



Campaign Report

About the Campaign

'Forces for Change' had two main objectives:

- To reach out to veterans of the armed and emergency services throughout Wales, provide people with information on pathways to recovery and the agencies that can support them, and listen to their experiences and ideas about how to improve that support.
- To use what we learn from veterans to inform and assist mental health and other services to improve their support for veterans of the armed and emergency services.

The campaign had the support of both mental health and veterans' organisations, and this provided the opportunity to tap into two distinctive areas of expertise: people who work with and support people who have mental health problems, and those who support and work with people who have worked in the armed and emergency services.



Background

As in any organisation some people who work or have worked in the armed or emergency services will experience mental health problems. Sometime these will arise from work or they will arise from other causes.

But the experience of mental health problems for people who have served in the services is often distinctive for two reasons:

- Some people may cope less well with the experiences they have had in the course of their work in the services. Most of us are aware of how dangerous or very distressing events can affect people longer-term, and those who work in the services are more likely to have such experiences. There are also other, less obvious causes of problems for those who work in the services such as long periods of intense and demanding work or difficulty in dealing with day to day responsibility for saving lives.
- The other problem for some people who have worked in these services can be the major changes in their life which are experienced when they leave the service. The change can often mean moving home, losing contact with close comrades, and leaving behind the wide range of support provided by their employer. This change can itself cause people difficulty, including difficulty in finding help and support for mental health problems, however they may have arisen.

Launch event

'Forces for Change' was officially launched in May 2017 by the then Minister for Social Services and Public Health Rebecca Evans at a major event held in the Norwegian Church in Cardiff Bay. The Minister, who had a specific responsibility for Armed Forces and veterans' health issues said at the launch:

"We owe our veterans a huge debt of gratitude for their service. That is why we are committed to ensuring the appropriate care and support is available to those who need it. We know that some veterans are not accessing this help because they perceive a stigma around mental health. This campaign will help tackle that stigma, bring the issues into the public forum, and highlight the services available."

Force for Change campaign Launch video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suH-loi2cwU>

Forces for Change Interview – Beth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoFVtVPVS0U>

Panel Member Tina Jones on Forces for Change:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVux6FAJR5w>



Local campaign events

Following the national launch, local campaign events were held that covered every county across Wales. Many of these were held at the various county shows that take place across Wales during the summer. Photos, comments and findings from all of these local events can be found on our 'Forces for Change' website: <http://forcesforchange.wales/>



Key messages from the campaign

During the campaign we asked veterans and their families about their experiences and what ideas they had about how support services across Wales could be improved. Many veterans and their families strongly valued the support they were receiving, and spoke about the importance of organisations such as Change Step and others which provide vital services.

There was much praise and appreciation of the work done by Veterans NHS Wales, and many people told us during the campaign that they wanted to see this service expanded, and people also wanted to see more specialist mental health support being made available for veterans across Wales.

People felt that there were still some big gaps in services for veterans, or that people were not being told about how to access where services were available. Many veterans told us how they strongly valued peer-mentoring and support services, with Change Step regularly highlighted as providing a particularly effective service.

Here are some direct quotes from veterans and their families:

“We need more funding for specialist mental health support worker - especially for veterans. A level 3 residential unit”

“At the moment the service I think is real adequate”

“Follow through and identify the problems people and families get”

“Needs people leaving force to be told about Change Step, Combat Stress etc. and there is help out there”

“More help for families of veterans to help them better understand and help their partners. Also to help their mental state and let them know they are not alone”

“Good services” “Better promotion. More access. Make coffee clubs known”

“Access to counseling out of work hours”

“More time at appointments to give people time to open up more – follow up services – training for GP to recognize issues when person doesn’t see it for themselves”

“Very good support from social services and local CMHT and CPN”

Moving forward

1. We will look to establish a formal all-Wales Veterans’ Mental Health network to include veterans and mental health third sector and statutory sector organisations, to ensure the continued co-operation and collaboration between and across different agencies to better promote, co-ordinate and support services relating to the mental health and well-being needs of veterans and their families.
2. We will work with the Royal College of GPs to develop and promote veterans being identified by GPs (only where a person agrees and wishes to be identified as a veteran) to enable access to healthcare priority treatment – For further information on veterans accessing healthcare priority treatment see: <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/170905whc41en.pdf>
3. We will develop further guidance and advice relating to the mental health and wellbeing needs of veterans and their families.

The High Needs Collaborative

The High needs Collaborative is a longstanding alliance of third sector organisations which aim to support the recovery of people with a serious mental illness in Wales, and to support carers. By “serious mental illness” we mean people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or other illnesses which require substantial support.

Traditionally this group of people has been supported by secondary mental health services but increasingly many are supported at primary care level only. The activities of the collaborative are led by people with a serious mental illness and their carers through the nance of each of the organisations and by direct engagement as activists and volunteers in specific campaigns.

Organisations that supported this campaign were:



*dros adferiad
o afiechyd
meddwl difrifol*

hafal

*for recovery
from serious
mental illness*

Hafal is Wales' leading charity for people with a serious mental illness and their carers. Providing services in all the counties of Wales, Hafal is an organisation managed by the people it supports: individuals whose lives have been affected by serious mental illness. Find out more at hafal.org

