

Veterans and access to Mental Health – Special Project

Project Background

Veterans and their access to Mental Health services has emerged through initial outreach as a significant issue. The Armed Forces Covenant is a focus for many strategic partners so there is a heightened focus on support for veterans.

Mental Health issues are known to be more prevalent in those leaving the armed forces, however the help and support for them is felt to be insufficient. The Armed Forces Covenant also being a focus for many strategic partners has heightened focus on support for veterans.

This work would look to build on pre-existing engagement we have with Veteran groups and forums and look at what understanding there is amongst Veterans of the Mental Health support available. We will also be looking at the current experience of those already using Mental Health support services and if it is felt to be appropriate for those leaving the Armed forces by those Veterans using the service.

Project Objectives - In scope

Scope and set out the statutory and VSC support for Veterans and their mental health

Gather evidence of the levels of awareness amongst Veterans of the Mental Health support available both in voluntary and statutory organisations

Build a picture of patient experience of Veterans using Mental Health services. And evaluate how effective and/or relevant are they to veterans

Production of an initial evaluation of Veteran specific services and support based on our investigation

Limitations and Exclusions – Out of scope

Whilst it is understood that many factors may affect a persons mental health such as physical conditions, finances or a particular trauma as examples, this project will not be exploring why mental health issues are more prevalent in Veterans.

This project will be looking at Mental Health services only

The focus will be on services and voluntary organisations only in Leicester and Leicestershire

Project Dependencies

This project has been agreed between the HAB and local authorities in Leicester and Leicestershire. Whilst we will work with key stakeholders to ensure this project is able to deliver meaningful insight into the experiences of Veterans, there are no external dependencies.

Risks and Contraints

1. The current COVID 19 situation puts constraints on the project. Whilst every effort will be made to engage with people virtually and through voluntary organisations the dependance on people having access to the internet may mean a smaller group is engaged with. The press release and using other media such as radio will hopefully mitigate this to a degree.
2. Duplication may be a risk. Working with stakeholders to understand what other work is being done in this field will help keep any duplication to a minimum

Assumptions

We will use the definition of a Veteran as defined by the UK government as anyone who has served Her Majesty's Armed Forces. It will be assumed that anyone coming forward to talk to us or who completes the questionnaire is a Veteran and has experience of mental health issues.

Based on the above definition it will be assumed anyone coming forward to talk is a Veteran based on the above definition and has experience of mental health issues.

Project Methodology

This project will use an online survey and 1 to 1 interviews to gain an insight into Veteran experience of Mental Health services

Mental Health is not always a subject people feel comfortable talking about so the survey will give Veterans the opportunity to provide feedback in an anonymised way.

1-1 interviews will give us the chance to explore in more detail some of the themes of the questionnaire but in a safe and private environment.

We are also exploring the feasibility of an online focus group or event in which Veterans could come together to tell us about their experiences.

Social Media Campaign

Veterans
experiences with mental health
services

Are you a Veteran?
Are you aware or have you used any
Mental Health services in Leicester/Leicestershire?

Can you Share your Experience?
Healthwatch Leicester & Healthwatch Leicestershire want to hear from you.

For more information

healthwatch Leicester becky.engley@healthwatchLL.com healthwatch Leicestershire
07732 683453

Our aim is to create awareness of the work we are carrying out surrounding Mental Health and Veteran experience.

We will be contacting several organisations and asking them to share this image on all their social media platforms, in the hope that veterans will come and answer the questions via a 1-1 interview or provide a case study.

Along side this will be the online survey where people can fill out and answer honestly in their own time- giving them the option to be contacted to give a more in-depth interview.

Charities we will contact will include:

- Phoenix CIC
- RF Life Links
- Once We Were Soldiers
- Veteran & Service Family Awareness
- Age UK - Joining Forces
- CALM - campaign against living miserably - concentrate on male suicide
- Combat Stress
- SSAFA Leicestershire
- Veterans Gateway
- Veteran Support @ Leicester University
- Amicus Trust - they provide supported housing for veterans and they have 1 house in Leicester
- Anxiety UK - have partnered with the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

Press Release

A press release will be circulated to local newspapers, with the aim that it will be picked up and shared in the press. Current publications include:

- **Leicester Live (Mercury etc)**
- **Melton Times**
- **Hinckley Times**

Before this is sent out- we would like a quote from HWLL explaining the plan and hopeful outcomes of the project

Events/ Focus Groups

We are living in a time where we must think outside the box in order to deliver outreach.

We have several ideas to gain some feedback from veterans through online forums.

The first being a VIRTUAL meeting with guest speakers who work with veterans and specialise in mental health who will be able to give some tips and insight on how they can deal with PTSD or other Mental Health issues.

One of the voluntary organisation ,Phoenix CIC, hold a Carp Fishing competition every year.

The idea would be we would to offer a fishing related cooking class/ recipe for those that offered us feedback. Something that they could use with their hobbies. This will be developed more as we get further into the project.

Key Milestones

13th July – social media campaign begins

20th July – survey launched and promoted through social media and emails to veteran groups