

Institution: Anglia Ruskin University
Unit of Assessment: 20 Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Helping military families thrive: supporting veterans, their families and military spouses to deal with limb loss and find employment
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2015–July 2018
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:
Name(s): Dr Nick Caddick Dr Lauren Godier-McBard Dr Hilary Engward Matt Fossey Kristina Fleuty Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Research Fellow Research Fellow Senior Research Fellow Associate Prof, VFI Director Research Assistant Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: October 2015–Present October 2015–Present November 2005–October 2019 May 2015–Present January 2017–Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2015–December 2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The 'Thriving Families' research programme by the Veterans and Families Institute (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) has improved policy and service provision for the families of 'limbless' veterans, and has led directly to new policies and funding designed to promote employment opportunities for military spouses and 'Early Service Leavers' (ESLs). New support models developed by the charity Blesma – 'The Limbless Veterans', based on our original research, benefit nearly 3,000 limbless veterans and their families. In addition, over 1,100 military spouses have accessed programmes developed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and its commercial partner Right Management and validated by VFI research, and nearly 4,000 ESLs per year are now entitled to access new support also validated by the research.
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The three projects comprising this case study formed part of the VFI's 'Thriving Families' research programme, funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT). This programme addressed some of the most pressing issues facing families within the UK's military community, i.e. traumatic injury and economic inequality. The impact goal of the research was to transform how

veterans' and their families' needs for rehabilitation, as well as economic and social inclusion, are met by the military and society.

Caring for the carers: The UK currently has nearly 3,000 veterans with one or more limbs missing as a result of either military service or post-service injury/illness, with 333 of these losing limbs in post- 9/11 wars. The impact of traumatic limb loss on veterans is substantial, but the impact on families had barely been researched and was unrecognised institutionally prior to our work. The VFI's research is, internationally, the first to consider families' experiences of supporting a veteran with limb loss [1,2]. The research was led by Dr Hilary Engward supported by Matt Fossey and Kristina Fleuty and was carried out between 2016 and 2018. Engward, Fossey and Fleuty designed an original Grounded Theory study to understand families' perspectives on living with limb loss, carrying out 72 detailed interviews with veterans and their family members. The findings produced an original conceptual Limb Loss Support Model (LLSM) explaining individual and family coping and support needs over five distinct stages of adaptation to limb loss over the life course. Uniquely, the LLSM differentiates separate biopsychosocial support needs of the family and the person with limb loss. The new theory-driven model also identifies specific periods where timely support is more likely to be effective in meeting individual needs and enhancing coping ability. This new knowledge enables individuals, families and health professionals to strategically plan resources to support coping over the life course [2].

Supporting spouse employment: The second project in the VFI's 'Thriving Families' research programme focused on employment opportunities for military spouses. According to the MoD, the difficulty partners and spouses of military personnel experience in pursuing career opportunities is among the biggest factors influencing personnel retention. Spouses face difficulties due to frequent relocations, lack of employment opportunities in remote base locations, and lack of access to affordable childcare. With the number of UK military spouses estimated at 64,000, this amounts to an economic and social disadvantage faced by a sizable but neglected constituency.

In 2015, the MoD launched a new trial programme designed to help spouses overcome barriers to employment. The VFI's evaluation of the MoD's 'Spouse Employment Support Trial' was the first UK research to examine attempts to support spouses in overcoming barriers to employment [3,4]. The research, undertaken between 2016 and 2018, was led by Matt Fossey with Dr Nick Caddick and Dr Lauren Godier-McBard (and supported by colleagues from ARU's Faculty of Business and Law). Through systematic survey methods with a representative sample of 111 (out of 435) Trial participants (completing questionnaires on wellbeing and job-search self-efficacy, n = 45 at follow up), and in-depth interviews with 30 spouses and 23 of their in-service partners, the research examined the Trial's impact on spouses' employment prospects and wellbeing. Findings offered compelling evidence that employment support helped increase spouses' confidence, provided new skills, and helped them to feel valued by the military (*"I've always wanted to teach but its jumping off that ladder and getting back into the training . . . and it [the Trial] made me jump, and I'm loving it"*; spouse). 67% of spouses felt more confident in their ability to obtain work as a result of participating in the Trial, 78% stated a positive impact on their lives, and 80% would recommend it to others.

Improving employment outcomes for Early Service Leavers (ESLs): The third project examined employment outcomes for ESLs, defined as recruits who leave the military prior to serving four years, or at any point via compulsory discharge. Research has identified ESLs as a group potentially vulnerable to mental health problems and under/un-employment. Every year, approximately 4,000 recruits leave the military as ESLs. The MoD's Future Horizons Programme (FHP), launched in 2011, was designed to help ESLs transition into civilian employment, and was delivered through a model of individual support provided by contracted services from the Career Transition Partnership (CTP).

Whilst working as a consultant for ARU to establish the VFI, Fossey carried out an evaluation of the FHP in 2012-2013. Later, original research by the VFI, carried out by Godier-McBard,

Caddick and Fossey in 2016, directly built on the earlier work to extend knowledge about this vulnerable cohort [5]. The research examined vulnerabilities among ESLs and sought to understand how ESLs could be supported during and after their transition to civilian life. Godier-McBard and Caddick examined survey data (assessing 10 self-rated vulnerabilities) for 5,399 ESLs taking part in the Future Horizons Programme [5]. The survey analysis revealed that ESLs (predominantly young male recruits leaving prior to completing basic training) do not ask for help or admit vulnerabilities, despite clear indications that many struggle in civilian life. Whilst ESLs are therefore considered 'hard to engage' [5], the VFI's research presented a compelling social and economic rationale for supporting them during transition, building on the prior evidence from Fossey's evaluation that employment support is incredibly important for this vulnerable cohort. The rationale for the programme – and more broadly, intervening to support ESLs – is furthermore underpinned by the VFI's original conceptual work examining transition through a 'Bourdiesian' cultural competence framework [6]. In this work, it was argued that (contrary to conventional wisdom) ESLs may struggle in transition to a greater extent than their longer-serving colleagues due to their comparatively smaller reserves of cultural and social capital.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Engward, H., Fleuty, K. and Fossey, M. (2018). Caring and Coping: the family perspective on living with limb loss. London: Blesma. <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/20180611-FINAL-Families-Project-Report.pdf>.
- [2] Mitchell, S., Andrews, L., & Engward, H. (2020). Examining the effects of acquired limb loss on the family network: a grounded theory study. *Disability and Rehabilitation*. DOI: [10.1080/09638288.2020.1780480](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2020.1780480).
- [3] Caddick, N., Godier, L., Sanchez-Vasquez, A., Fossey, M., Ivory, C., and Down, S. (2018). *Evaluation of the Ministry of Defence Spouse Employment Support Trial*. Research report commissioned by Forces in Mind Trust, UK. https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Spouse-Employment-Report_FINAL.pdf.
- [4] Godier, L., Caddick, N., and Fossey, M. (2020). Confident, valued and supported: Examining the benefits of employment support for military spouses. *Military Psychology*, 32(3), 273–286. DOI: [10.1080/08995605.2020.1731251](https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2020.1731251).
- [5] Godier, L., Caddick, N., Kiernan, M. D., and Fossey, M. (2017). Transition support for vulnerable service leavers in the U.K.: Providing care for Early Service Leavers. *Military Behavioural Health*, 6(1), 13–21. DOI: [10.1080/21635781.2017.1325804](https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2017.1325804).
- [6] Cooper, L., Caddick, N., Godier, L., Cooper, A., and Fossey, M. (2018). Transition from the military into civilian life: An exploration of cultural competence. *Armed Forces and Society*, 44(1), 156–177. DOI: [10.1177/0095327X16675965](https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16675965).

Outputs [1] and [3] are final reports for externally funded research projects. Grant income (from the FiMT, open competition) was £336,834. Outputs [2], [4], [5] & [6] were rigorously peer reviewed prior to acceptance in key publications for military and veterans studies, and were rated as 2* or above by both internal and external reviewers.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Overview: The main beneficiaries of the VFI's research have included the MoD and its commercial partner Right Management; the veteran's charity, Blesma – 'The Limbless Veterans'; GPs; limbless veterans and their families; and active and former soldiers and their spouses and families. The research therefore made an impact on government policy, commerce, charity policy and practice, GP training and practice, and the health, well-being, professional development and quality of life of soldiers, veterans and their families.

Improving delivery of charitable services: Blesma – 'The Limbless Veterans'

Blesma – ‘The Limbless Veterans’ is the UK’s leading specialist limb loss charity. VFI research on families’ experiences of living with limb loss has transformed the services provided by Blesma to veterans and their families. The Living with Limb Loss Support Model (LLSM) was incorporated within Blesma’s strategic planning report, ‘Looking Forward to the Next Five Years’ [i] published October 2018, with its adoption becoming a ‘key operating concept priority’. Thus the research, according to Blesma, has been key to the charity’s long-term planning and central to its efforts at “*adopting and sustaining good practice*” [ii]. The Model was also incorporated into the Blesma Support Officer (BSOs - Blesma’s caseworker team) toolkit, and as a direct result the ten UK BSOs (who made 2,362 visits in 2019 alone) have since assessed coping levels of veterans and their family carers separately, allowing the provision of relevant support for both. The BSOs’ practice has thus been enhanced through formalising support to families as part of their remit.

According to Blesma [ii], there are between 450 and 500 limbless veterans with ‘active issues’ at any one time. In the majority of these cases, it is not just the veteran who requires support, but also the family. Each of the families visited since the introduction of the Model has benefited from support informed by the VFI’s ‘Caring and Coping’ report, meaning that the innovative LLSM reached at least 17% of the nearly 3,000-strong limbless veteran community by the end of July 2020. The Model continues to be used by Blesma and the BSOs, with families benefiting from ongoing support informed by the VFI’s research.

Limbless veterans and families visited by Blesma testified to the value and significance of the new approach because it distinguishes between how families and veterans cope: “*It’s the carer that takes the brunt of it all*” (veteran with limb loss) [1: p. 69]; “*Ask the family if there’s anything, not the person who has lost the limb, talk to the family themselves*” (daughter) [1: p. 71]. Since 2018, all new Blesma members (and existing Blesma families, where appropriate) have been given the ‘Caring and Coping’ booklet which explains the Model and what caring for and coping with limb loss might be like across five stages of the life course. This has been positively evaluated by families: “*Thank you. This really shows what I’ve felt. For the first time I feel I’ve been listened to*” [iii].

Changes to GP training and practice: In 2018 the LLSM was incorporated within the National GP Registrar Training Programme about Veterans’ Health that all trainee GPs must engage with during their training; several components of this training are delivered by Blesma. In 2019 alone, 641 GPs attended the new training element [iii]. As a direct result of the research findings, a pain Q&A crib sheet was also developed with a specialist consultant in veteran pain to assist both persons with limb loss (PWLL) and health professionals in explaining the nature and impact of phantom pain. This has been distributed to all Blesma members, pain clinics and prosthetic centres.

Influencing national policy development on spouse employment support

The VFI’s research played a pivotal role in MoD decisions on spouse employment by confirming the need for career support among the UK’s 64,000 military spouses, as well as validating the model of support (i.e., bespoke careers consultancy, training, and job-finding workshops). Specifically, the evaluation report’s finding that support improved spouses’ confidence in seeking employment directly influenced the UK Secretary of State for Defence’s decision to introduce a new fund for supporting the careers of spouses and civil partners of military personnel, announced in September 2018 [iv, v]. This fund supported the development of a new Partner Career Support Programme designed to empower spouses to be more confident in seeking employment. Based on the findings of the VFI’s evaluation – in particular, spouses’ need for flexible access to employment support – the MoD designed the new programme to offer tailored, flexible career support to spouses to fit around childcare and other responsibilities [iv, v]. Moreover, the VFI’s recommendations from the evaluation were used to establish the ‘statement of requirement’ by which the MoD set the terms of contracted services for the provision of career support to spouses [iv, v]. For instance, our recommendation that training should include online and distance learning formed a key part of the statement of requirement, and our suggestion that

the new programme should be systematically evaluated led to the MoD creating an evaluation strategy for the programme [iv, v].

The VFI's evaluation was discussed at length in a 2020 government-commissioned review into the needs of Armed Forces families ('Living in our shoes'), which stated *"this was an important study as it provided a wealth of information about the views of partners who took part"* (p. 110) [vi]. The review also reiterated the VFI's recommendations around flexibility of support, the need for further provision for spouses, and for rigorous evaluation of the MoD's new programme. The new Partner Career Support Programme forms a key component of the MoD's Families Strategy 2020, and was launched as a new six-month trial in November 2020 with a further 750 spouses able to benefit from tailored support.

In recognition of the value of the VFI's research, in 2019 the MoD also invited Matt Fossey to sit on the **Partner Employment Steering Group**, a national committee which has direct access to cross-government policy discussions on partner employment opportunities. Fossey's contributions to this group led to the creation of a new online platform, Forces Family Jobs – a job-finding website specifically for military families – which counted 1,400 active users by May 2020 [iv]. In June 2020, Fossey also requested that the MoD take steps to support spouses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Responding to this request, the Minister for Defence People and Veterans wrote to spouses signposting a battery of resources and organisations who could support them during the pandemic.

Influencing national policy development for supporting Early Service Leavers

Acting on the VFI's evidence-based recommendations, in 2015 the MoD made employment support during transition available to around 4,000 ESLs annually across all branches of the military. This decision was enacted through a change in MoD policy (Joint Service Publication 534, v14), which formalised the provision of transition support for ESLs as part of the renewed Career Transition Partnership (CTP) contract and took effect on 1 October 2015 [vii].

Underpinning this policy change, the VFI's research on the Future Horizons Programme (FHP) demonstrated that providing support for ESLs was morally, economically and politically justified. Since the change in policy and subsequent availability of new provision for ESLs, 5,174 ESLs have benefited from support when leaving the military [viii], with 82% of ESLs reported by the CTP as finding employment in civilian jobs following the FHP in 2017/18 [ix]. Feedback collected from ESLs during the VFI's research on the FHP demonstrated its significance for ESLs returning to civilian life: *"FHP gave me a push in the right direction; I would have literally nothing if it wasn't for Future Horizons,"* wrote one participant. *"Future Horizons have been amazing, and I couldn't have done this without their support,"* stated another. VFI research has opened up the opportunity to enjoy the same benefits to 20,050 ESLs from all branches of the military who have left since 2015 [viii].

Right Management (the career and talent management company responsible for delivering the CTP contracted services) **benefited commercially** from the research in that the policy decision led to an expanded contract with the MoD. They acknowledged that the research *"was instrumental in validating the concept of Future Horizons"* and *"enabled us to extend and further develop the programme in confidence of the positive outcomes it achieves and the experiences it offers"* [x]. Specifically, the evidence provided by the VFI's research regarding engagement and employment rates, along with excellent qualitative feedback as testimony of the benefit to ESLs, demonstrated that the FHP could effectively engage and support ESLs, thereby leading to the MoD's extension of the programme.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[i] Blesma Five-Year Strategic Plan, released October 2018, <https://blesma.org/media/443644/blesma-strategic-plan-2018.pdf>, pp. 14 and 18.

[ii] Letter from Director of Independence and Wellbeing at Blesma, 14 November 2020.

[iii] Collated Blesma member beneficiary quotes.

[iv] Letter from Assistant Head, Families Policy, Armed Forces People Support, MoD, 4 May 2020

[v] Government news story 'Defence Secretary bolsters support for Armed Forces':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-bolsters-support-for-armed-forces>.

[vi] Government-commissioned report on the needs of military families: "Living in our shoes", June 2020, pages 109-112

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895236/Living_in_our_shoes_Full_Report_1_embargoed_30_June.pdf

[vii] Joint Service Publication 534, v14, October 2015. (Pages 20, 36, 37)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/465794/20151001-JSP_534_Issue_14_TESRR_FINAL-O_3_.pdf

[viii] Figures obtained via Freedom of Information request to MoD.

[ix] Career Transition Partnership Annual Statistics: UK regular service personnel employment 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2018. Published 31 January 2019. Available online:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774784/20181203_-_CTP_Bulletin.pdf.

[x] Letter from CTP Head of Transition at Right Management, 12 June 2020.