Military History
The experiences of people who become homeless after military service

Gerard Lemos and Stefan Durkacz

Lemos & Crane
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Gerard Lemos is a partner at Lemos&Crane and is the author of a series of reports on homelessness and supporting vulnerable people, including A Future Foretold: New approaches to meeting the long term needs of single homeless people, Homelessness and Loneliness: The want of conviviality and Dreams Deferred: the families and friends of homeless and vulnerable people.

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The views, along with any errors or misrepresentations, expressed here are those of the authors. The full responsibility lies with us.

Names in the report have been changed to protect confidentiality, and where appropriate, places have not been named.

Gerard Lemos and Stefan Durkacz
Lemos&Crane
London, April 2005
Summary

Purpose of the report
The report aims to address the following questions:

• Are there factors in people’s past that may contribute to the decision to join the armed forces or to the experiences of homelessness that some have after leaving?

• What are people’s aspirations and motives when they join the armed forces, what is the quality of their life when they are in service, and what is it like when they leave?

• What helps them through the process of leaving, and what makes things more difficult?

• What do the Ministry of Defence, homeless agencies, and other service providers need to do to meet their needs – emotional and social as well as practical?

Experiences prior to joining the armed forces
Disruptive and disrupted family backgrounds were a particular feature of the lives of the youngest ex-services respondents, those in their teens and early twenties who had left the armed forces recently after a short spell in service. Seven of the 18 respondents reported conflict with their families, either ongoing or in the past. Some respondents’ parents had been in the armed forces. This could entail a transient family life. Those who had spent time in care described difficulties in settling down in their younger lives. Five respondents reported having been in trouble with the law. However there was a distinction between younger respondents, who had been in trouble with the police prior to joining the armed forces, and older people who had got into trouble after leaving, in some cases partly due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

The main motives for joining the armed forces included opportunities for travel, challenge, gaining qualifications, building a career and earning better money, and a family history of involvement in the armed forces. Expectations prior to joining the armed forces centred on tough training, career, and travel opportunities.

Life in the armed forces
Many respondents, when asked what was good about being in the armed forces, mentioned the camaraderie and friendship. Some also mentioned the security offered by the armed services, although others felt this left them unprepared for civilian life. Whilst not always enjoying the discipline and physical hardships of life in the armed forces, respondents generally accepted them as part of the job. Most respondents did not disclose experiences of bullying during their time in the armed services. However some evidence of bullying and victimisation did emerge in the interviews. Two respondents mentioned boredom, ‘downtime’ and being given apparently pointless tasks or being treated by their employer in a way that did not appear to make sense, as downsides to their time in the armed forces.

Leaving the armed forces
Respondents left for a variety of reasons including disciplinary issues, personal and family reasons and reaching the end of their contract. For some who left voluntarily or were involved in violent misconduct, mental health problems may have contributed. Concerns regarding partners and children may prey on the mind of an individual living far away from them in a military base. This could result in them leaving or feeling they have no other option but to go AWOL.

Alcohol, mental health problems and relationship breakdown
Alcohol and mental health problems and relationship breakdown were all key features of the
interviews. They were often intertwined, pushing the individual towards homelessness, and were associated more often with the older respondents. Ex-service people with mental health problems can be divided into two types: older people, who may have been in the armed forces for many years, seen much active service, and be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder; and young early leavers who may have come to the armed forces with psychological ‘baggage’ from their childhood. Post-traumatic stress disorder may be associated with heavy alcohol use, and may persist undiagnosed for many years. Some respondents suffered from a range of mental health problems other than post-traumatic stress disorder, which may have originated prior to their time in the armed forces. Two respondents had dual diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder and another mental health condition. Relationship problems could be caused by long periods of absence, a key feature of military life. Post-traumatic stress disorder could also lead to relationship breakdown after leaving the armed forces. Bereavement, occurring when an ex-service person is already struggling with problems such as alcohol misuse and post-traumatic stress disorder, can be acutely devastating.

From homelessness to resettlement

Serving in the armed forces is not especially likely to lead to people becoming homeless, indeed some of the skills, experiences and personal qualities
acquired in the armed forces may be a bulwark against homelessness and other problems. But for some people, there are links between having served in the armed forces and subsequently becoming homeless. These links can be summarised into three groups.

**Group A. Lives lived well in the armed forces and thereafter**
This group of people, whatever their histories, backgrounds or past problems, retain or acquire the aptitudes, personal qualities and life skills while in the armed services to leave them well-prepared socially, materially and emotionally for a life to be lived well in the civilian world – a life of enriching relationships, fulfilling work and a sense of the thing done well when all is said and done. This group may well have greatly benefited from their experiences of camaraderie, activity, purpose and order in the armed forces. This group is likely to be the great majority.

**Group B. Old problems not removed and ready to return; new problems arise regardless of military experience**
This second group of people may have had problems of disrupted and disruptive family lives, bad behaviour in adolescence or a chequered educational career. Life in the armed forces may have been problematic, the structures and lifestyles not living up to the hopes and dreams. Notwithstanding the military lifestyle they have remained whom they feared they might be. They have not become what they thought they might. Military life may also have been simply unexpectedly unpleasant. Or life in the armed forces may have been fine, but insufficient skills, confidence or wherewithal has been acquired by the point of departure. Life after the armed forces is then insecure in terms of employment, relationships with families, friends and partners. Homelessness is a pitfall awaiting the unsuspecting or the ill prepared. In short, life in the armed forces may not have saved this group of people from themselves or from the ghosts of their unhappy pasts and those re-awakened ghosts are ushers into homelessness.

**Group C. Life in the armed forces has lessened their ability to cope with life beyond**
There is a small group of people for whom military life has exacerbated the risk of becoming homeless in the future. Life far away from families and familiar routines and lifestyles may have been hard to bear. The military lifestyle has increased or inculcated bad habits such as drinking too much or a tendency to violence. The ‘unnatural’ lifestyle may have exacerbated old problems such as a depressive outlook or other mental health problems. Experiences of combat may have been traumatising. The trauma may have gone unnoticed, not least to the protagonists themselves. No help may have been offered, or, if offered, not taken.

For this group of people, the solutions lie in, as far as is operationally possible, making forces life more like civilian life, keeping families together, people living in the same place and in a place of choice, even if they sometimes have to go away for extended periods; armed forces personnel having easy access to opportunities to socialise with civilians in civilian social settings. In addition the support and assistance that the armed forces now give people in seeking housing may need to be supplemented with rather more social and emotional support, particularly with, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder. They may also need help with practical skills in finding work and somewhere to live.

**Findings from previous studies**
The findings from previous studies tend to follow the same lines as those set out earlier in this report. Previous research, while confirming the existence of a link between armed service and homelessness,
nevertheless gives the lie to the suggestion that the increased likelihood of homelessness can be ascribed to a failure of the armed forces in their duty of care during or after service. Instead, the research suggests that the link is partly explained by the types of people more likely to join the armed forces. Behaviour that may be an integral part of service life may also, without intention, habituate people to lifestyles that translate poorly to the civilian context. In a minority of cases experiences in the armed forces have reduced people’s ability to cope. Experiences after leaving, including experiences of relationship breakdown, may also contribute to subsequent homelessness. In short, a complex interaction is at work, which therefore inevitably requires an equally complex set of responses.

Services currently available

In recent years a range of assistance has been developed and offered to military personnel, while in the services, at the point of departure and after leaving. Some of the latter services are specifically designed for people at risk of, or who have actually been, homeless. These services include:

- Armed Forces Resettlement Package
- Joint Services Housing Advice Office
- Ex-services action group on homelessness
- SPACES (Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services)
- Galleries Project.

In addition a range of projects and services have been developed by voluntary organisations and charities, including the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, Home Base, Combat Stress, Haig Homes and Project Compass. A full description is set out in chapter 10.

The way forward

This and other analyses suggest some possible approaches and services in addition to those set out above. These include:

1. A greater recognition and understanding of previous problems when people join, such as disrupted family lives, trouble with the law or previous experiences of mental health or alcohol problems.

2. Greater support with psychological and emotional problems during armed service coupled with encouragement not to deny or stigmatise mental health problems or problems with excessive alcohol consumption and the associated behaviour.

3. Encouraging contact with family and friends while serving in the armed forces, particularly when serving far from home.

4. Access to emotional and psychological support services during and after the period of transition from military to civilian life. Since the respondents placed rather greater store by the efforts of the ex-services charities than the help they received from other statutory or voluntary sources, widening the range of help beyond housing into the areas listed above (some of which is already occurring) seems to fall well within their remit. The trust and confidence they already enjoy may give their efforts a speedier and more complete success.

5. Since people sometimes become homeless long after leaving the armed forces greater efforts are needed to keep in touch with those that leave the armed forces and, for one reason or another, are at greater risk of becoming homeless. This too could be a job for the forces charities.

6. A focus on long term as well as immediate and temporary housing options. The duty here falls on the wider world of affordable housing provision: local authorities, housing associations and so on.
Normal lives; normal habits

Services could always, no doubt, be improved and extended, but there may also be ways of preventing the factors occurring in the first place that may lead to becoming homeless. These relate to changing the military lifestyle itself, not just improving services to those who cannot cope with it, or fail to cope with its aftermath. Two aspects of military life seem most significant with regard to the possibility of future homelessness: firstly, extended periods of garrison living, particularly out of the UK or far from home. This is already being reduced by changes in the structures of all the armed forces to meet the changed requirements of a post-Cold War era. Secondly, the messing arrangements that make alcohol cheaply and readily available need also to be re-considered. Again, plans are afoot. These are more challenging, ambitious and long-term goals but will contribute greatly to prevention in preference to cure after the event.
Introduction

Sir David Ramsbotham was Adjutant General (the head of Army personnel) at the time of Options for Change when the size of the Army reduced by one third, or, put another way, by 50,000 people. Sir David, commenting on the problem of homelessness amongst ex-army personnel, succinctly and elegantly summarised the problem that this report describes in correspondence with the authors:

I felt that we were able to do a certain amount to help families but were not very good about the single men. Many of these had joined to get away from a chaotic and dysfunctional background, finding some stability in the Forces. But when the career came to a premature end, which it inevitably did for some, many of them had nowhere to go back to. The Forces charities were not well-equipped with hostels and so began the spectre of too many ex-servicemen in doorways and in prisons, about which no one should feel comfortable.

The common perception that homelessness amongst ex-service personnel derives solely from inadequate support by the armed forces to those at the point of leaving is greatly over-simplistic. For some greater risk of homelessness may emanate from experiences before they joined the armed forces, for example family breakdown or growing up in care. Experiences during service in the armed forces may nevertheless also contribute to increasing the greater risk of future homelessness. The orderly structure of forces life, with clear ranks of status and authority and well-defined routines, at least outside combat situations, may not be the best preparation for the greater self-reliance, autonomous decision-making and complex and sometimes confusing social relationships required in civilian life. More negative experiences while serving in the armed forces may also influence future ability to cope. The close contact with violence and conflict may for example, even with the best training and preparation, have not proved easy to deal with emotionally and psychologically.

The psychological wounds may not become apparent as quickly as the physical ones and help may not be at hand when they do. Some of those interviewed in this report, as shall be seen presently, feel that on occasion psychological damage was entirely denied. Sometimes they denied the nature and extent of the problem to themselves. Finally experiences on leaving the armed forces may not have proved straightforward. The civilian world can seem a confusing, frustrating place, without the clarity and order of the armed forces and where decisions need to be made, which would either have been made for you or not been necessary at all, such as where to socialise and who to socialise with. In the civilian world the bureaucracies of the housing and benefits system can prove exacting to anyone, but to the ill prepared and inexperienced they can be maddening.

Purpose

The report aims to address the following questions:

- Are there factors in people’s past that may contribute to the decision to join the armed forces or to the experiences of homelessness that some have after leaving?
- What were people’s aspirations and motives when they join the armed forces?
- What was the quality of their lives when in the military services?
- What is it like when they leave?
- What helps them through the process of leaving, and what makes things more difficult?
- What could the Ministry of Defence, homeless agencies, and other service providers do to meet their needs – emotional and social as well as practical?
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Methodology

In-depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out with 18 ex-service personnel at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation in Fulham, West London and the Galleries Project in Richmond, North Yorkshire. Respondents were asked about their backgrounds prior to joining the services, their experiences during and after the services, their experiences of being homeless or at risk of homelessness, aspirations and future plans, and their views on the services they used. Researchers from Lemos & Crane also spoke to a range of practitioners from organisations involved in housing ex-service people, and in helping vulnerable ex-service people with experience of homelessness, alcohol problems and mental health problems.

Structure of the report

The main body of the report is based on one-to-one interviews carried out with ex-service personnel and on discussions with practitioners. It is divided into two parts. Part One looks at ex-service people’s experiences of life in the armed forces. It begins with profiles of four of the ex-services respondents (chapter 1), and goes on to describe their experiences prior to joining the armed forces, including reasons for joining (chapter 2), and positive and negative experiences of life in the armed forces (chapter 3).

Chapter 4 describes experiences of leaving the armed forces. Chapter 5 considers the experiences and effects of alcohol problems, mental health problems (particularly post-traumatic stress disorder), and relationship breakdown. Respondents’ experiences of coping and surviving on the streets are set out in chapter 6. Chapter 7 looks at ex-services respondents’ experiences and perceptions of services, focusing on their journey from homelessness to resettlement.

The second part of the report sets out findings and conclusions. Chapter 8 draws out findings from this study and chapter 9 compares our findings with previous studies. Chapter 10 describes the services currently available for homeless people with a background in the armed forces. The final chapter, chapter 11, looks more generally at the way forward.

Each chapter ends with a summary and the findings as a whole are set out in chapter 8.
Part 1
Experiences
1 Profiles

The responses given in interviews are analysed thematically in chapters 1 to 6, but in order first to give a better rounded picture of the people involved, four case studies are set out below. These illustrate some of the key themes to be discussed later. Names have, of course, been changed in the interests of confidentiality throughout the report.

Leslie

Leslie is 20 years old. He finally signed up for the Army in 2002 after failing the medical on several previous attempts to join. He wanted to see and experience the world. He says that his father sought to discourage him from joining, wanting him instead to help carry on his painting and decorating business. As a result, according to Leslie, they fell out. His mother had left when he was still very young. He was an infantryman for one and a half years.

Leslie has a child. When the baby became ill during his time in the Army Leslie went AWOL twice to be with his family. He regrets this but felt he had no choice having been refused leave. Consequently he was sent to the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) at Colchester and then voluntarily discharged. His relationship with the child’s mother has since broken down. He currently has no access to the child and risks arrest if he attempts to make contact. He is now engaged to a local girl from the town near where he was stationed while in the Army.

After leaving the Army he stayed in a bed and breakfast for three days, arranged and paid for by the Army. He then approached the local council who referred him to the supported accommodation for ex-servicemen where he is currently living. While in the Army he was diagnosed with dyslexia. The staff at his current supported accommodation have helped him access appropriate courses to improve his maths and English. He is looking for a job in construction, although his longer-term ambition is to rejoin the Army.

Leslie believes that, overall, the Army has had a positive impact on him, and he felt happy while he was there. Prior to joining the Army he was involved in petty criminal behaviour and often in trouble with the police, and he feels the Army helped him realise that his behaviour was wrong and how it negatively affected his family.

Kenny

Kenny is 25 years old. He joined the Army in 2001 for approximately two and a half years. His father had been in the armed forces for many years and the family had moved frequently as a result. His mother had also served in the forces for a few years. Kenny’s parents separated when he was still young, partly in his view because of their itinerant military lifestyle. His father settled abroad and Kenny went to live with his mother and grandmother in the UK.

Before joining the Army Kenny was sent to prison for three years after being involved in a fight. After leaving prison he moved in with his girlfriend. He says he was unhappy with his life during this time. He joined the Army with a view to earning more money and making a better life for himself and his girlfriend. He also wanted to gain a recognised qualification. However he had just passed Army training when they split up.

While in the Army Kenny got involved in another fight. He was posted back to training where he became bored and began drinking heavily, repeatedly getting into trouble. Eventually he was discovered to have taken cannabis and faced serious disciplinary action. Kenny felt at this stage that his career in the Army would be effectively on indefinite hold and decided to leave voluntarily. The WRVS referred Kenny straight from the Army to the supported housing project for ex-service people where he is now staying. He is about to start a labouring job and wants to settle in the local area.
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Kenny feels that being in the Army was a good experience overall. He says he learned a lot about looking after himself and being well organised. He believes that if he hadn’t got into trouble in the Army, he would still be there now.

Johnny

Johnny joined the Royal Navy in 1978, aged 16, and served for nine years. Prior to joining the Navy, Johnny lived at home with his parents. Most of his father’s side of the family have been in the armed forces.

Johnny was particularly keen on working on helicopters. He trained on Sea King helicopters in Cornwall, as well as aircraft maintenance and taxiing. He then joined a front line squadron and was sent to the Falklands conflict in 1982. He says that his experiences there led to him being affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, although apparently it was not diagnosed until 1996. Johnny feels that his problems began after returning from the Falklands. In his view these experiences led him to drink increasingly heavily, seeking to cope with his symptoms. He was discharged in 1987. Johnny then got a series of jobs maintaining aircraft.

He separated from his wife in 1989 and moved to his parents’ house. He was still drinking heavily and suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. In 1990 he moved to another town and got another job maintaining aircraft. This only lasted for a few months as the sound of aircraft and smell of diesel began to trigger flashbacks for Johnny. He lost his accommodation, moved to another area and stayed in a hostel. He then went to prison for three months and on his release began sleeping rough. A church drop-in centre then helped him find a bedsit.

Throughout the 1990s Johnny stayed in a series of bedsits and did not become homeless again. He still continued to drink heavily however and he says he suffered from mood swings and suicidal thoughts. In the mid-1990s he worked in a homeless hostel. On one occasion he found a resident who had overdosed on drugs. According to him, this experience considerably worsened the symptoms of his post-traumatic stress disorder and he was unable to work for a year. He married again during this period but the relationship only lasted a few years, in his opinion because his wife was unable to cope with his behaviour, which is in his view symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and the experiences and difficulties that has subsequently left him with.

Johnny was finally diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in 1996. He says he was fortunate enough to come into contact with an ex-military psychiatrist who recognised his symptoms. Johnny felt that the civilian mental health services were unable to help him as they knew nothing about post-traumatic stress disorder and often sought – in his view erroneously – to explain his problems as the result of his childhood.

Johnny has only approached ex-services organisations in the last few years after finding out about them by word of mouth. He says he was not made aware of any support services when he left the Navy. Organisations such as Combat Stress and SSAFA have helped him address his financial and mental health problems. He now has a good quality studio flat and is looking for employment.

Johnny has mixed feelings about his time in the armed forces. He enjoyed the camaraderie. However he also describes how post-traumatic stress disorder was not recognised, and how the culture in the Navy discouraged talking about feelings with colleagues. He also recalls how he and his colleagues were sometimes assigned seemingly pointless tasks when at their base.
Colin

Colin had no family at all, and was brought up in an orphanage until the age of 15. He joined the Army in 1965 and served for 22 years. He describes himself as ‘a bit of a beatnik’. He had travelled around Europe for two years and was working as a painter and decorator prior to joining the Army. Colin joined on impulse. He felt bored with the routine of going to work every day and was attracted to the Army by the possibility of travel.

During his time in the Army, Colin’s postings included Germany, Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Fiji. When his service ended after 22 years, he travelled in Europe again, working on farms, before returning to the UK. He slept rough on and off for many years, and had a few jobs. He was unable to get a council flat as he was single and had not lived for long enough in the local authority area in which he was born. He experienced intense anger and frustration and on one occasion was detained in a psychiatric ward for two weeks.

Colin had few difficulties in surviving on the streets. He describes how homeless ex-service people tend to stick together, and how they are easily recognisable, being clean and upright compared to many other homeless people. He avoided sleeping in groups, never told anyone where he was sleeping, and generally kept to himself. Colin then approached a homelessness charity in London. He was placed in shared housing for over fifties before being offered a permanent flat of his own on an estate for ex-service people, where he has been for four years.

Colin is generally positive about his time in the army and says he has never regretted joining. He enjoyed the friendships he made and feels he learned a lot about other cultures, as well as a general respect for humanity. The downside for him was the culture shock he experienced on leaving the Army and returning to civilian life. He felt, amongst other things, unprepared for approaching the council and applying for accommodation.

Summary
The picture painted here is of complicated and, in many ways, unstable lives. A forces family background is not uncommon. Relationships with family and partners can be unstable. Managing socially unacceptable behaviour, sometimes verging towards the criminal, appears to be an uphill task. Crime is not always avoided and nor, eventually, is getting caught. The armed forces experience has in some cases acted as a counterweight to previous negative experiences. But for some people, life in the armed forces has not been altogether happy and even troubling; nor has it been a good preparation for a life of stability and fulfilment.

Though everyone’s life is in some ways unique, the experiences of this small group of individuals compare in many ways to the experiences of the other people interviewed for this report. The similarities and differences of experiences are set out in the table below. The chapters hereafter consider these experiences and their consequences thematically.
**Figure 1  Similarities and differences in the experiences of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Year joined</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
<th>Care / fostering</th>
<th>Rough sleeping</th>
<th>Trouble with the law</th>
<th>Family conflict</th>
<th>Bereavement</th>
<th>Relationship breakdown</th>
<th>Mental health problems</th>
<th>Alcohol problems</th>
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<td>Marines</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>1969</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>c.18 months</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Army</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>c.2 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>c.1996</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Army</td>
<td>c.2001</td>
<td>c.2 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*All names have been changed to protect the identities of the respondents

**Had two separate spells in the Army
2 Life before joining the armed forces

Having given a sense of a few people’s lives who have experienced both the armed forces and homelessness – as well as noting a multiplicity of other causes and consequences of having nowhere to live in chapter 1 – this chapter begins the thematic analysis of the lives and experiences of our respondents. Their family backgrounds are discussed as well as any trouble with the law. Reasons for, and expectations of, joining the armed forces are set out.

Family backgrounds

When discussing their family backgrounds with ex-service people two prominent themes emerged: family conflict for some and a family history of employment in the armed forces for others – though there is no suggestion that these are connected. Seven respondents mentioned that their parents or other relatives had been in the armed forces. This was often given as a reason for that person joining the armed forces themselves.

Disruptive family backgrounds were a particular feature of the lives of the youngest ex-services respondents, those in their teens and early twenties who had left the armed forces recently after only a short spell in the services. Older respondents reported more stable family backgrounds, or at least were less openly and currently concerned with that more distant time in their lives. Conflict with their families, if it occurred at all, often did so after their time in the armed forces. Post-traumatic stress disorder may be a contributory factor as well as behaviour associated with alcohol problems, perhaps exacerbated by their experiences in the armed forces. A major life crisis for one person did not elicit the expected family support. This happened long after leaving the armed forces. More detailed analysis of the impact of the family backgrounds of respondents, as they see it and as far as possible in their own words, are set out below.

Family members in the armed forces

Some respondents’ parents had been in the armed forces. As a result their family life may have involved many moves and changes. Elliot, aged 44, an ex-Army driver, describes his childhood:

“I’ve got a military background. My dad was 28 years in the Army. All my adolescent life I lived in barracks, in Cyprus, Germany and Singapore.”

As well as obliging the family to move frequently, the forces lifestyle can put a strain on the parents’ marriage, as Kenny, a 25-year-old ex-Royal Engineer describes:

“My dad was in the forces for 22 years so we moved around a lot and we lived with my nan for five years. My parents split up when I was eight. The lifestyle didn’t help. My dad is settled in Germany now.”

A family history in the armed forces was by no means all bad. It may have meant frequent moves and sometimes family conflict, but the experience of military life also evidently had its appeal. For some respondents, a family history of employment in the armed forces was a motivating factor in their joining, as described later in this chapter.

Family conflict prior to joining the armed forces

Seven of the 18 respondents reported conflict with their families, either ongoing or in the past. A further three had no family to speak of after being fostered or brought up in care. For some, a lack of family support at crucial points in their lives contributed to them becoming homeless or increased the risk of them becoming homeless. For Leslie, now 20 years old, joining the Army itself, in his view, triggered conflict with his father:

“I was an apprentice painter and decorator but I wanted a change. The war in Iraq was on and they were recruiting in the town at the time. Dad wasn’t happy about it and we fell out. He’s a painter and decorator as well and he wanted me to do that but the money wasn’t good enough.”
Leslie also experienced instability in his family further back in his life:

“I used to be a real thug, stealing from shops and terrorising people … My mum left when I was small and my dad took a lot from all of us.”

In the light of this second statement, conflict with his father may have had deeper roots and more longstanding origins than Leslie’s decision to join up.

Sandra, who was 46 years old when she was interviewed, was a chef in the Royal Navy for 22 years. Describing her life prior to joining, she said:

“I had various problems with my parents and I was definitely not happy but I didn’t realise this at the time.”

Her early life was unsettled in other ways, not just the ‘problems with parents’:

“I lived in different places. I had moved 11 times even before joining the Navy, all over England. I was 18 when I joined and I’d had four jobs before that.”

For 19-year-old Chris, conflict with his stepfather, whom he called ‘Dad’, led to him becoming homeless and even sleeping rough prior to joining the Army. His stepfather and mother had divorced when he was 14 and he had chosen to live with his stepfather:

“I chose to live with my dad but I got kicked out when I was 16. I lived in a hostel in [place] and then a different one in [place] for about six months.”

He then moved in with his grandmother but the death of another grandparent triggered further conflict and led to him becoming homeless:

“I joined the Army for the first time when I was about 17. I’d been stopping with my nan and then I had a big argument with my dad. My grandma took ill and then died and it got too much for my dad. It all built up and then he blew up. I was staying at different families and friends and for about a week and a half under a bridge.”

Simon, aged 26, also experienced bereavement prior to joining the Army. This seemed to negatively affect his mental health:

“I was depressed even before joining the Army. My brother had committed suicide because of homelessness.”

Peter, 22, also had a severely disrupted life prior to joining the Army, due to his poor relationship with his mother, whom he feels may have had mental health problems:

“I was doing my A-levels then, but I fell out with my mum. She punched me in the mouth. She’s a bit crazy … I left home and went to a hostel in [place]. I quit my A-levels when I was there … I was at the hostel for just over a year.”

He also had a difficult relationship with one of his sisters:

“After [the hostel] I lived in 18 different places in less than a year. I made the mistake of living with my sister. She doesn’t know the meaning of the words ‘paying’ and ‘rent’. Each time I’d get a bond together and she’d hardly give anything. I eventually decided ‘I’m not doing this any more’. I’ve not seen my sister since that time.”

Since that time, going home has not been an option for Peter:

“If I hadn’t come to [this project] I would’ve gone round the hostels. I wouldn’t have gone home. I didn’t tell my mum I’d left the Army.”

Peter is however still keen to keep in touch with two of his sisters and would like to see them again:

“I’m working on a master plan to speak to my sisters without talking to my mum. I haven’t seen them since June 2003.”

Given his strong feelings of anger towards his mother, however, reconciliation seems to be unlikely.
Conflict in families and the breakdown of relationships is the largest single cause of homelessness for all groups of people, regardless of service in the armed forces. For some of these respondents, family conflict was a contributory factor in them joining up, as no doubt it was for many others who have not subsequently experienced homelessness. Joining the armed forces may reduce the risk of people from disrupted family backgrounds becoming homeless in many cases, but not in the ones described here. The history of family conflict and disruption may have been a reason to join the army, but it also means that, when they leave, the informal social networks and resources that most people rely on to get themselves back into civilian life are not available. So homelessness is the consequences of the absence of support, which for a while being in the armed forces may have ameliorated, but not entirely or permanently removed. Without the ‘protection’ of life in the armed forces, little other support is available and the result is nowhere to live. If this analysis is correct, it is not life in the armed forces that has led people to become homeless. Their former experiences have put them at greater risk and their experiences in the armed forces have not in the end been enough to put them permanently back on track.

Growing up in care

Only the three oldest respondents said that they had spent time in care. Another participant in his fifties had been adopted. Those who had spent time in care described difficulties in settling down in their younger lives. Robert is a 58-year-old ex-infantryman:

“My parents died when I was 13. I lived in children’s homes in [place] and [place] from the age of 15 to 17 … I had an apprenticeship as a carpenter but I couldn’t settle. I was institutionalised.”

Colin, a 61-year-old who spent 22 years in the Army, describes his experiences of growing up:

“I was brought up in an orphanage. I had no family at all. I left at 15. They tried to put you in families but it didn’t work. I shared a flat with a friend for four years but then I felt it was time to leave … I was in the building trade – painting and decorating. I was a bit of a beatnik. I had travelled around Europe for two years.”

Nigel is 60 years old and was in the Army for 11 years. His early life was marked by much disruption, but despite this he does not look back on being in care as an entirely unhappy experience:

“I spent most of my childhood in homes. My mother was a manic-depressive as am I but I was diagnosed later in life. I was homeless with my parents and grandparents when I was very little then when I was four the police came and I was made a ward of court … I was in small children’s homes and I had an excellent time.”

Trouble with the law prior to joining

Five respondents reported having been in trouble with the law. There was a distinction, however, between the two younger respondents, who had been in trouble with the police prior to joining the armed forces, and the three older people who had got into trouble after leaving, partly due to post-traumatic stress disorder triggered in their view by their experiences in the services. Trouble with the law after leaving the armed forces is dealt with in chapter 5. This section looks at the experiences of those younger people who were in trouble with the law prior to joining.

Kenny, now aged 25, had a spell in prison before joining the Army:

“I was a year out of prison so really wasn’t happy with my life at all. I was in prison for three years. I got into a fight in [place] with some other young lads and it was all caught on camera. I walked into it really and then I was done for unlawful wounding.”
Wayne, a 20-year-old who dropped out of Army training, did not admit to being in trouble directly with the police, but his school years were marked by truancy:

“I was at school but I didn’t go much. I didn’t do school. I did a few factory jobs before I joined the Army at 18.”

Leslie, as described above, described how he used to be a ‘real thug’ and nuisance in his community before joining the Army.

Reasons for joining the armed forces

The principle motives for joining the armed forces mentioned by respondents included opportunities for travel, seeking a challenge, gaining qualifications, building a career and earning better money, as well as a family history of involvement in the armed forces, as already mentioned. Nigel, who joined the Army in the 1960s, sums up his reasons for joining:

“I joined the Army for romantic reasons. I liked the uniform and I wanted to travel. I was only 16.”

Robert had difficulty settling down in his youth, as described above, and the Army appealed to his restless nature:

“It was the only option open to me. I couldn’t settle after leaving Barnardo’s [children’s home]. I wanted variety.”

Cameron, a 19-year-old who spent four months in the Army, wanted independence and a challenge:

“I thought it’d be a challenge and a chance to move away from home.”

For Simon, aged 26, the physical challenge motivated him to join the Army:

“I was keen to get fit … I wanted some experience under my belt. The ads at the time really appealed to me. I thought it was great that you could be paid to get fit.”

Fergus, 20 years old, was similarly motivated:

“[Joining the Army] gave me something to do. I was always physically motivated. I joined for the challenge and to prove others wrong who said I couldn’t do it.”

Mike, a 49-year-old ex-Royal Marine, also felt he had ‘something to prove’:

“I had an image of a Rambo type, a real macho man. I had something to prove. I was 18 and it was something to do, something completely different that a lot of people couldn’t do.”

For Kenny it was an opportunity to gain a qualification:

“I wanted to get a recognised qualification without all the pen and paper work that you have to do at college, so I joined the Royal Engineers.”

Johnny is 42 years old and was in the Navy for nine years:

“All of my father’s side of the family were in the services except my dad who was in the police. I wanted to join the police or the Navy … I wanted a full-time career and promotion.”

Elliot, aged 44, was similarly motivated to join the Army:

“I didn’t know anything else. My dad was a Physical Training Instructor and a Regimental Sergeant Major. I always assumed I’d go into the Army.”

Mark, aged 26, was motivated to join by his father’s experience:

“My dad was in the Army for nine years. He said it was a good crack so I decided to join up.”

Altogether, seven respondents had family members who were in or had been in the services.
Life before joining the armed forces

Expectations of the armed forces

Most respondents had general rather than specific expectations. Ben, a 52-year-old ex-Royal Marine, had no expectations at all:

“I had no great desire to join up. It just seemed a good idea at the time. I only went to the Navy office because I couldn’t find the Army one. I had no expectations of the armed forces and no prior knowledge.”

Elliot also did not have clear expectations other than to make a career. When asked what his expectations were prior to joining, he answered:

“I’m not sure ... I wanted to just get into the Army, then look around and see what’s what in terms of careers.”

David, aged 35 and formerly in the RAF, responded similarly:

“I’m not sure what my expectations were. I wanted to make a career and see the world. I knew a bit about the RAF as a friend had joined before me.”

Wayne, a 20-year-old who dropped out of Army training, was succinct about his lack of expectations:

“I don’t expect stuff. I just do it when I get there.”

Cameron’s expectations were based on a popular media image of tough training:

“I expected lots of shouting and lots of physical training, like you see on TV.”

In general, expectations prior to joining the armed forces, insofar as people had focused expectations, centred on tough training, career and travel opportunities.

No one mentioned a desire to fight as a reason for, or an expectation of, joining. Perhaps they did not feel that desire or, if they did, they did not feel like talking about it. But there is a risk that ignoring this central fact about military life, while emphasising other aspects of the lifestyle in encouraging recruitment may have left some people with overly romantic ideas about life in the armed forces. These images of army life as ‘romantic’ and ‘Rambo’ imply the internalising of a set of assumptions, not just about the military lifestyle, but also about the identities and persona of military people: it is not just what you do in the forces that is appealing, it is who and what you might become. In other words, while forming and stabilising a character and identity during the critical transitions through adolescence, for some the military image is one to aspire to. It can be a way of leaving behind what you have been and becoming something more, perhaps even becoming all that you might want to become: becoming your role model – which may or may not include actually fighting or being near those who are fighting. This is all rather like the poet Paul Valery’s response when asked what he did all day. He replied, “I’m inventing myself”.

Sir Alistair Irwin, the Adjutant General until 2005, described to the Financial Times (2 April 2005) what he thought the army could offer a new recruit. His views in some ways reflect the sense of an identity, a strengthened personality, being acquired through military service. His phrase is ‘a master of yourself’.

You will develop your communication skills, powers of decision-making and you will, very quickly, become a master of yourself. And, on top of that, you’re going to have a lot of fun. You will go to all sorts of places, on exercise or to face the Queen’s enemy. And then you will learn even more about yourself – whether you have inner strength, courage, that sort of thing.

‘To fight the Queen’s enemy’ is, many might say, a slightly anachronistic and euphemistic description of fighting a war in, say, Iraq. This, of course, may be deliberate since, in Sir Alistair’s view:

“The ideal person to be a professional killer is someone who doesn’t want to do it.”
Summary
Disruptive and disrupted family backgrounds were a particular feature of the lives of the youngest ex-services respondents, those in their teens and early twenties who had left the armed forces recently after a short spell in service. Seven of the 18 respondents reported conflict with their families, either ongoing or in the past. Some respondents’ parents had been in the armed forces. This could entail a transient family life. Those who had spent time in care described difficulties in settling down in their younger lives. Five respondents reported having been in trouble with the law. There was a distinction, however, between younger respondents, who had been in trouble with the police prior to joining the armed forces, and older people who had got into trouble after leaving, in some cases partly due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

The main motives for joining the armed forces included opportunities for travel, challenge, gaining qualifications, building a career and earning better money, and a family history of involvement in the armed forces. Expectations prior to joining the armed forces were centred on tough training, career, and travel opportunities.
Having considered in the previous chapters the earlier lives of the people interviewed before joining the armed forces, chapter 3 looks at their experiences while in the armed forces.

Security, camaraderie and friendship

Many respondents, when asked what was good about being in the armed forces, mentioned the camaraderie and friendship. Some also mentioned the security offered by the armed services, although others felt this left them unprepared for civilian life.

Sandra, aged 46, was a Navy chef for 22 years, and describes what she felt was good about being in the service:

“I met lots of acquaintances but no real friends. There was a lot of fun and humour sometimes and it was an interesting and varied career. The armed forces totally protect you, they give you security in every aspect: money, food, no bills, medical care, dental care, everything.”

Elliot had similar views on what he liked about the Army:

“The security, being looked after, getting three meals a day. The Army was like your family.”

Mark, 26, was in the Army for four and a half years and found it a ‘fair experience’:

“You get loads of leave and you’ve always got somewhere to live, food on the table.”

And when asked what was good about being in the Army, 19-year-old Chris replied:

“The team building, having friends, going away on camps. I enjoyed the training.”

However 26-year-old Simon did not enjoy the social side of the Army. When asked if there was anything not so good about his time in the Army, he said:

“Being away from my family, not much of a social life, always mixing with ruffians and bums, people who are just off the dole. You had no choice but to mix with them otherwise you would end up making life very hard for yourself.”

Sandra also pointed out the negative side of the security offered by the armed forces:

“You are looked after in such a way that you are totally unprepared for civilian life. You don’t know any of your rights when you come out when it comes to social services, it doesn’t prepare you on your rights at all.”

Colin, 61, an ex-Army combat medical technician, made similar comments, referring to when he left the Army:

“The biggest fault with the Army is that when you leave you don’t know anything about the system outside. They don’t tell you the ins and outs of how to approach councils and apply for flats.”

Mark, 26, and an ex-Royal Engineer, sums up the downside of the secure armed forces life by saying, “they control your life basically”.

Career and status

Many respondents valued the career opportunities and status afforded them by the armed forces. According to Sandra:

“I learnt a career that I thoroughly enjoyed, leadership skills. I was very lucky to be able to travel to foreign drafts.”

Mike, an ex-Royal Marine, enjoyed the status. He also felt that life in the Marines was ‘tough but fair’ and that the absence of ambiguity also had its appeal. When asked what was good about being in the Marines, he replied:

“The comradeship and doing a job that a lot of people couldn’t do. The respect – everything was black and
white, there were no grey areas, no ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’. There is an old-fashioned hierarchy, no favouritism; everything is gained on merit, not like on Civvy Street where it’s all about who you know … It was hard and tough but very fair as well.”

Colin, 61, was in the Army for 22 years and echoes these sentiments:

“It’s a completely different mindset from civilian life but you don’t really realise that until you leave, and then the differences are really clear.”

The paradox that emerges from these observations is that the aspects of military life that many place great value on – security, structure, camaraderie, predictability (in what must often be rather unpredictable situations) – are also the lifestyles least likely to be instantly replicated on immediate entry into civilian life. This points to a wider paradox: military life is inevitably unnatural or abnormal. It is designed to train and equip people to deal effectively with extraordinary and sometimes extreme situations. A higher level of order is needed to cope with the potential for disorder. Preparing people to move back to more routine and mundane lifestyles (which, although superficially less likely to be seriously disrupted, may nevertheless present other unpredicted and unpredictable challenges) is inevitably a complex journey. Two preliminary questions therefore emerge: Are there steps to be taken that would make military life less unusual and unnatural without compromising military objectives? And secondly, given the unavoidable difficulties of the transition from military to civilian life, what can be done to make it smoother and more painless? Both these questions are addressed in Part 2 of the report.

**Discipline and hardship**

Discipline and a degree of hardship were also part of most respondents’ experiences in the armed forces. Some dealt with it better than others and training and discipline provoked mixed feelings in some people. As described above, Leslie, a 20-year-old ex-infantryman, was often in trouble with the police before joining the Army. He credits the Army with helping him to mature:

“I was happy in the Army and I was keeping fit. I used to have a bad reputation with the police … [The Army] makes you mature, it makes you more of a man … I know now I shouldn’t have done it. The Army made me realise what an idiot I was and what I’d put my dad through.”

Kenny, 25, an ex-Royal Engineer, also felt the Army helped him to mature:

“I would say it was a good experience and I learned a lot about looking after myself, and being well organised, life lessons. I would still be there if I hadn’t messed up. When it’s good it’s really good.”

Colin, 61, felt that the Army broadened his horizons. When asked what was good about being in the armed forces, he said:

“Your mates obviously, you could never be bored. You could go on courses and learn a lot about people and different cultures. You learned to respect humanity as a whole instead of one insular part …”

Elliot, 44, fitted easily into Army life but recognised that it might not be for everyone:

“It was like home from home as I was from a military background. I knew what discipline was all about. Those who didn’t struggled.”

The experience of some respondents, particularly the younger ones who had spent only a short time in the armed forces, bears out this observation. Peter, a 22-year-old ex-Royal Engineer with mental health problems (described in more detail in chapter 5) found Army discipline extremely hard to cope with:
“In the first seven weeks it was a nightmare. I learned slowly, then I clicked on completely when I met someone who taught me better than anyone before. I hate being ordered around. I nearly got kicked out for punching someone at a drill, but they said I’m a good soldier. I nearly managed to pass out but I told a corporal to get lost …”

“I have a problem with people screaming and shouting at you when you’re giving them your best. You have to do exercises you don’t like, and there’s beasting time, doing press-ups until your arms bleed, but that’s all part and parcel of it.”

Cameron, 19, describes the hardships of training:

“I was in the infantry. I did the training including runs, lots of physical stuff, rifle lessons and drills … Sometimes it was a bit much, carrying 45lb packs up mountains, things like that. I didn’t like going out on exercise. You’d go out into the field for five days, you’d be freezing and hungry and not able to wash.”

Respondents, whilst not always relishing the discipline and physical hardships of life in the armed forces, however, generally accepted them as part of the job and enjoyed being fit. Aside from the physical benefits, these responses also suggest that, for some people at least, the demands and structures of military life helped them to grow in experience and self-esteem, the benefits greatly outweighing the downside. So some of those aspirations discussed earlier, the wish to fulfil hopes and dreams and to become different and in some ways new, are being met.

Bullying

Most respondents did not mention experiences of bullying during their time in the armed services. Evidence of bullying and victimisation did emerge, however, in three interviews. Sandra experienced some victimisation and was aware of much more widespread bullying when she started as a Navy chef:

“I had some racial taunts when I joined [in the 1970s] and I saw a lot of bullying which affected me. That was the old Navy, a lot of chefs, instead of giving you a telling-off if you did something wrong, would just take you round the back and beat you up. As it became more modernised it did change although I did experience someone hitting me and I witnessed it several times.”

When asked what he didn’t like about being in the armed forces, Fergus, 20, an ex-Army chef, said:

“The attitude of the officers and the way they spoke to you. There was one who didn’t like me. It was discrimination and I made a complaint, but it was blanked. One night on the town he pinned me against the wall by the throat so I hit him. It was classed as self-defence though. He left me alone after that.”

Simon, 26, felt that some NCOs sometimes demonstrated their authority more than was necessary:

“Some of the sergeant majors thought just because they had a higher rank that they were something special. They were always raising their voices and they didn’t need to. I already knew they had rank. They didn’t need to prove anything but they always wanted to show off – a real power trip.”

Overall, however, experiences of bullying were not a key feature of the interviews, though something that the armed forces should be ever vigilant about guarding against, both within and outside their own ranks.

‘Downtime’ and lack of meaningful activity

Two respondents, describing aspects of life in the armed forces that they did not enjoy, mentioned boredom, ‘downtime’ and being assigned apparently pointless tasks or being treated in a way that did not appear to make sense. Johnny, 42, was in the Navy and described the frustrations of being at the base with little to do:
“I joined the Navy to see the world and ended up on Salisbury Plain. Being on shore base was a low point. The stupidity of some of the things we were given to do there for no reason was breathtaking. We were told to do things for the sake of it. For example, we once had to paint new lines on the airfield, but before they were dry they had planes landing on them so we had to do them again. Also, when we came back from the Falklands we had to go on an exercise to prove we were battle-ready, even though we’d just come back from doing the job.”

Mark, 26, was in the Army for four and a half years, talked about periods of boredom and inactivity:

“I was bored sitting about all the time, waiting for time to pass. I did a six-week tour of Cyprus, which was alright, but then on your days off you’re just in the middle of nowhere and it’s boring again. If you’re not on tour or on an exercise then there’s lots of waiting about.”

After leaving the Army, Mark was called up as a reservist to go to Iraq. Despite having lost his driving licence, he was employed as a driver, despite being disqualified from rejoining the Army on account of his driving ban:

“I tried to get back into the Army but they wouldn’t take me because of the ban. Then as I was still a reservist I was called up for war and went to Iraq for four months, but then they didn’t need me any more. It was a waste of time me being out there. I was employed as a driver operator. I told them I had no licence but they said it didn’t matter. In the end when I got there it did matter. They thought I was just saying it to get out of going to Iraq. But when I got there I couldn’t drive so they had me doing woodwork, building latrines for the PoW camps.”

Despite these experiences Mark is still keen to rejoin the armed forces.

Summary

Many respondents, when asked what was good about being in the armed forces, mentioned the camaraderie and friendship. Some also mentioned the security offered by the armed services, although others felt this left them unprepared for civilian life. While not always enjoying the discipline and physical hardships of life in the armed forces, respondents generally accepted them as part of the job. Most respondents did not disclose experiences of bullying during their time in the armed services. Some evidence of bullying and victimisation, however, did emerge in the interviews. Two respondents mentioned boredom, ‘downtime’ and being given apparently pointless tasks or being treated by their employer in a way that did not appear to make sense, as downsides to their time in the armed forces.
Having considered peoples’ lives before they joined the armed forces and their views and feelings about life while in the forces, this chapter discusses the experiences of respondents on leaving and having left military life.

Nine respondents had left the armed services voluntarily for a range of reasons, including discipline and the threat of being sent to the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC), personal reasons to do with relationships or family. Four people left at the end of the nine-year contract. There were generally other underlying reasons, however, such as conflict with superiors, drinking and post-traumatic stress disorder. A further two respondents had been discharged for misconduct (going AWOL and being involved in a fight). Two respondents had reached the end of the 22-year contract and one person had been medically discharged.

Disciplinary reasons

Wayne, 20, was discharged after going absent without leave:

“I went AWOL and signed on the dole. I don’t know why I wanted to leave. I didn’t have any problems. I enjoyed it. After going AWOL I went back to [place] and handed myself in. After six months I went to Colchester [Military Correction Training Centre]. I was there for a month.”

Simon, 26, was discharged from the Army for fighting:

“I was no longer required for service after being in a fight. I did more damage to him than he did to me. We had a disagreement. Instead of asking me to do something he told me. I wasn’t there to be bullied and picked on by somebody who wasn’t even a higher rank than me. I put his head through a window. I broke his nose and he needed six stitches. I got kicked out before I got to the passing out ceremony.”

Some young respondents had left the Army voluntarily, but essentially for disciplinary reasons. As described in chapter 3, Peter, 22, found Army discipline difficult to cope with. He was also suffering from mental health problems and was gambling a lot. He left after punching a colleague and another incident when he told a corporal to ‘get lost’:

“[It was a] voluntary discharge. I chose it because I might have gone to Colchester for what I did. Then two months later they said I could never come back.”

The situation was similar for Fergus, 20:

“I was going to be discharged anyway for drink driving.”

Kenny, 25, also decided to leave the Army voluntarily after a breach of discipline:

“On New Year’s Eve I smoked one piece of cake [cannabis] and I told them about it so of course the next time we had to give urine samples I was sent to the front of the queue. I already knew it would be positive. My career would have been put on hold for five years and I would have had to go for urine tests every week. I was treated like a habitual user so I decided to cut my losses and get out. I left voluntarily but if they could have found a way to throw me out they would have. I was a disgrace to them.”

Personal and family reasons

Other people who left for disciplinary reasons were motivated by family and personal concerns. Leslie, 20, had left voluntarily after going AWOL. He felt he had good reasons for going AWOL, however, due to troubling concerns in his family life:

“I went AWOL twice. I’ve got a little girl, two years old, who was unwell and then I got sent to Colchester. I put in for a discharge but I regret it now. I was stupid. I should’ve gone through the chain of command. Six months after I’d passed out they
refused me leave. I didn’t want to do it but she’s only a little girl. I was very angry. I was putting my life on the line and they wouldn’t even let me see my little girl.”

Leslie also had problems and concerns about getting access to his daughter, which still continue and continue to be a source of anxiety to him:

“It was hard to get rights to see her. Now I will be arrested if I go anywhere near her. I put my foot on the pram and that’s classed as assault so I have no access at all at the moment.”

Mark, 26, an ex-Royal Engineer, left the Army after his girlfriend ended their relationship while he was on tour, because of the length of time they were spending apart. There were no disciplinary issues involved. Cameron, 19, left the Army voluntarily also because of his relationship:

“I got engaged. I didn’t want to leave her on her own. I met her in [place]. She wanted me to leave too.”

Mental health reasons

One participant, Chris, aged 19, was medically discharged. He was declared unfit for service due to anxiety and asthma. Peter left the Army after conflict with colleagues, as described above, but was also suffering from mental health problems that may have contributed to his behaviour. He was referred to a psychiatrist while still in the Army and after he left was prevented from returning as the nature of his mental health problems made him, he says, potentially dangerous to work with.

Some of the older respondents who left voluntarily after the end of the nine-year contract may have been in part motivated to leave by their mental health problems. Both Johnny, formerly in the Navy, and David, from the RAF, had seen their careers begin to falter after seeing active service, respectively in the Falklands and the 1991 Gulf War. Johnny was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, described in more detail in the next chapter. David was assessed for post-traumatic stress disorder at Combat Stress many years after leaving the RAF, but it was agreed that he did not have the condition. He says that he began to experience problems after 1991, however, including beginning to drink heavily, and left in 1994 after nine years in the service.

Nigel, formerly in the Army, developed post-traumatic stress disorder after being injured in Northern Ireland. He also suffered from other mental health problems. He left voluntarily after 11 years in the Army as he could not face returning to Northern Ireland. This is also discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Other reasons for leaving

Two respondents, Sandra and Colin, had left after 22 years in the Navy and Army respectively. This is the maximum length of time that non-commissioned staff can serve in the armed services.

Elliot, 44, left the Army voluntarily after four years. He said he ‘wanted to see what was out there in the world’. He was based in Germany at this time and had put down roots. He had a German girlfriend and a group of friends that helped him to find work, and he remained in Germany from when he left the Army in 1980 until 1999. Elliot’s experiences between leaving the Army and the present are described in more detail in chapter 6.

Robert, now 58, left the Army voluntarily after nine years:

“I thought I had a job to go to but it fell through.”

Ben, 52, left the Marines voluntarily after nine years, although he also wanted to leave due to conflict with his superiors:

“My rank went up and down. I was a corporal when I left … I got very involved in intelligence work in [place] but my superiors in the Marines didn’t seem...
to take the work as seriously as I did. This caused problems with the hierarchy. I never regretted joining but I regretted their attitude … Conflict with superiors led to me leaving at the end of my term.”

Mike, 49, was also in the Marines. He left after eight years:

“I tried the sergeant’s course twice and failed. I left voluntarily and I got a better job outside.”

**Summary**

Respondents left for a variety of reasons including disciplinary issues, personal and family reasons and reaching the end of their contract. For some who left voluntarily or were involved in violent misconduct, mental health problems may have contributed. Concerns regarding partners and children may prey on the mind of an individual living far away from them in a military base. This could result in them leaving or feeling they have no other option but to go AWOL.
5  Alcohol, mental health problems and relationship breakdown

Having considered the ‘pathway’ that people follow from before they join the army to when they leave in the preceding chapters, this chapter looks at the specific problems of alcohol, mental health problems and relationship breakdown experienced by some respondents.

Alcohol use, mental health problems, relationship and family breakdown interacted with each other and increased the risks of having nowhere to live and no one to live with. For some of the older respondents in particular, alcohol and mental health problems contributed to their difficulties in settling into civilian life after their time in the armed forces. They may have struggled on, leading a transient life, for many years before finally getting help. Virtually all respondents repeatedly referred to alcohol, and the behaviour it may induce, as a major feature of life in the armed forces.

Three respondents had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The condition had typically persisted over many years before being diagnosed. These respondents tended to ‘self-medicate’ with alcohol; they sometimes experienced extreme anger. This could lead to problems with the law and difficulty in maintaining employment and accommodation. At least six respondents had other mental health problems such as depression, manic depression and anxiety, which originated before their time in the armed forces and continued to complicate their lives after they left. Two of these people also had a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. Relationship breakdown during or after leaving the armed forces, and bereavement, were also features of some of the responses.

Alcohol and drug use

Six respondents admitted to full-blown alcohol dependency problems in the past. They were all older respondents, aged 35 or over, three of whom also suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. It was clear from many other interviews that alcohol was a big part of the armed forces culture and lifestyle, however, and that other respondents sometimes drank heavily. Rick Brunwin, Chief Executive of the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, says:

“Many leave the forces with alcohol problems. They’ve managed in the services – you won’t get sacked for drinking but you will for drugs. That’s why drug problems are so rare in ex-servicemen. Drink can then become a problem in civilian life. There’s significant downtime in garrisons, resulting in a mess culture of heavy drinking.”

Mike, a 49-year-old ex-Marine, who also suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, describes how his alcohol problem in his view sabotaged his chances of stable employment after leaving the armed forces:

“I went [abroad] to make some money. I was earning £400 a week. I was there for two years and when I came back I realised I had an alcohol problem. I spent a lot of money on hotels. I ended up on a rubbish dump one night after a night of drinking, with my wallet gone. I went to the DSS … and they gave me £38 … I got a job as a dishwasher, cash in hand. Then I became a security guard and within four months I was promoted to inspector of the site. I worked there for five years. I was drinking vodka at lunchtime. It was good money, about £30,000 a year but I was spending a lot of it on drink and just going down and down … Eventually I got the sack because of my drinking. I got a job with BSkyB but I was only in charge of ten guys there. I got done for drinking again and got the boot again.”

Colin, 61, who was in the Army for 22 years, said of himself, and the other ex-service people he used to associate with on the streets: “we may drink a bit but we aren’t alcoholics”. The
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frustrations of homelessness and trying to cope in the civilian world after so long in the Army did, however, on at least one occasion, cause Colin to turn to alcohol to cope with his emotions:

“I hit the bottle. The Army is a drinking culture anyway. I saw a doctor in the psychiatric ward in [place]. After two weeks he wouldn’t let me go. I was all anger and frustration. I went on detox and psychiatric care.”

For David, 35, his alcohol problems began while he was still in the RAF:

“In 1991 I was on active service in the Gulf War. Afterwards I returned to Catterick and this is when the problems started. I was drinking heavily and spent time in military hospital.”

His drinking continued throughout the 1990s until he became homeless in 1999. His life followed a similar pattern of temporary accommodation and periodic employment, against a backdrop of chronic drinking.

Ben’s problems with alcohol also began while he was in the armed forces in the 1970s:

“I started drinking in the Marines. They were like a replacement family. Drink is a big part of Army life. Take the drink out and there’d be a mutiny. Drinking is part of the job, and you worry about the problems later. I don’t like to blame anyone. I did it to myself; no one was forcing the drink down my neck.”

Ben joined the police after leaving the Army in 1979. He struggled on for many years, drinking heavily, with no help, before finally admitting he had a problem:

“I left the police in 1986. I’d become obsessed with the job. I was drinking heavily and found the work very depressing … I became a self-employed private investigator. By this stage I’d bought a house and was married with one son. I didn’t feel I had problems moving from the Marines to the police, although I was drinking a lot. People don’t go straight from the Army to the streets … I had ups and downs financially. I was still drinking heavily although I didn’t admit I had a problem.”

“My marriage broke up in the early 1990s. I started renting. By 1997 I was visiting psychiatric hospitals mostly due to the drinking but I was never actually asked about my drinking … I was living in bedsits until October 2002. I saw no future for myself and finally admitted I was an alcoholic.”

Boredom and frustration while in the Army could exacerbate heavy drinking. This was what Kenny, 25, says happened to him. He was posted back to training for disciplinary reasons:

“I got bored and I was getting drunk all the time and misbehaving.”

By contrast with these many stories about the use and abuse of alcohol, drug use was not a feature of the lives of the respondents as described in the interviews, although one or two people mentioned it. Kenny took cannabis on one occasion while in the Army. He was caught and left the Army voluntarily. David also reported experimenting with drugs after leaving the RAF.

Types of ex-service people with mental health problems

Toby Elliot, Chief Executive of Combat Stress, identifies and profiles two main types of ex-servicemen with psychological problems:

Older ex-servicemen
The average age of Combat Stress service users is 34. They have been in the armed forces for 14 to 16 years and have seen much active service. They may have discharged themselves due to post-traumatic stress disorder and thus missed out on the support offered if medically discharged. Post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol misuse and other problems may have been handled while in service due to having a structured, regimented life. They may also
use alcohol to self-medicate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Early leavers**
Those who leave the army early are generally young people. They may have failed in training and therefore seen little active service. Some may have been on peacekeeping missions, however, and witnessed traumatic events. Young people may also have been discharged on disciplinary grounds, and may have come to the armed forces with psychological ‘baggage’. For example, they may have been abused as children or come to the Army from being in care.

**Combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder**
The famous writer and war correspondent Martha Gellhorn described the impact of war in straightforward terms.

> “Anybody can imagine war: there is nothing arcane about it. War happens to people one by one. That is really all I have to say and it seems to me I have been saying it forever.”

She may be alluding to what has come to be known as post-traumatic stress disorder, which, as she says, happens to people one by one.

Post-traumatic stress disorder had deeply disrupted the lives of those respondents suffering from it. Associated with heavy drinking, it may not be diagnosed for many years, not picked up by the armed forces and misunderstood by civilian mental health services. The poor awareness of the problem in NHS services is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. The lives of respondents suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder were characterised by transience and disruption. Unable to settle, they moved from job to job and lived in a succession of bed and breakfasts and temporary bedsit accommodation. Julie Rogers of the Alcohol Recovery Project says of post-traumatic stress disorder:

> “There may be a long delay before it becomes a problem. Low tolerance to noise can be a symptom. We had one client who walked out of seven tenancies because of this.”

Johnny developed post-traumatic stress disorder after serving in the Royal Navy in the Falklands conflict in 1982, and lived with the condition undiagnosed for many years. He was also later diagnosed with depression:

> “My head was shot away in the Falklands. I didn’t know it at the time … I wasn’t diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder at the time, not until 1996. It was picked up by an ex-military psychiatrist … Things went downhill for me after 1982.”

The culture in the Royal Navy at the time didn’t help:

> “[Post-traumatic stress disorder] wasn’t picked up in the Navy. They put it down to drink. We didn’t talk about our feelings in the Navy. Everyone acted normally so you had no idea the next person was going through the same thing as you. At a welcome back party after the Falklands in 1982 our friends and families were told by senior officers not to talk to us about our feelings. Post-traumatic stress disorder was not tackled by the MoD, they wouldn’t admit it existed.”

Post-traumatic stress disorder affected most areas of Johnny’s life. After leaving the Navy, the symptoms made it difficult for him to hold down employment in his field of expertise. He found employment in 1990:

> “I got a job maintaining passenger aircraft. This lasted three months. The sound of aircraft and smell of aircraft diesel triggered flashbacks … I was drinking a lot to block out the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. I suffered from mood swings and was often suicidal. I often had flashbacks.”

Another job in a homeless hostel also ended due to his post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms:
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“I was doing night duties. The ambulance would be called out at least four times a week for residents. One time they came for someone who had overdosed. This set off my post-traumatic stress disorder very badly, just seeing the state this person was in. I did nothing for a year.”

His second marriage also broke up, as his wife was unable to cope with his post-traumatic stress disorder.

Nigel, 60, was in the Army for 11 years. He was a musician in the Army as well as a soldier. He has suffered from manic depression for many years, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder following a severe injury in Northern Ireland. His mother had also suffered from manic depression. His mental health problems resulted in leaving the Army:

“I loved the life but my manic depression was getting worse. My commanding officer was very kind but I couldn’t stand it any more. I was terrified of going to Northern Ireland and being wounded again. I had already been wounded very badly. My depression was very bad. Everyone wanted me to stay but I was on standby for Northern Ireland and I was all over the place. I liked the musical side but not the soldiering side any more. I was in psychiatric hospitals three times.”

He left the Army in 1972 but his mental health problems continued:

“In 1978 I got married and I had a massive breakdown. After a long time caring for me my marriage eventually broke up. She found it too much to cope with.”

Toby Elliot of Combat Stress believes that a diagnosis of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder may be more acceptable to some ex-servicemen:

“It’s maybe less stigmatising than saying ‘you have depression or a drink problem or a personality disorder’. When people come to us we need to get behind the initial diagnosis of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder. Often it masks drug, alcohol and other mental health problems.”

Other mental health problems

Six respondents had suffered mental health problems other than post-traumatic stress disorder that had interfered with their lives, including Nigel who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and manic depression as mentioned above, and Johnny who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Sandra, 46, was a Navy chef for 22 years. She suffered from depression from before joining the Navy, but did not acknowledge it at the time. She felt the help she got in the Navy was inadequate:

“I first saw a psychiatrist in 1982, which is when I was diagnosed with depression but the doctors I saw didn’t really understand and I didn’t get any real help. I wasn’t offered any counselling, just tablets. I didn’t have the option of going to doctors outside the Navy. I just didn’t know my rights at all.”

After leaving the Navy, against a background of continuing depression, Sandra had a succession of short-term jobs and was sometimes taken advantage of by employers. She moved frequently. These experiences are discussed in more detail in chapter 6 below.

As described in chapter 2, Peter, a 22-year-old ex-Royal Engineer, had a poor relationship with his mother from whom he is now estranged. She was violent towards him on at least one occasion. Peter suffers from mental health problems now, possibly stemming from these experiences:

“I can’t work as I can’t get on with people. I get ideas about what people think of me … I’m not allowed to work but that could change very soon. I’ve got a job interview but I don’t want to go because I need to get examined by a doctor and I don’t like doctors.”

“I was told I had low self-esteem due to events in childhood. The worst thing for me is staying awake...
most of the night thinking about everything. It drives me crazy. I sometimes play computer games at night until my eyes are closing, then I go to bed because I know I’ll fall straight asleep and not stay awake worrying.”

Chris, 19, suffered from anxiety as well as asthma, and left the Army as a result. Robert, 58, an ex-infantryman, also sought help for mental health problems:

“Nine years ago I went to a dry-out centre for five months. I was drinking a lot and had problems that weren’t being dealt with. I felt I had to do something about them. Two years ago I went to the doctor I wanted one-to-one counselling, not group therapy.”

Robert is currently nearing the end of a course of counselling.

Trouble with the law after leaving the armed forces

Mike, David and Johnny got into trouble with the police after leaving the armed forces. Johnny was imprisoned for three months for fraudulently cashing cheques. After coming out of prison he slept rough in a park under a tarpaulin for three months.

Mike, an ex-Marine, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. He secured a place at university. His fiancée died at this time, however, and as he put it, he “completely lost it”. The consequences were disastrous for him:

“After I had started university, one day I got into a fight … I was told to go to the halls. The police came and arrested me for ABH. I was charged. All my stuff was moved out of my room and I was told to find another place to live. I sold my stuff then I was on the streets selling the Big Issue … from 1987 to 1988. I was in various trouble with the law after that mainly through drinking. I was living in hostels and B&Bs and I just couldn’t find any way out of it.”

David, 35, formerly in the RAF, also went to prison for a violent offence:

“I was feeling under pressure from my family and was drinking a lot. I got into trouble with the police and spent ten months in prison for GBH. I was originally sentenced to four years but this was reduced to two and a half on appeal, and I got parole.”

Marriage and relationship problems

Six respondents experienced marriage or relationship break-up during or after their time in the armed forces. Two experienced the death of a wife or partner. For people already in difficult, stressful situations, these events could be deeply traumatic. Spending much time apart led to problems for some respondents. This aspect of the military lifestyle contributed to the break-up of David’s marriage:

“I got married in 1988. My wife was ex-Royal Navy. She didn’t like me being away a lot. Our marriage problems really began after 1991.”

Mark’s career in the Royal Engineers was going well until he split up with his girlfriend:

“At first I was doing really well and they put me on all the courses I wanted to go on. Then I split up with my girlfriend. I did a six-month tour in Bosnia and we split up because of the distance … I was devastated really but there was nothing I could do.”

Kenny, 25, also a former Royal Engineer, split up with his girlfriend from home just after he passed training.

Robert, 58, grew up in care, as described in chapter 1. He lived a transient life after leaving the Army, moving around the country, living in a series of bedsits and doing casual work. He confessed to having ‘itchy feet’. This contributed to the breakdown of his marriage:
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“I’m divorced. I got married in the Army but we separated three years after I left. We fell out over where to live. She stayed at home while I moved around … [After leaving the Army] I moved to a bedsit in [place] while my wife went to her parents. Then I moved into a smaller bedsit. I couldn’t afford to send money back. We both went on the dole separately and I also did a few odd jobs, labouring mostly. After we got divorced I travelled around the country.”

For Nigel and Johnny, mental health problems, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder, led to the break-up of their marriages, as described above.

Bereavement

Losing his fiancée was a devastating experience for Mike, an ex-Marine. As mentioned above, she died when he was about to start university:

“I stayed in [place] for six years where I met my fiancée who had a son suffering from MS. I was his voluntary carer first of all and then I got paid. Four years into our relationship he died … Between getting my diploma and going to university my fiancée died. I completely lost it after that. I was sectioned and didn’t go to the funeral.”

After Nigel’s first marriage ended, described above, he lived with a friend for four or five years. He then stayed in a series of hostels before getting his current flat:

“I had a girlfriend at [hostel] and I was still with her when I came here but she died of a liver complaint. I was very low after that. Then I had a heart attack.”

Fortunately, Nigel said that his health had improved a lot since that time.

These are descriptions of troubled lives, but they probably are not typical of the lives of all those in the forces. After all, these interviews were conducted with those who at one time or another had nowhere to live. Many others will have led a life in the services that was, on balance, happy and gone on into civilian life with no more than the normal range of ups and downs that await and attend everyone. Nevertheless the troubled lives described point to a truth widely acknowledged, but still too frequently ignored or suppressed: not having anywhere to live is a consequence of the interaction of manifold troubles most of which are set out above. Homelessness does not come from nowhere and is not only the fault of poor or non-existent services in the armed forces or in civilian life. Troubles, of course, come not in single spies, but in battalions, but some have more solid defences against these battalions than others. These defences are built on strength of personality and self-confidence shored up by the kindness of friends and families. Those whose equanimity is more readily upended by events unexpected and untoward, and who rely only on the infrequent kindness of strangers, will more readily have to consign themselves to the tender mercies of service providers and the less than tender bureaucracies by which access to those services is granted. In Part 2 of the report some suggestions will be made not about how to prevent the problems adumbrated above from occurring at all – that would be unrealistic – but at least to prevent them leading to homelessness, thereby adding another twist to the vicious spiral of exclusion and making a return to ordinary life an even higher mountain to climb.
Summary
Alcohol and mental health problems and relationship breakdown were all key features of the interviews. They were often intertwined, pushing the individual towards homelessness, and were associated more often with the older respondents. Ex-service people with mental health problems can be divided into two types: older people, who may have been in the armed forces for many years, seen much active service, and be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder; and young early leavers who may have come to the armed forces with psychological ‘baggage’ from their childhood. Post-traumatic stress disorder may be associated with heavy alcohol use, and may persist undiagnosed for many years. Some respondents suffered from a range of mental health problems other than post-traumatic stress disorder, which may have originated prior to their time in the armed forces. Two respondents had dual diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder and another mental health condition. Relationship problems could be caused by long periods of absence, a key feature of military life. Post-traumatic stress disorder could also lead to relationship breakdown after leaving the armed forces. Bereavement, occurring when an ex-service person is already struggling with problems such as alcohol misuse and post-traumatic stress disorder, can be acutely devastating.
Having considered the aspects of life before and in the military mentioned by respondents, chapter 6 looks in more detail at how respondents coped between leaving the armed forces and the present, including how they dealt with being homeless. It examines how they coped practically, financially and emotionally, including what support, if any, they received from family and friends.

Many of the young respondents had moved straight from the armed forces to their current temporary, supported accommodation and had little or no experience of homelessness, sleeping rough or living in hostels. For some of the older respondents, however, many of whom had been in the armed forces for a number of years, adjusting to civilian life had been difficult and little support of the sort now offered by the Galleries Project was available when it was needed. As described in chapter 5, some struggled for many years with mental health and alcohol problems, compounded by marriage and relationship breakdown and, sometimes, bereavement. They often had to survive on the streets, and this chapter looks at those experiences too.

Coping practically
Surviving on the streets
Some of the older respondents had lived for extended periods on the streets. While this had obviously been a tough experience, they felt that their military experience helped them to survive better than other homeless people. Interestingly they believed a code of honour existed between homeless ex-service people which was a powerful bond without ever receiving much acknowledgement. This code of honour is combined with a certain pride in the survival skills gained from life in the military. Mike, a former Marine, described at length his experiences and methods of survival:

"The safest place to sleep was a graveyard at least a mile from the town centre. A lot of people, because they have no energy, will sleep in the town centre, but the vegetation is much warmer. A plastic bag is often much warmer than a sleeping bag. You learn these little things from being in the military. You have to stash your gear half a mile or so from the city centre, so the police don’t automatically stop you for being homeless, and always camouflage it first …"

"The mental survival is the most important. I will always know where to get a meal. I know where to take shelter in London. You can go to M&S at 12.30 when they are putting out the food that’s out of date. I also know how to be an actor. You have got to be a chameleon to know how to survive. You have to know who you can trust within five minutes, where to sell the Big Issue and where not to sell it. I still have a list of places to go where I can get some money doing furniture removals or something like that. I have never begged on the streets. A lot of ex-servicemen won’t do that. It’s a pride thing. I don’t steal either. It’s not worth it. I would recommend being on the streets to anyone for a month … There is a code of honour that you don’t rip off your own kind."

Mike’s description suggests that the experience of being homeless is much more than simply having nowhere to go for the night. Military experience had given him skills that had proved highly adaptable to this new and unexpected, though not altogether, different way of life. But Mike is describing more than just a way of life; he is also giving an insight into an implicit ethical code – a set of ‘commons’ that are organising principles for lives lived not under a roof. Escaping homelessness doesn’t just mean finding somewhere to live. It also means finding another way to live and another set of principles by which to live. These psychological shifts are in some ways more demanding than the physical shifts. The help needed may be more with the former than the latter.
Military History

Colin, 61, also spent a long time on the streets after leaving the Army. He too points to the standards upheld by homeless people who have been in the army, their sense of camaraderie and mutual support and their feeling that they were different to other homeless people and should keep a safe distance.

“I had been sleeping rough off and on for 15 or 20 years before going in to St Mungo’s [hostel]. When I had some money I stayed in a hotel but if not then I just survived. I survived no problems. I was fortunate to have my pension. It’s a lot harder for people on the dole. You can always tell an ex-squaddie, always clean and upright. There’s no need to look like some of these types you see walking around. It tends to happen that the ex-squaddies stick together, down at The Passage in Victoria. Ex-squaddies tend to find each other. We are not alcoholics although we might drink a bit. There’s no need to starve in London.”

“I never slept in groups. Always keep yourself to yourself. Never tell them where you’re sleeping. The ones hanging around in groups are trouble. They’re dangerous.”

Elliot had a good network of friends in Germany, so he was soon able to find work again:

“I then worked in a friend’s pub, still in Germany. I was meant to be helping out temporarily but ended up managing it for eight years. I enjoyed it but there were no weekends off … I left when the pub was sold. Unfortunately I wasn’t sold with it. I was unemployed for a while. I claimed German benefits … Then I saw an advert in a British Army newspaper. I don’t know why but I kept in touch with Army life. I reminisced about it with other ex-servicemen. I had no thoughts of coming back to Britain. My German girlfriend didn’t want that.”

“So then I got a job selling tax-free cars to British soldiers in Germany … The company that trained me pulled out of the market so I started my own company.”

This lasted until 1999, when Elliot was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, described in more detail below.

Employment

After leaving the Army in Germany, Elliot trained in non-destructive testing at an engineering school in Berlin. He lived and worked in Germany for 19 years, largely successfully:

“I stayed with friends for the first two months after leaving the Army. When I got qualified I started working for a British company in Germany, in steelworks, oil rigs and nuclear power stations, doing building and testing. I loved it. The downside was I was always away from home. My family was back in [the UK]. I hadn’t fallen out with them at that point. I left the job because a lot of it was to do with nuclear power stations, and no more were being planned. The Green Party got into the government and stopped the building of nuclear power stations.”

Other, older, respondents, who left the armed forces many years ago, had done a range of jobs. Johnny’s aircraft maintenance skills, gained in the Navy, enabled him to secure a job maintaining civilian aircraft. However, as described in the previous chapter, the work triggered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and he left the job after only three months. For David, 35, formerly in the RAF, things seemed to be going well in the second half of the 1990s. He was working in a prototyping company and had cut down his drinking. However the company closed without notice. He started drinking heavily again and in 1999 lost his hostel place as a result:

“After leaving the hostel I met two travellers in Victoria. I went travelling around the UK with them doing odd jobs. The drinking was really taking hold now. I went into hospital and detox twice in this period.”
Coping with being homeless

Mike, a former Marine, had a series of jobs after leaving the armed forces, some of which were responsible, well paid and appeared to offer prospects. However, as described in the previous chapter, he lost successive jobs due to his heavy drinking. Ben, also a former Marine, worked in the police and then became a self-employed private investigator, reflecting his experience in the Marines of working in intelligence. Again, his drinking became an increasing problem over the years, however, and as a result work became increasingly sporadic.

Colin and Sandra were in the Army and Navy respectively for 22 years. Both found difficulty adjusting to civilian life, especially employment. Colin, 61, was brought up in care and lived an itinerant life after leaving the Army, supporting himself with a range of jobs:

“After 22 years you get a gratuity. I travelled around a bit to get it out of my system. I worked on farms around Europe. I don’t regret it. I’ve always had itchy feet. It’s in me to get out. I travelled around Europe all over. I worked for Tesco’s and the Post Office but I couldn’t hold it down. I am used to hard work and I didn’t like the bullying. One guy was picking on someone else so I turned around and hit him. He reported me but I resigned first. It makes you very upright, the Army. I don’t like bullshit. The Post Office guys were alright but you know, you start early, sometimes six, sometimes five and you’re expected to do overtime. I didn’t need the extra money though. I was on an Army pension. The atmosphere started to go bad so I threw my hand in.”

Sandra had numerous housekeeping jobs between leaving the Navy in 1998 and moving into a hostel for ex-service people a few years later:

“I went for a two-week induction course to be a prison officer but I failed the test so I decided to use my skills as a chef and how clean and pristine I was to work as a private cook and housekeeper. I had 15 jobs in three years. Most of them were live-in jobs so when the circumstances changed I would lose my job and home together. I found the jobs through agencies mainly. In those three years I was nearly on the streets lots of times but I had a friend who helped me. I also suffered various degrees of depression.”

The culture shock of trying to adjust to civilian life, as well as struggling with mental health problems, made this a traumatic period for Sandra:

“I was going for constant job interviews and whenever I got a new place I never knew how long it was going to last. I was taking various tablets but I never had any counselling. I was working 12 or 16-hour days. In the Navy everything you do to the best of your ability, you give 110 per cent. When I came out I was being taken advantage of by my employers and I had really low self-esteem. Civilian people just don’t understand this. Civilian life is so much more laidback than in the services, everything is done tomorrow or the next day. That’s not the attitude the services teach you. You are taught never to say No to anything and you just don’t know how it is in the civilian world. I found and still find it all so frustrating.”

Sandra gives an example of one bad experience with an employer:

“In my last but one job, my employer said she wouldn’t take me on unless we did it without the agency. In the end she reduced my pay and wouldn’t pay any national insurance for me. Eventually I was sacked from there but I won the employment tribunal. I got another job for two weeks but I just couldn’t take it mentally and emotionally.”

After that, she moved into the hostel. David, 35, was in the RAF for nine years and he also found it hard to adjust to civilian employment:

“I worked for Dixons. This lasted four months. I left due to conflict with the managers. Going from the RAF to being told what to do by some spotty teenager is tough.”
The supported housing project where the young respondents stay is in a small rural town near a large garrison. There is a lack of job opportunities locally. Some would like to go back to the Army. Wayne has been supporting himself by working in a local pub, but is finding it difficult to cope:

“I’m working at the moment. People around here are stuck up. I’m working behind a bar. People take the piss out of me. I’m the idiot in the corner.”

Mark lives in the same project. He worked as an HGV driver after leaving the Army. However he lost this job and began having financial problems:

“I was an HGV driver for a while but then I got a ban for drink driving and I lost everything and had lots of money problems. I tried to get back into the Army but they wouldn’t take me because of the ban … I even tried the Navy but they wouldn’t either. Why do you need a car on a boat?”

He describes the difficulties of looking for work in his current locality:

“I’m not coping very well with money. For most jobs around here you need a car or you’re going to have a minimum wage job at £4.50 or £5 an hour. Full-time that’s £200 a week. The rent here is £118 a week plus council tax at £114 a month and with food and everything you’d end up with nothing left. It’s a Catch-22. I’ve done some landscaping though and a bit of bar work.”

Kenny, also living in the same project, had a similar experience:

“I worked as a fryer in a chippy for two weeks … I’m still on their books but I only wanted to do 14 hours a week and they wanted someone full-time on a minimum wage. I would have ended up in debt doing that. I like a beer and a cigarette.”

And Simon, formerly in the Army, is also in a similar situation:

“It’s expensive here for what it is. £114 a month for council tax and £118 a week rent. To be honest I want to get out of here, it’s kind of messing my head about at the moment. [My girlfriend and I are] both very worried, we’ve had to go into our savings that we were keeping for furniture. I’ve got a job with a timber company but it’s quite crap, £4.85 an hour which is crap for my age.”

Employment aspirations and training and education are discussed in chapter 7, looking at the move from homelessness to resettlement.

Coping financially

Other than employment, respondents had claimed a range of benefits. The older respondents with many years of service often had armed services pensions, whereas the young respondents, if not working, claimed Jobseekers Allowance. Other benefits accessed included housing, council tax and invalidity benefits.

Simon has struggled financially and moved frequently since leaving the Army. He has survived on a variety of benefits, short-term jobs and assistance from his family:

“I was on the dole when I was here the first time. Wales was a real black spot for jobs when I was here the first time … My Dad is posted there with the MoD and my step mum is Welsh. I’m trying to learn to stand on my own two feet. I left here and got a temporary job in [place] and then another one. This is the second time I’m here after failing miserably. I’ve made a proper go of it this time though … Last time I had to borrow money from my parents but now I’ve learnt how to budget and I can keep myself in food and cigarettes and petrol. I haven’t had to borrow money this time and my parents have said they are really proud of me. I’ve got back with my missus and my kid. I blame it all on finances, if you’re out of pocket then you’re bound to be depressed aren’t you?”
Colin received a gratuity and a pension after 22 years service in the Army. Sandra also receives a pension after 22 years in the Navy. She has found it difficult to secure the other benefits she is entitled to:

“Getting the hospital benefits that I’m entitled to has been extremely demanding and I have been treated like a second class citizen. I have served my country, paid my taxes and national insurance but that’s not important, it doesn’t count for anything. It’s been a long, long fight to get what I’m entitled to and four years later I am still fighting for benefits. I’m on incapacity benefit at the moment. It’s been a three-year fight about the war pension and because of my writing difficulties I have only just applied for the other bits. I am still waiting to be assessed correctly on housing benefit and council tax. It should only take four weeks to go to the review board but it has taken 14 weeks. I still don’t know about my rent and I am frightened of losing my tenancy.”

Sandra is also applying for a community care grant.

Coping emotionally

Homelessness and insecurity was emotionally devastating for some respondents, as we have seen throughout. Combinations of financial and accommodation insecurity, mental health problems, emotional problems and conflict with families could be traumatic. Mike, an ex-Marine, gives an account of what he would do sometimes to feel ‘normal’ and escape from the reality of sleeping rough:

“Sometimes I would get a cash-in-hand job and on the last day I would treat myself. I would go and have a shower somewhere and have clean clothes and then I would go to a pub and get pissed one night. I would be talking to people there and nobody would know I was homeless. Then I would go back to the graveyard where I was sleeping and wake up the next morning and carry on as normal.”

He describes his mental state while living on the streets:

“i was on a super high – mega alert, mega conscious of everything. sometimes I was absolutely drained though. you feel like you’re switched on all the time. it’s an automatic thing.”

David, 35, formerly in the RAF, describes his feelings whilst homeless:

“emotionally i felt like a zombie. i felt like society owed me more than i was getting.”

Lack of security of accommodation and employment badly affected Sandra after she left the Navy. She also experienced mental health problems:

“I was very unstable because of the lack of security. I never knew when I was going to get my next job and next pay packet … I was always staying on some friend's floor. I moved hundreds of times. I had no security and I never had a bed of my own. I was constantly on the move.”

Elliot also found the move from Army to civilian life difficult emotionally:

“I regretted leaving the Army because of the security and guaranteed income. It’s difficult to adjust to civvy street. The Army tells you when to do everything. When you leave there’s a void. You don’t know where to start and where to get advice.”

Ben, 52, an ex-Marine, went from being a police officer, home owner and married with a child in the 1980s to living alone in bedsits and drinking heavily by the end of the 1990s. He describes his mental state at this point simply: ‘I was off my head’.

Advice and support from family and friends

For some respondents, especially those in their teens and twenties, poor family relationships often meant that they did not want to move back home,
preferring to settle away from their families and the areas where they grew up. However others were also negatively affected by unforeseen family conflicts and upheavals after leaving the armed forces. Just when they needed to fall back on family support, it was no longer available.

**Unwillingness to approach family**

Wayne, 20, did not receive any support from his family, nor does he want to approach them now:

“My parents didn’t really say anything about me leaving the Army. My sister has a baby and my brother is a druggie … I wouldn’t approach my family for help. There’s no way I’d go back to my old life in that area.”

Cameron, 19, is staying in temporary supported accommodation in a different part of the country from his family. He has lost touch with his friends from the Army and spends his free time with his fiancée and her parents. He hasn’t been home for several months:

“I see [my fiancée] every day. We’ll get married in a couple of years when we’ve saved enough. I’ve lost touch with my mates from the Army because I lost my phone with all their numbers.”

“My mum’s not happy about me leaving the Army. I’m still in touch with my family. I last saw my mum [four months ago]. I’ve got two sisters but I don’t speak to them.”

As described in the previous chapter, Fergus, 20, a former Army chef, left voluntarily after getting into trouble for drinking and driving. He felt unable to go home to his family, and is currently living far away from them:

“I couldn’t go home. I was a disappointment to my mum and I didn’t want to hurt her. My dad would’ve just laughed at me. He thinks my whole life is a laugh anyway.”

Fergus’s mother is a Commodore in the Royal Navy and has been in service for 27 years. Their relationship is better now:

“My mum took it OK when I told her. We’re OK now … My mum and dad are coming over to visit.”

Kenny, 25, was also reluctant to face his family after leaving the Army:

“I felt kind of like the black sheep of the family for getting chucked out of the Army. My dad was there for 22 years and my mum served three years in the RAF … I might have been able to go back home but I didn’t fancy it really. It would’ve been murder.”

Talking about their relationship now, Kenny says:

“I’m on the phone whenever I can. Just before Christmas I went down to see my family. Our relationship is alright at the moment, we’re not really tight but we’re OK. I like it, it suits me.”

Leslie, 20, fell out with his father, who did not approve of him joining the Army. The situation is improving but there is still friction in his family:

“Things are going OK with my dad. I’m going up after Christmas and we’ve agreed to start all over again. I’ve not been [home] for 12 months. I feel a lot of remorse and guilt about falling out with him. I’m going to take my fiancée up with me. My brother isn’t happy with me and my sister over the way we’ve treated Dad. I don’t have any contact with my mum. She doesn’t want any contact with any of us.”

Robert, 58, was orphaned and grew up in care from the age of 13. He has a younger brother who has offered him help since he left the Army in 1974. Robert has generally shunned his help, however, preferring to stay away and live a transient life:

“I moved to get away from my brother. He was asking too many questions. I didn’t want to stay with him and his wife and kids … I felt out of place with
Coping with being homeless

my brother and his family. I didn’t want him knowing what I was doing. I was worried I would just let him down.”

When asked if there was anyone he would like to get back in touch with or see more of, Robert replied:

“No, not my brother. I haven’t had a drink for 18 months. I don’t want to put myself under pressure. I’m not thinking so far ahead. He’s never seen me drunk. I don’t want to risk him seeing me that way and let myself down.”

Sandra, formerly in the Navy, is also reluctant to contact her sister:

“I last saw my sister six years ago. I last tried to contact her two years ago but now I don’t know whether the gap is too big or not.”

Breakdown of family support

Elliot, 44, appeared to thrive after leaving the Army in 1980. He lived and worked in Germany for 19 years, as described above. When he became seriously ill in 1999, however, he was devastated to find that his family in the UK could not be relied on for support when he needed them most:

“In 1999 I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. I had a major operation. I was off work for a year. I lost [my] company and exhausted all my savings. I couldn’t get benefits this time … I decided to come home to Britain to my family. They said they’d support me, they’re my family, they’ll always be there for me, but it turned out not to be true. They told me to leave after five weeks. Then I went to stay with my niece but after another five weeks she asked me to leave too … I came to Britain alone, without my partner.”

Elliot’s mother had previously died of cancer. When asked if there was anyone he would like to get back in touch with, Elliot said:

“I’ve no wish to see my family. They don’t exist as far as I’m concerned.”

Mark, 26, also relied on his family for somewhere to live after leaving the Army, but he lost this support due to circumstances outside his control:

“I went back to Mum and Dad’s. Then they split up and sold the house and went their separate ways. Since then I’ve been living in different places.”

For Chris, 19, neither his mother nor stepfather were able to offer him accommodation when he was discharged from the Army:

“I’m in contact with my family but there’s no room at my dad’s. I’ve got three brothers and a sister there. I still visit him though. There’s also no room at my mum’s. I see them probably about three or four times a year.”

Between leaving the RAF in 1994 and losing his hostel place in 1999, David, 35, relied on his family on several occasions. He was struggling with an alcohol problem throughout this period, moving frequently:

“After leaving prison I went back to stay with my parents. However there were arguments and I left and went to stay with friends in [place]. Then I stayed in a B&B …”

“I then returned to my parents, then stayed with my sister. I got myself together a bit and moved into a hostel. My brother got me a job in a prototyping company and I was there for three years. I cut down my drinking during this period. Then the company closed without any notice. One morning we turned up for work to find the gates locked and us out of work. I was suddenly made redundant and started drinking again.”

Johnny, formerly in the Navy and a Falklands veteran, is still in touch with his family, although they do not discuss his post-traumatic stress disorder:

“My parents and sister don’t really understand. We don’t discuss my mental health problems. We keep in
Simon, formerly in the Army, has supportive parents who have helped him with money and accommodation when he has needed it since leaving the Army. He is currently on his second stay at a supported housing scheme for ex-service people and, as he puts it, ‘learning to stand on my own two feet’. He has a girlfriend and a baby. He had to distance himself from the negative influence of former school friends:

“I moved to [place] after I left here the first time. I had friends around me there but I was looking at my friends from school and looked at their lives and at mine and I thought about how much further I’d come compared to them … All my friends were smack heads. I met a girl but we were always hanging around in houses where there were drug deals going on so I took a job in Wales.”

Many of the experiences described here of life on the street, difficulties with finding and keeping work, alcohol and mental health problems and problems with family life are certainly not confined to those who have done military service and subsequently wound up homeless. Yet there are patterns of similarity amongst ex-service people that mark them out as a sub-group amongst homeless people. Some of those distinctive qualities are strengths: a sense of pride and honour, well-developed survival skills. Others are more troubling: a tendency to alcoholism, and psychological disturbances (though these two are also very common amongst all homeless people); a sense of alienation from ordinary life; an insuperable frustration with the confusing and seemingly chaotic nature of civilian life; a large and growing distance from family. As already noted, the balance of pros and cons of services life are heavily weighted towards pros for most ex-service people. For others the scales have tipped: the negatives have become destructive; the positives have not proved protective enough.

**Summary**

Respondents who had survived on the streets were helped by their military experience, and differentiated themselves from other homeless people. Older respondents who had disrupted family backgrounds or grew up in care fared worse in terms of employment than other older respondents. Respondents who had been in the armed forces for many years could find it difficult to adapt to civilian employment, and may be at risk of exploitation by employers. Some of these respondents supported themselves for many years before alcohol and mental health problems finally drove them to seek help. For young respondents, the rural location of the Galleries project makes it difficult for them to find work above the minimum wage. Full-time employment therefore does not seem worthwhile to some. The emotional impact of homelessness combined with other issues and life crises such as mental health and alcohol problems, financial problems, family conflict, relationship breakdown, serious illness and bereavement, could be devastating.
This chapter looks at the perceptions and experiences that respondents have had of the services they have used to help them rebuild their lives, and looks at the outcomes respondents have had, where they are now and what their aspirations are.

Services specifically for ex-service people were generally popular amongst respondents. Most respondents also felt that having support staff with an armed forces background could be helpful, but is not essential. Respondents were less complimentary about mainstream services such as local authority housing, mental health services, and agencies responsible for benefits. Often, mainstream services seemed to be unaware of the specific provision available for ex-service people, and failed to signpost them. Once in touch with ex-services organisations, life could improve swiftly and considerably with access to advice, grants, specialist help with mental health problems and advice and access to accommodation. Nonetheless it is also important to remember in looking at respondents’ views of services that some may be so vulnerable and have had such bad experiences that they may be unwilling to complain and grateful for any assistance. This came through in some interviews. For example Nigel, who left the Army in 1972, said:

“I have a tendency to say I’m lucky. I don’t want to gripe or moan. I like to please people. It’s difficult to find a balance.”

And Ben, an ex-Marine, said:

“I didn’t have any concerns or expectations. If you’re desperate you’re grateful for anything you get.”

In terms of outcomes and aspirations, most respondents’ lives were still in a state of flux to varying degrees. The ten respondents from the Galleries were mostly concerned with looking for permanent accommodation. Most were keen to settle locally. Four were working, two of whom were dissatisfied with their jobs. Four were keen to rejoin the armed forces. Most were keen to learn more skills and participate in education and training.

Amongst the other respondents, who were generally much older and had many years of service, accommodation was less of an issue. All had permanent accommodation. They were also generally less concerned with gaining employment. Some felt they were not mentally able to cope with it. Others were involved in, or keen to do, voluntary work to help homeless people or other ex-service people, and in education and training. Some wanted more time and space for themselves and to develop their own hobbies and interests. Most had made significant progress in addressing long-standing alcohol and mental health problems.

Perceptions and experiences of mainstream services

Local authorities and housing associations

Respondents who had come into contact with local authorities were generally critical and reported negative experiences. Ben, a 52-year-old ex-Marine, approached his local council’s homeless services when he became at risk of homelessness, but found them slow to respond:

“Homeless services housed me eventually [in 1995] after many letters from doctors and visits to hospital. They didn’t seem interested. I wasn’t a priority for them as an older white man. I wasn’t directed to ex-military support organisations.”

David, formerly in the RAF, was also critical of homeless services:

“The Homeless Persons Unit at [town] Council sometimes didn’t want to know because I wasn’t from the borough. They didn’t try to help.”

Robert’s itinerant life began when his local authority failed to help him when he left the Army in 1974:
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“The council said they’d lost my papers, which meant I couldn’t get a house there. I couldn’t prove I’d been resident there for four years before joining the Army, and I couldn’t prove I’d been on welfare until I was 18.”

Simon, 26, formerly in the Army, is currently in temporary accommodation and is also critical of his local authority:

“The council around here are absolutely crap, no help whatsoever. I’ve been back there with my application and they said they’ve got no record of me whatsoever. I thought they were helping me all this time and I wasn’t even on their list. They’ve messed up my housing benefit as well. They owe me £450.”

Prior to coming to the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, Colin had secured a tenancy with a housing association, but left due to drug-related police raids on the property opposite:

“Organisations can only do so much. They can only advise you. The Passage got me a place through the housing association in Bermondsey. They’re not to know the circumstances of the place. They can help you with the forms but that’s about as far as it can go. The housing association will say there are hundreds queuing for a place so you can’t wait anymore.”

Hostels and other homelessness services

Older respondents in particular had experience of staying in homelessness hostels and of using other homelessness services. Mike, an ex-Marine, preferred to sleep rough rather than use hostels, but he did use day centres:

“The most dangerous places are not the streets, it’s the community centres where you get your meals … From the moment you walk in, if you are a newcomer you are being watched.”

Robert, 58, generally lived in bedsits and bed and breakfasts, but he did use some of the services offered by day centres and hostels:

“Seymour Place day centre allowed me to keep my stuff there. St Martins kept my Army papers for me … I used it for what I needed at the time, like showers, clothes and a hot meal. The same with Seymour Place. I kept myself to myself. It’s the Army way.”

Colin, 61, slept rough on many occasions for many years after leaving the Army. He usually deliberately avoided hostels:

“I only stayed in one hostel. I decided to come in one day when it was raining and freezing cold. A lot of guys, particularly ex-servicemen, won’t tolerate hostels because of the drugs. That’s why I left Bermondsey [tenancy]. The police kept raiding the digs opposite. I consciously stayed clear of hostels.”

When asked which service helped him most, however, he refers to a supported housing scheme run by St Mungos:

“It was supported accommodation where a key worker came in once a week. I find it easier talking to someone with a service background and a street background. At St Mungos a lot of the staff have this.”

Nigel, formerly in the Army, stayed in three different hostels over several years. He had mixed feelings about them:

“The staff in all three were very kind and very helpful. It wasn’t very hygienic there though. A lot of the guys were Irish and whenever I had a bit of a wobble they would take me out for a drink … I took pride in my room and I liked doing the cooking and there were good support workers. Some of the behaviour from the other lads used to bother me sometimes and the hygiene was terrible, the smell was just awful.”

He also felt that he was treated differently by at least one support worker, and that more was expected of him, because he had an armed forces background:
From homelessness to resettlement

“A criticism I have of one support worker who I used to have was that she seemed to expect more of me than the other lads because I was ex-Army. I told her that I was a corporal in the infantry, not a colonel in the SAS but she still seemed to expect a lot of me. Perhaps I didn’t get the same amount of help as the others in the hostel because of that.”

Mental health services
Respondents who had used civilian mental health services could feel they had been misunderstood by them, and not been asked the right questions. Johnny, formerly in the Navy, was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in 1996 when he fortunately came into contact with an ex-military psychiatrist. However he found that mental health services generally didn’t know about combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder:

“I went to a range of psychologists who all wanted to blame it on my childhood. That would really wind me up. The mental health support was zero … The local mental health services know nothing about post-traumatic stress disorder.”

He believes that events in war that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder cannot be compared to traumatic events in ordinary life:

“Post-traumatic stress disorder is used to apply to a lot of things, like when you’ve been in a car crash or had a baby, but being in a car crash isn’t like what you witness in war. I remember in the Falklands being on a convoy of ships. The ship in front of us was hit by a missile. It crumpled up and sank, and you’re standing there thinking ‘it could me next’.”

Colin was also critical:

“That’s the problem with a lot of psychiatrists, the guys who have never been in the services didn’t have a clue. It’s a completely different mindset. I was sent on anger management courses. They were very worried I was going to do something stupid. They were going to section me and then they got an ex-squaddie psychiatrist in. Things changed then.”

Ben, an ex-Marine who struggled for many years with alcohol problems, had some spells in psychiatric hospitals in the late 1990s. Signposting was an issue: he says that the welfare officers at the hospital were unaware of specific projects for ex-servicemen.

Detox services
Some of the older respondents had used detox and rehabilitation services to address problems with alcohol. Ben, an ex-Marine, and David, formerly in the RAF, both underwent detox at the same centre in 2002. Both have been ‘dry’ since then. Ben found out about the detox centre through a friend. Again, lack of signposting to specific projects for ex-service people was a problem. When Ben and David were at the detox centre, the staff were unaware of services for ex-service people. David currently works as a volunteer at the centre, and the staff are now aware of these specific services.

Perceptions and experiences of services for ex-service people

Accommodation and support services
Of the 18 ex-service people interviewed during the research, ten lived at the Galleries project, seven at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, and one lived in a private studio flat. Nine of the respondents from the Galleries project were in their teens and twenties. They had mostly been referred straight from the Army via SPACES. They were generally complimentary about the service and trusted the staff. Chris, 19, says:

“I like it here; everyone is much more laid back than in the Army. They’re always helping us with the Jobcentre and CVs. I’ve got some problems with money and budgeting. They help us with everything really, cooking and cleaning. I trust them 110 per cent.”

Leslie, 20, also finds the staff approachable at the Galleries:
Military History

“I trust them completely. I’m not very good with women and I’ve been able to ask the staff here for help with my fiancée.”

Peter, 22, says:

“I expected a nightmare like the hostel I’d been in before, but I got a genuine nice shock. The staff will talk to you if you want to.”

Elliot, 44, was referred to the Galleries by SSAFA. He says the process was quick:

“I was at the Galleries within three days of contacting SSAFA. After approaching SSAFA I was vetted by SPACES in Catterick. They checked out my story within 24 hours. I was offered a place at the Galleries straight away and had to move the next day.”

He is currently the oldest tenant there. This can sometimes cause him problems:

“I don’t socialise with the lads here. They’re too young, but they sometimes come to me for advice if there’s something they don’t feel comfortable discussing with the staff … I would have liked someone on call 24 hours a day. Sometimes young guys come in drunk. It can be intimidating. If something happens after 8 pm you can’t tell anyone until 9 am the next day.”

Nonetheless he is essentially positive about his stay at the Galleries:

“I’ll be forever grateful this place exists, although I don’t want to repeat the experience. There’s always someone to turn to for support at the Galleries … I thought at the Galleries I’d be living in a huge dormitory with drug addicts and alcoholics.”

Wayne, 20, is also positive about the Galleries, but has some difficulties with the rules:

“I don’t like asking for help. I’ll try anything to get round it. If it wasn’t for the Galleries I’d have ended up living at 34 Cardboard Street … The staff here help with everything … I trust the staff enough to tell them stuff.”

“I keep getting banned from bringing people round who stay too late. Rules are rules though. They treat you like children. I’m now on my final warning ban because I thought if I’m going to get banned I might as well get banned for something proper, so I let my girlfriend stay over for two nights.”

Simon, 26, has also had some problems settling in, and misses his family:

“I was a bit depressed coming here and having to leave my family. I didn’t know anyone and I was getting into fights all the time. Someone took a knife out on me one night.”

The respondents who stayed at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation were also generally positive.

Mike, an ex-Marine, has lived there for three years:

“I had no concerns about Oswald Stoll. It’s the jewel in the crown for anyone who’s been homeless. As soon as I was shown around I liked it here.”

He also feels his support needs have been addressed:

“It took me six months to a year to settle in here. I was still drinking at that point but I asked for help and they put me in rehab for four months. It was addressed very quickly. If you ask for help here you get it. The support I’ve had here has been fantastic. I can’t recommend it enough. I have a support officer who does all the ground work and who is like a big sister to me. You’ve got to help yourself as well though and make sure you’re doing something.”

Sandra has also settled in well at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation:

“I feel secure and safe here and there is a very nice medical service on the complex. The outings they do are fantastic and you can use the computers, library and launderette which has been brilliant. The setting is peaceful and restful.”

She also feels she is not visited often enough by a support worker, however, and would like more help with filling in forms and securing benefits:
From homelessness to resettlement

“I am completely surrounded by paperwork because I’m doing everything by myself.”

Colin is pleased with the support and flexibility offered by the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, but observes that some people need more help than others:

“It’s different for each person on an individual basis. You can be very independent here but some people do need help. Some people can flare up easily … For the first six months [of my stay], Oswald Stoll weren’t paid anything. I couldn’t pay my rent because I was waiting for benefit but they understood that. The fact that they are there is a big help. My support worker is always there.”

Sandra and Mike had also spent time at New Belvedere House, a hostel in London specifically for ex-service people. Mike was less positive about New Belvedere House:

“I was going to Victoria to the Passage. They put me in touch with Belvedere House where I was for a year and then I came here three years ago. Belvedere House was horrible. It was half this size and there was one microwave for 35 guys. They would give you a ticket to get breakfast from a hole in the wall half a mile away with all the druggies.”

“At Belvedere House I expected a lot of help … but there was a lot of favouritism about who got the help and who didn’t.”

Sandra had a short spell at New Belvedere House. She describes how the other residents were almost all men. Sandra now has a support manager from the Ex-services Resettlement Project whom she is in weekly contact with. The support manager is also working with staff from the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation to define Sandra’s support needs.

Mental health services

Many of the respondents from the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation were also regular visitors to Combat Stress, and highly valued the support they received. Ben, an ex-Marine, says:

“I got the most response from Combat Stress. They came to visit me and sorted out my war pension. They put me in touch with the Alcohol Recovery Project. I spend two weeks a year at Combat Stress in Leatherhead. I see the psychiatrist. It’s a good place to unwind and speak to people in a similar situation, very relaxing.”

Johnny, formerly in the Royal Navy, also has regular stays at Combat Stress:

“Everyone at Combat Stress is ex-services and going through the same thing. You can relax and drop the mask and talk about how you felt and what happened. The best therapy is talking to other people, often through the night. It makes you realise you’re not alone. It helps you build up a support network. We keep in touch with each other. You meet different people each time you go.”

Combat Stress has also helped Johnny with applying for benefits, trying to get back a job from which he feels he was unfairly dismissed, as well as helping him with anger management and post-traumatic stress disorder and securing him a Community Psychiatric Nurse.

Advice and other services

Other ex-services organisations such as SSAFA, the Royal British Legion and the RAF Benevolent Fund had helped some respondents by signposting them to other ex-services organisations, and by providing or helping them secure grants for furniture and other essentials. The problem for many older respondents who had left the armed forces a number of years ago was not the services themselves available to them. Indeed, some respondents commented on how they were lucky to have access to these services, in comparison to non-military homeless people. Rather, the problem was a general lack of knowledge of services and a
reliance on luck and word of mouth to find out about them. As mentioned earlier, mainstream services could also be unaware of such services and fail to refer ex-service people.

Sandra feels she could have been helped with more comprehensive information on her rights and the services available:

“I had seen a brochure about Oswald Stoll. But each individual place only knows bits and pieces. You need one brochure that tells you everything. I hadn’t even been informed that you can have a welfare person from the Veterans’ Agency to help you with writing and filling in forms. I only heard about that recently.”

Johnny has had similar experiences, particularly regarding benefits:

“I only found out a lot of things by accident, by word of mouth. The information isn’t readily available. I missed out on Disability Living Allowance, the war pension and the service pension. It’s difficult to find out about charities. My local British Legion didn’t know about Combat Stress. There’s a lack of co-ordination.”

Johnny is also critical of the War Pensions Agency:

“My post-traumatic stress disorder was diagnosed at a DSS medical. The doctor told me I was entitled to a war pension. I was also entitled to a service pension but the War Pensions Agency never sorted this out. They’re also very slow in processing my expenses for travelling to Combat Stress.”

Staff with an armed forces background
Respondents mostly felt that it could be helpful to have access to support staff with an armed forces background. David, 35, was formerly in the RAF. His response was typical:

“It sometimes helps. They’ve been there and done it. They know the score and there’s camaraderie. There are a lot of ex-servicemen on the street.”

Kenny, 25, thinks an ex-services staff presence at the Galleries is important:

“There could be a full-scale war around here otherwise. You get all sorts of regiments here and they’re very proud lads. We’re all mates but we have some heated discussions.”

Sandra, formerly a Navy chef, has had severe problems re-adjusting to civilian life after 22 years in the armed forces, as described throughout the report. She would appreciate support staff with a services background:

“It would be more helpful. Civilians have no comprehension of what people have suffered in the services or how it affects them. They try and get you to be more independent but you’ve been cosseted so much in the services.”

Not everyone agrees, however. Cameron, who was only in the Army for four months, says ‘it doesn’t matter’. Robert, 58, is also sceptical about the value of ex-services support staff:

“Having ex-service staff here wouldn’t help. Their attitude would wind you up. Imagine some ex-sergeant major telling you to pull yourself together. You’d say, ‘I’ll pull you together in a minute mate!’ I’m glad my counsellor isn’t ex-armed forces.”

Overall, the majority of respondents felt that having support staff with an armed forces background could be helpful but was not essential.

Outcomes and aspirations
Accommodation
The respondents from the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation were generally happily settled in permanent accommodation and were not looking to move on. The respondents staying in temporary accommodation at the Galleries project, however, were focused on securing permanent accommodation. Some were keen to rejoin the Army, as described in more detail below.
Respondents from the Galleries were generally keen to settle locally. Some had girlfriends. As well as a lack of suitable employment, however, the cost of accommodation in the local area is high. Simon, 26, is looking to move in with his partner and baby:

“We’re looking for accommodation. We’ve seen one place, £500 a month for two bedrooms, a garden, conservatory, and furnished. That’s not bad, most places around here are very expensive.”

Elliot, 44, has recently begun a new job and is also looking to move on from the Galleries:

“SSAFAs are trying to get money for me for a bond for my own accommodation. My tenancy ends next month at the Galleries. I don’t intend to renew it. There are many more people out there who need the room more than I do. I’m getting back on my feet and hope to have my own accommodation by Christmas.”

And Cameron, 19, says:

“I’d like to find work and find a house here, roughly in this area. I’ll maybe rent a place. I won’t move in with my girlfriend straight away. She’s only 17. She wants to go to a local college.”

**Employment**

Only four respondents, all from the Galleries, were in paid employment. Two were unsatisfied with their jobs. Five of the 10 respondents from the Galleries were keen to rejoin the Army. Leslie says:

“Hopefully the Army will take us back. I want to be a driver. It’s a skilled job. I’m going to write a letter and explain why I went AWOL and take it from there. My last report wasn’t too bad so that might help.”

Fergus, 20, is also keen to return:

“I want to go back to the Army or Navy, if the Army don’t take me. I need to get my driving licence back first. I’m doing an apprenticeship in mechanics for a year to keep me occupied before going back to the Army.”

Chris, however, is looking forward to life outside the armed forces:

“I can’t wait to get a job. I’ve just completed a course called Gateway to Employment and I’ve done a computer course as well. I need to be earning £200 to £250 a week though, no less than that. I want to get a labouring job. In January I’m going to start my City and Guilds in construction.”

Most respondents from the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation were not actively looking for paid employment. Sandra does not feel ready yet even for volunteering:

“Until I’m more settled I couldn’t really think about going down the volunteering avenue. I can’t take any pressure. Once I’ve got my rent and furniture sorted out and got myself a little bit more sorted then maybe. Nothing in the near future though because of my mental health and disabilities.”

David, 35, formerly in the RAF, is also not yet ready for employment:

“I’d like to go back to work full-time, maybe next year as I’m not quite ready yet. I’m currently on disability pay. I’m doing work training with Training For Life.”

Peter, 22, is currently unable to work on the instructions of his doctor, due to his mental health problems, but is nevertheless preparing energetically for when he is able to work:

“I’d love to do computing. In my last two weeks in the Army I did admin. I wasn’t trained but I did better than some of the people with rank who were already there. I’ve thought about going back into army admin as a civilian. I got eight GCSEs above grade C and I’ve got a mentor helping me to get my computer qualifications. I know about Windows and I can type quite fast. I got my mentor through a two week back to work scheme through the Jobcentre.”

He feels he is not quite ready for independence yet:
Military History

“I believe I’ve got to grab any help I can get. I’m not yet ready to face the world. I’m hoping to stay here [at the Galleries] near to the full term. Hopefully I’ll get a job a couple of months beforehand. I don’t really want a community care grant. I’d rather do things off my own bat.”

Mike, an ex-Marine, is also keen and feels ready to look for work:

“I want to get a job which has a bit of prestige, you know, with a collar and tie and a minimum of £23,000 to £24,000 a year … I’d like a job where I’d be appreciated for what I put into it and where I could use my mind a bit.”

He feels that as an ex-serviceman he perhaps has more to prove than most:

“I am doing a media journalism course twice a week through CSV. I have got quite good at writing and I’ve been asked to write for [newspaper]. I need to prove that I am not just a squaddie. I can do so many things, just give me the chance to prove it. I have blown so many chances before through my alcoholism but I’ve got good potential. My attitude has changed. I am reasonably intelligent, articulate and switched on. It has taken me 20-odd years and I’ve definitely gone the long way round. I’ve got the problem with being a recovering alcoholic is that I often feel as though I don’t deserve anything and I try to sabotage any potential success.”

And Colin, 61, is keen to do some voluntary work to help other ex-servicemen:

“When I moved in here there was a guy painting who told me about it where you go and decorate the flat of ex-servicemen … I don’t want to do voluntary work in hostels. It would be like taking a step backwards and you can easily get caught up in it again.”

Making friends

For Elliot, 44, and Nigel, 60, establishing a social network was particularly important. Elliot hopes his new job will open up opportunities for socialising:

“I don’t have a social life as such … but I can start socialising when I get my first wage cheque at the end of the month. There’ll be a Christmas do at work.”

Nigel describes feeling lonely sometimes and would like to find suitable day centres that he could visit once or twice a week. He socialises sometimes with the other tenants:

“We have a friendship group here. We all go for walks and pub lunches. There’s quite a camaraderie. We had a weekend in Dorset a couple of months ago. It’s kind of like a mini regiment.”

Other respondents from the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation socialise with other tenants, or they may communicate with other ex-service people they met through Combat Stress. David and Johnny are in regular contact with their parents. For Mike, however, socialising, especially with former colleagues in the Marines, can be difficult, as he is recovering from alcohol problems:

“It’s very clinical now. I see people in Alcoholics Anonymous. I have got to stay away from people who are going out for a drink. Everybody here knows I’ve been in rehab and they respect that. There are some guys from the Marines who I email now and again. I meet them for a reunion but I have to leave as I can’t go to the pub, not even for an orange juice. I would love to be able to go there though.”

The young respondents at the Galleries tend to socialise with each other, and with other young people they have met locally through going to the pub.

Space and stability

Robert, 58, is preoccupied with getting used to relative independence and having his own space:

“I’m quite content. I’ve got things in the pipeline. I’m doing up my flat at the moment. I’d like some more space and free time. I haven’t had my own space before as I’ve been in care, in the Army and on the
From homelessness to resettlement

Nigel is also adjusting to the new situation at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation:

“There’s a saying bartered around that you can’t have your cake and eat it but here you can have independence and support when you need it. It’s not like other places. It’s the best of both worlds, that’s why I like it so much. I had become almost institutionalised what with the Army and the hostels combined. Oswald Stoll has given me my independence and a choice. I can cook when I want and eat when I want. It’s all about confidence building.”

One of Nigel’s main aims currently, is to develop his interest in modern art and painting.

Summary

A key criticism of service provision in general was that information for ex-service people was not easily available. For ex-service people who had left the Army a number of years ago, finding out about services could be a matter of luck or word of mouth. Respondents were generally critical of local authorities and agencies dealing with benefits, finding them to be indifferent and inefficient. Some older respondents in particular had used hostels. However, they were seen as dangerous and dirty places. Concerns were with other residents rather than staff. Civilian mental health services were criticised for failing to recognise and be sensitive the needs of ex-service people, particularly regarding combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder. In contrast, respondents generally praised organisations providing services specifically for ex-service people. Respondents from the Galleries were often keen to settle locally. There is a lack of affordable accommodation locally, however, as well as a lack of employment above the minimum wage. Five respondents from the Galleries were keen to rejoin the Army. Employment was not the priority for everyone. Some were adjusting to having their own space, or were not mentally ready for the pressures of work.
Part 2
Findings and conclusions
8 Findings from this study

All those interviewed had experienced homelessness. They are therefore not typical of ex-military people, most of whom, as already noted several times, go on to live lives encompassing the spectrum of stability and success that is the norm in the generality. Many of these people – and indeed many of those we interviewed – would report that their military experience, far from being a problem or distraction, has helped them to live a better and more fulfilled life. These points, already made elsewhere in this report, are re-stated here as a necessary balance to what is to follow: an exposition of the difficulties encountered by those interviewed for this report who at one point or another had nowhere to live.

Many of the respondents had older family members who had been in the armed forces. Many others had experiences of family conflict, disruptions in family lives, such as parental separations and frequent moves, in their early lives. Family conflict and relationship breakdown had also affected the lives of some respondents after they left the armed forces. Some of the older respondents had grown up in care or in foster homes. Some had been in trouble with the law before joining; others had been in trouble with the law since leaving, often for violent behaviour. Mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, had significantly affected the lives of a significant proportion of the respondents. In some instances these were pre-existing problems. In others, combat had brought on or exacerbated psychological problems. Others had developed mental health problems, which may already have been incipient, later in life. Among those interviewed who had experienced homelessness, there seemed to be a greater propensity to indiscipline while serving in the armed forces. This might have been a recurrence of earlier patterns of behaviour, such as drunkenness or violence. In some cases this had led to their early discharge from the armed forces. In other cases they had jumped, fearing they would shortly be pushed. Nevertheless a significant proportion had served the full extent of their term, left with an unblemished record and still experienced problems with homelessness later in life.

A past in the forces sets people apart, in their own view, from other homeless people. Their greater survival skills, ‘code of honour’ and sense of pride had meant that they stuck together and were not reduced in their appearance or behaviour to being ‘ruffians and bums’. On the other hand, the pride that is in part derived from their forces background may make them minimise or deny their problems and so they may be less likely to seek help. The absence of timely help may in some cases have exacerbated their mental health problems. The proud reluctance to seek out or express the need for loving kindness may also have worsened their sense of loneliness and isolation from family and friends.

The experience of coping with life outside the army had not been easy for any of the respondents (though they may be untypical of ex-service people as they are all users of homelessness services). Mainstream housing, mental health and benefit services were experienced as indifferent, inefficient and ineffective. By contrast services specifically for ex-service people were received positively. They were seen as helpful, knowledgeable and responsive.

A life of fulfilment and stability for ex-services people, as with the rest of the population, is likely to be achieved through stable accommodation, a fulfilling and sufficiently remunerative job and a loving network of family and friends. Achieving each and every one of those things becomes more difficult after the ‘unnatural’ military life; even more so if problems from an earlier life recur or return a clamorous echo. Despite these difficulties, most people leave the armed forces with their skills, confidence, physical and mental health, social networks and material well being greatly enhanced, even though in some instances their early lives may not have been easy. These
enhancements make them better able to cope with the transitions and temporary depredations of the move to civilian lives. Those without skills, confidence and friends and family may struggle — and struggle even more if their experiences in the armed forces had lessened their already depleted store of these qualities.

Without wishing to stereotype or over-simplify the complexities of people’s lives, broadly speaking, the links, such as they are, between some of a life lived in the armed forces and the risks of homelessness can be grouped under three headings.

**Group A. Lives lived well in the armed forces and thereafter**

This group of people, whatever their histories, backgrounds or past problems, retain or acquire the aptitudes, personal qualities and life skills while in the armed services to leave them well-prepared socially, materially and emotionally for a life to be lived well in the civilian world — a life of enriching relationships, fulfilling work and a sense of the thing done well when all is said and done. This group may well have greatly benefited from their experiences of camaraderie, activity, purpose and order in the armed forces. All these qualities are welcomed to the fore in the face of disorder. Though civilian life may not present disorder in kind or scale experienced while in military service, nevertheless the frustrations and depredations of civilian life may be better faced with a store of resilience and resourcefulness gained perhaps in even more challenging military circumstances. This group certainly had not suffered any detriment. This group is likely to be the great majority.

**Group B. Old problems not removed and ready to return; new problems arise regardless of military experience**

This second group of people may have had problems of disrupted and disruptive family lives, bad behaviour in adolescence or a chequered educational career. Life in the armed forces may have been problematic, the structures and lifestyles not living up to the hopes and dreams. Notwithstanding the military lifestyle they have remained whom they feared they might be. They have not become what they thought they might. Military life may also have been simply unexpectedly unpleasant. Or life in the armed forces may have been fine, but insufficient skills, confidence or wherewithal has been acquired by the point of departure. Life after the armed forces is then insecure in terms of employment, relationships with families, friends and partners. Homelessness is a pitfall awaiting the unsuspecting or the ill-prepared. In short, life in the armed forces may not have saved this group of people from themselves or from the ghosts of their unhappy pasts and those re-awakened ghosts are ushers into homelessness.

**Group C. Life in the armed forces has lessened their ability to cope with life beyond**

There is a small group of people for whom military life has exacerbated the risk of becoming homeless in the future. Life far away from families and familiar routines and lifestyles may have been hard to bear. The military lifestyle has increased or inculcated bad habits such as drinking too much or a tendency to violence. The ‘unnatural’ lifestyle may have exacerbated old problems such as a depressive outlook or other mental health problems. Experiences of combat may have been traumatising. The trauma may have gone unnoticed, not least to the protagonists themselves. No help may have been offered, or, if offered, not taken.

For this group of people, the solutions lie in, as far as is operationally possible, making forces life more like civilian life, keeping families together, people living in the same place and in a place of choice, even if they sometimes have to go away for
Findings from this study

extended periods; armed forces personnel having easy access to opportunities to socialise with civilians in civilian social settings. In addition the support and assistance that the armed forces now give people in seeking housing may need to be supplemented with rather more social and emotional support, particularly with, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder. They may also need help with practical skills in finding work and somewhere to live.

For both the second and third groups the problems do not stop at finding somewhere to live. Their experiences of homelessness are to some extent conditioned by their military experiences. If sleeping rough, they may keep their distance from other homeless people who have not had these experiences and may therefore have difficulty in accessing services. The structured military lifestyle is also poor preparation for the more mind-boggling aspects of the bureaucracy of civilian life: council housing; housing and welfare benefits. Their years in the military may also have resulted in them having grown distant from friends and family and not being able to see or find a way back to those old relationships with few new ones to replace them.

These differences of attitude and experience for homeless people with a services background contain messages for providers of services to homeless people. They need to recognise, validate and respond to the effects, positive and negative, of life in the armed forces. Those charities and other agencies which work specifically for people with a services background should be particularly well-placed to understand and respond to these attitudes and needs. Theirs is a special, different and much valued role and discussed further in the final recommendations.

Summary
These are not pre-determined outcomes, but there are patterns and inter-related connections between the various factors that influence people’s decision to join the armed forces, what happens to them whilst in the military and their experiences after leaving. The problems associated with some of these experiences point to the need for a range of services, to be provided both by mainstream statutory and voluntary organisations working with homeless people and specialist ex-services charities. The links and possible responses are set out in the chart below.
Figure 2 Pathways and experiences linking military service to increased risk of homelessness

- **Motives**
  - Travel
  - Challenges
  - Skills/qualifications
  - Careers
  - Better money
  - Military family background
  - Disrupted early lives

- **Expectations**
  - Tough training
  - Camaraderie
  - Travel opportunities

- **Positive Experiences**
  - Security, camaraderie, friendship
  - Way out of past difficult relationships
  - Career, status, structure

- **Negative Experiences**
  - Discipline and hardship
  - Authoritarianism
  - Downtime and boredom

- **Leaving the armed forces**
  - Discipline or misconduct
  - Family and relationships
  - End of contract
  - Conflict with superiors
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Medical discharge

- **Problems afterwards**
  - Alcohol
  - Mental Health
  - Relationship breakdown
  - Bereavement
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Trouble with the law

- **Positive ways of coping with homelessness**
  - Surviving on the street
  - Ex-services code of honour and pride
  - Advice and support from family and friends

- **Negative ways of coping with homelessness**
  - Difficulties with transition
  - Insecure or exploitative employment
  - Difficulties with the benefits system
  - Emotional insecurity
  - Breakdown of family support
  - Homelessness long after leaving the armed forces

- **Mainstream services**
  - Housing
  - Hostels
  - Mental health
  - Detox

- **Ex-services organisation**
  - Accommodation
  - Advice
  - Financial and other support
  - Keeping in touch long after leaving
  - Support for post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Social and emotional support
The literature shows that overall there is a general lack of systematically collected data on the health and social outcomes of UK veterans, compared to the literature from other countries, especially the United States. However, several surveys and studies of outcomes amongst ex-service people, including homelessness, have been carried out since the mid-1990s, and a number of recommendations made for prevention and preparation for civilian life in-service, and improving services to ex-service people who are homeless or at risk. The risk of homelessness amongst ex-service people is therefore generally acknowledged. Like their civilian counterparts, the most common triggers for homelessness appear to be the breakdown of a significant relationship, compounded by unemployment. However there are some significant differences in the profile and experiences of homeless ex-service people when compared with other homeless people.

**Numbers and profile of homeless ex-service people**

The vast majority of ex-service people make a successful and smooth transition to civilian life and have few problems finding stable employment and housing. Previous research has shown that some may experience homelessness, however, though not necessarily immediately upon leaving the army. The Crisis report *Falling Out*, published in 1994, found that up to 30 per cent of homeless people in hostels, soup runs and day centres had been in the armed services. This was broadly confirmed by a survey carried out in London in 1997 that found that of 200 homeless people interviewed, 44, or 22 per cent, were ex-service people. These relatively high proportions may be most prevalent amongst older homeless people, many of whom will have done National Service. The proportion of younger homeless people with a forces background may be lower.

There may also be considerably more homeless ex-Army personnel than homeless people with backgrounds in the other armed services. The 1997 survey found that of the 50 respondents interviewed who had served in the forces, 68 per cent had been in the Army. Other personal academic research seems to back this up. Interviews were carried out with 112 older homeless ex-service and merchant navy personnel in 1997 for the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation. Two thirds of the interviewees had been in the Army. Another series of 41 interviews with homeless ex-servicemen on the streets of London found that the vast majority had an Army background.

Research has also shown that there are significant differences in the age profiles between non-service and ex-service homeless people. In the 1997 survey, over half of the ex-service homeless people in the sample were aged 50 years or above, compared to only 13 per cent of the non-service homeless people. Homeless ex-service people are also almost always men. There has been very little evidence found of higher levels of homelessness amongst ex-service women.

**Transition to civilian life**

Making the transition from military to civilian life can be problematic. Some professionals have observed that service recruits are ‘looked after’ in every respect when in the armed services. They do not have to budget or pay rent or bills, or in any way organise their lives or make independent choices. This is sometimes described as the ‘dependency culture’. The army, in particular, it is suggested, tends to build a limited culture of self-reliance, with soldiers encouraged to think and operate along narrow guidelines, deviation from which is discouraged. In civilian life, on the other hand, one very often finds oneself with many apparent options (though they may all be relatively unappealing) and not many stars to steer by.
Consequently, when they are discharged, returning to civilian life can be a jarring experience which some find hard to cope with, even if they are ‘street wise’ and able to look after themselves physically.

Other professionals, however, feel that this view is outdated and that only a small minority of service people are affected in this way.11 A number of those who join the armed forces come from unstable backgrounds, attracted by the stability and structure on offer. These individuals may already be vulnerable to becoming homeless, rather than their vulnerability being the result of having served in the military. The solution, if any, therefore resides in dealing with underlying causes.

Ex-service people may, however, leave without any clear idea of what they want to do in terms of employment. Soldiers in service are not encouraged to look ahead to civilian life and the nature of the job means there is little space for introspection and contemplation. Much of a soldier’s day-to-day life is lived in the present tense. The future may literally and metaphysically be another country. They may take up the first offer of employment on leaving, which may prove unsuitable or unrewarding and therefore may not work out. Some may feel resigned to unsatisfactory occupations in civilian life.12

Consequently, a healthy transition may be encouraged by nurturing and developing a strong desire to fulfil an alternative ambition towards the end of service, and by acknowledging that the ‘disengagement’ period immediately after leaving will be painful for many. Instead of rushing through this period, ex-service people should be encouraged to use it for reflection, before moving forward.13

There is no published data on the employment of UK veterans. Anecdotal reports, however, suggest that unemployment amongst ex-service people may be higher than average. A 1995 study by the Army established that the unemployment level amongst ex-soldiers was nearly 20 per cent 12 to 14 months after leaving, compared to a national unemployment rate at the time of less than nine per cent.14

Ex-service people’s experiences of homelessness

The research suggests significant differences between ex-service people’s experiences of homelessness and those of non-service homeless people. Homeless ex-service people are likely to have been homeless for longer than non-service homeless people.15 There is also commonly a delay between leaving the armed services and becoming homeless. Falling Out reports that 53 per cent of homeless ex-servicemen had left the forces more than 20 years earlier and 33 per cent between ten and 20 years ago. Even taking into account the greater length of time ex-servicemen are likely to have been homeless it still seems that a number of years are likely to pass before they become homeless.16 Between leaving the armed services and becoming homeless, accommodation for single ex-service people tends to consist of a series of bedsits and temporary accommodation, often preceded by some time at the parental home. Those who are married may experience more stability in accommodation.17 If homelessness is a delayed effect of leaving the army, it is evidently more difficult for the Ministry of Defence or the services charities to keep in touch with people.

Homeless ex-service people are also apparently more likely to have slept rough than non-service homeless people, and are less likely to use night shelters and hostels.18 They may be more able than most to adapt to the hardships of homelessness. Experience in the forces may make them more accustomed to being on the move and enduring some physical hardship.19 Ex-servicemen may often be proud of their ‘survival skills’ that allow them to tolerate cold and hunger.20 Some professionals believe ex-service people tend not to ask for help due to pride combined with a sense of shame. They may feel they have let themselves
down and do not want to approach support services, as this would involve admitting they could not look after themselves. They may also have developed more ambivalent attitudes towards rules and regulations than those they espoused when in the armed forces and therefore be wary of approaching agencies or charities associated with the military.21

**Alcohol**

Alcohol abuse has been an increasing concern to the armed forces in the UK. It is cited as a concern not only by practitioners but also by ex-service people themselves. The report *Improving the delivery of cross departmental support and services for veterans* draws together some statistics that illustrate the problem.22 For example, data from the Alcohol Recovery Project showed that nine per cent of their walk-in clients in London had an ex-services background. Also, according to research from 1987, the army rate of acute alcohol poisoning deaths was 2.73 per 100,000 compared with an overall UK rate of 1.23 per 100,000. Forty-one per cent of ex-servicemen interviewed for the report *Homeless on Civvy Street* were affected by problems with alcohol.

According to practitioners, alcohol plays a big part in military social life. It is easily available and military authorities are perceived to approve or acquiesce in its consumption and over-consumption. The majority of discipline problems are alcohol related.23 Some professionals believe that the rigid structure of the armed forces and the fact that recruits are well looked after by their peers and by the authorities means that those with alcohol problems can be accommodated within the system and continue to function adequately as long as they are in the forces. Consequently, alcoholism may become out of control after discharge and contribute to becoming homeless.24

Ex-servicemen themselves also confirm the culture of drinking in the armed forces. Some describe heavy drinking as endemic in the military, and an inevitable aspect of the machismo culture of the forces.25 Peer pressure, boredom, and cheap alcohol in foreign countries may also be contributory factors.26

**Post-traumatic stress disorder**

The body of research and literature on the mental health of ex-service people is vast and spans over 100 years.27 There is considerable evidence that after onset, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms tend to remain chronic and unremitting. There is also evidence that combat is much more likely to result in ‘chronic post-traumatic stress disorder’ compared with other traumatic events.

Combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder may have a worse prognosis than their civilian counterparts. There are two possible reasons for this. First, there may be something about the nature and impact of combat that makes subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder more chronic and resistant to treatment; or secondly, it may be something about the veterans themselves. Veterans are more likely to have risk factors such as childhood adversity, alcohol problems, lower social class and personality disturbance, all of which are in themselves risk factors for poor prognosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is unclear which explanation is true.28 People with chronic injuries sustained in combat are at the highest risk of chronic post-traumatic stress disorder.29

**Marriage and family life**

Research has shown that military service can adversely affect family life, and marital health in particular. The report *Improving the delivery of cross departmental support and services for veterans* contains a detailed review of the evidence.30 In particular, deployment and active service have been shown to have profound effects on family dynamics. Interruption of normal family life can lead to
feelings of bereavement, anger, boredom and mistrust.31

Ex-servicemen who have experienced homelessness have described how serving in the armed forces had a negative effect on their family relationships.32 Two factors may be involved. First, communication can be difficult between servicemen and their families if they do not see each other for long periods of time. Secondly, the change in lifestyle for a person joining the armed forces can distance them from their family and make them feel as if they are ‘in a different world’. Relationships with girlfriends and spouses may be particularly problematic. They may suffer from the same pressures as relationships with families in general. The restrictions and frequent moves entailed by being a member of the armed forces may also make it more difficult to meet and form relationships with girlfriends in the first place.

Some professionals also believe that relationship breakdown and divorce are unusually common amongst services personnel.33 They point to two types of pressure on relationships. First, being married while serving in the forces involves long separations and frequent moves, making it difficult for families to put down roots. Second, problems can occur after the serviceman returns to civilian life. Having spent a great deal of time apart, it may be difficult for the family to re-adjust to the ex-serviceman being a permanent member of the household. Relationship breakdown and divorce may contribute to homelessness whether or not people have been in the armed forces, so circumstantially at least, if life in the armed forces creates a greater risk of relationship breakdown, it may also contribute to homelessness.

Alternatively it could be argued that marriage protects men from homelessness. There is certainly fairly compelling evidence that marriage and stable relationships are a protection against some of the upstream causes of homelessness, such as offending. In Homeless in Civvy Street, results from the sub-sample of 50 ex-servicemen show that 70 per cent of ex-servicemen may be single when they leave the armed forces.34 The self-reliance developed by some ex-servicemen during their time in the armed forces may also make them frightened of stability and being ‘tied down’.35 So a lower likelihood of forming lasting, stable relationships may also be linked to a greater risk of homelessness.

Summary
The findings from previous studies tend to follow the same lines as those set out earlier in this report. Previous research, while confirming the existence of a link between armed service and homelessness, nevertheless gives the lie to the suggestion that the increased likelihood of homelessness can be ascribed to a failure of the armed forces in their duty of care during or after service. Instead, the research suggests that the link is partly explained by the types of people more likely to join the armed forces. Behaviour that may be an integral part of service life may also, without intention, habituate people to lifestyles which translate poorly to the civilian context. In a minority of cases experiences in the armed forces have reduced people’s ability to cope. Experiences after leaving, including experiences of relationship breakdown, may also contribute to subsequent homelessness. In short, a complex interaction is at work which therefore inevitably requires an equally complex set of responses.
10 Services currently available

The last two chapters have reported the findings from this and other studies about the nature and, less definitively, the extent of homelessness among ex-military people. Before making suggestions as to what might be done, the available services – much developed and enhanced in recent years – should first be set out.

Armed forces resettlement package

The armed forces resettlement package is intended to help with the transition from military to civilian life. It consists of a cash payment for civilian training and advice on jobs, training, housing and finances. Prior to 1 April 2004 the service was not available to early leavers (those with less than three years service or who left during training), or those who had been compulsorily discharged. This meant that approximately 9,000 ex-servicemen per year, out of the 24,000 discharged annually, were not entitled to resettlement assistance from the armed forces. Early leavers now receive a mandatory ‘signposting’ interview covering health, employment and housing, although they cannot access the whole resettlement package, including the cash payment. Vulnerable people can be referred to relevant agencies. People discharged for medical reasons are entitled to the full resettlement package, irrespective of their length of service.

Joint Services Housing Advice Office (JSHAO)

JSHAO was set up in 1992. In 1990, a housing study had been commissioned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in response to the large-scale redundancies of service personnel taking place at the time. Part of its remit was to look at the lack of encouragement of service personnel to plan their own housing provision. There was concern that the number of ex-servicemen would overburden local authorities. Consequently the MoD set up JSHAO as a focal point for housing advice. The JSHAO remit is to engage service personnel early in their careers and encourage them to think about their housing options after they leave the armed forces. Advice is offered on social housing and home ownership.

The work of JSHAO includes the following strands:

MoD nomination scheme

This is a route into social housing. JSHAO has links with 32 housing associations and a number of local authorities, allowing it to identify vacancies and nominate ex-service people. Some local authorities, mostly those near the main recruiting areas, give a slight priority to ex-service people. No priority is given at all in south east England.

Housing Options Briefings

JSHAO provides briefings to service personnel on housing options in Germany and Gibraltar, as well as 45 briefings each year in the UK at Regional Recruitment Centres.

Housing Matters magazine

JSHAO produces ten issues per year of this magazine, which provides information and advice on housing issues. In addition, JSHAO responds to hundreds of email and telephone requests for help each year.

Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness

The Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness (ESAG) consists of representatives from ex-services welfare organisations. It was formed in 1996 in response to the finding in the Crisis report Falling Out that approximately a quarter of the homeless people interviewed by their researchers claimed to be ex-services. In 1997 it commissioned and published the report Homeless on Civvy Street to provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of homelessness amongst ex-servicemen in London. ESAG was subsequently tasked with using the research outcomes to establish a strategy
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that identified solutions and supported initiatives to tackle the issue, and bringing together all the agencies assisting homeless ex-service people.

The initiatives taken or supported by ESAG and its members can be divided into six main areas: Government, MoD, frontline action and provision of short-term accommodation, provision of follow-on (longer term) accommodation, training and employment placement, and funding of initiatives.

Government

The homelessness and ex-service people policy began in 1999. It is a joint policy between the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) and the MoD. The RSU developed their strategy in close collaboration with ESAG. Since its restructuring in 2002 it continues to be represented on ESAG’s main group as the Homelessness Directorate of the ODPM. In November 2001 RSU, in partnership with ESAG, published its Guide to Resources for Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London. Also, the Homeless Act 2002 includes a section recognising that a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of the armed forces has a priority need for accommodation.

Ministry of Defence

Three departments work closely with ESAG: Veterans Policy Unit (VPU), PS4 (Army) and the JSHAO. Several specific initiatives have been developed by the MoD to help prevent service personnel becoming homeless on leaving, including:

SPACES (Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-services)

A key part of ESAG’s and the MoD’s strategy has been to reduce the numbers who arrive in London without a house, job, or a realistic prospect of getting either. Therefore, the MoD have established SPACES, an accommodation advice and placement centre at Catterick designed specifically to provide help to single leavers seeking appropriate civilian housing. SPACES has links with many housing associations and some local authorities around the country to which referrals can be made. SPACES is run by English Churches Housing Group, managed through the JSHAO and funded by the MoD.

Galleries Project

The Galleries Project in Richmond, North Yorkshire provides 13 small flats for short-term supported accommodation for single ex-service people. It was opened in late 2002 by ECHG. The project works in conjunction with SPACES and JSHAO, from where it gets referrals, and helps to place single ex-service people in long-term accommodation, preventing them from ‘drifting’ to London. The MoD is proposing a second Galleries project at Aldershot.

Military Corrective and Training Centre (MCTC)

People leaving the services following severe disciplinary action are at a particular risk of ending up on the streets of London. Therefore a joint initiative between the MoD and Shelter was established in Colchester, where MCTC is situated, to provide soldiers being discharged from MCTC with general housing advice. The project has links with housing agencies around the country through established networks and with ex-service charities in London. The MoD has recently entered into a new agreement with English Churches Housing Group to make the provision. The scheme will be run as a satellite to the SPACES scheme.

Front-line action and provision of short-term accommodation

A number of projects are targeted at helping those homeless ex-service people who are already in London, and who will continue to gravitate to the capital despite efforts at prevention and diversion. They tackle the homelessness problem at the front line.
SSAFA Forces Help
The Central London branch of SSAFA Forces Help has recruited a full-time co-ordinator to its London Homeless Division in order to improve direct services to homeless ex-service people. The initiative ensures that in a number of day centres across London there is direct access to ex-services advice and resources from ex-service people who find themselves homeless in London.

Ex-Service Fellowship Centres (EFC)
New Belvedere House was opened by EFC in 1998, creating a 42-room hostel for homeless ex-service people. This is the only exclusively ex-services hostel in London and is always full. EFC therefore expanded the hostel to provide a further 15 bedspaces. ESAG supported this project by working with the Veterans Policy Unit to help arrange a Housing Corporation grant and encouraging additional grants from its member organisations. EFC also co-ordinates its own London Relief Centre, helping ex-service people in need of immediate assistance with accommodation, travel warrants to go home, food vouchers, clothing and advice.

Community Housing and Therapy’s ‘Home Base’ Project
Despite the SPACES project, younger ex-service people do still come to London without a home and job and find themselves unable to get either. The Home Base scheme commenced in August 1998 and aims to break this cycle. It offers younger ex-service people in this position short-term accommodation for six to 12 months along with appropriate counselling on a one-to-one and group basis, guidance with independent living skills and employment advice. Staff are responsible for assessing each person for the level and type of support they need and ensuring it is delivered in a consistent and sensitive way.

The temporary accommodation offered by Home Base is in sheltered housing schemes in the Paddington, Maida Vale and St Johns Wood areas of London, as well as in a six room house in Hammersmith. The project tries to avoid recreating the military experience by placing clients in schemes that are not specifically for ex-service people, thus encouraging them to move on from the armed forces and interact with the community. Once employment is obtained, help is given to find permanent housing.

Ex-Service Resettlement Project
This project was established in 1998 in response to findings in the research report commissioned by ESAG, Homeless on Civvy Street. These showed that of the homeless people in London, those with a services background are on average more likely to experience poor mental health and alcohol problems and therefore be homeless for longer or have repeated periods of homelessness.

The project is managed by the Alcohol Recovery Project and the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation and comprises three workers whose task is to locate homeless ex-service people with mental health and/or alcohol problems, and work with them until they are able to sustain themselves in the community with permanent housing and appropriate support. ESAG believes the project has created a ‘route’ out of the revolving door of homelessness within which many ex-service people with mental health and alcohol problems have become trapped.

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (‘Combat Stress’)
Combat Stress has for many years been working with homeless ex-servicemen with combat-related psychological injuries. Membership of ESAG and joined-up case working with the other initiatives has helped Combat Stress to extend its outreach.
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and source referrals from a wide range of organisations for its specialist programmes.

Provision of long-term accommodation
ESAG state there is an increasing demand to provide long-term accommodation for those ex-servicemen now ready to move on from temporary accommodation after experiencing or being threatened with homelessness. The situation is exacerbated in London due to high costs in the rented sector. Home Base and the EFC hostel (New Belvedere House) find it harder to move people on from their temporary accommodation. There are two ESAG core member ex-service charities giving priority to tackling this problem: the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation and Haig Homes.

Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation
The Foundation provides housing and support for disabled ex-service people, including those with a history of homelessness who require continuing support to prevent further homelessness. It has an estate in Fulham with a long waiting list made up in particular of ex-service people referred through the Ex-Service Resettlement Project and New Belvedere House. Tenants are given support to sustain their tenancy and encourage them to rebuild their lives within the community in which they live. The Foundation is currently embarking on a five-year plan to provide at least a further 100 dwellings to meet the demand for housing with support and help reduce the numbers of homeless ex-service people.

Haig Homes
Haig Homes is a housing charity with around 1,200 properties throughout the UK for ex-service families. It does not provide supported housing, nursing or residential care and has little accommodation for single people. In recognition of the need for more accommodation for single people, however, the trustees Haig Homes have approved a new-build development in Woolwich consisting of 17 flats for single ex-service personnel. These will be specifically allocated to those who are resettled, employed and able to live independently again.

Training and employment placement

Project Compass
A specialist motivation and employment training (‘Ready for Work’) programme has been devised to help homeless ex-service personnel in London. During the pilot project which ran in 2002, clients came from EFC and the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, Training for Life provided the counselling to prepare them to return to work, and Business Action on Homelessness provided the work opportunities. The programme and its clients are now managed by Project Compass, which is supported by the MoD Veterans Affairs Secretariat and involves the same partners from the pilot project.

Training Colleges for the Disabled
About 100 ex-soldiers are retrained annually at these colleges.

Funding of initiatives by ex-service charities
ESAG has succeeded in highlighting problems in this area sufficiently to attract funding from the major ex-service benevolent charities. The Royal British Legion has played a significant role in supporting initiatives including the Ex-Service Resettlement Project, Home Base and the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation’s supported housing scheme. The King George’s Fund for Sailors and the RAF Benevolent Fund have also financially supported these initiatives. The Army Benevolent
Fund has played a leading part in co-ordinating many ESAG initiatives, as well as providing funding where most needed. Significant funding for both capital and revenue projects aimed at tackling homelessness amongst ex-service people has also been forthcoming from the Ministry of Defence and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
11 The way forward

Serving in the armed forces does not, on the face of it, lead to people becoming homeless. On the contrary, services in the armed forces may assist many people in acquiring the personal and other qualities that prepare them well for civilian life. Nevertheless there are links – in many cases circumstantial rather than causal – between experiences in the armed forces and homelessness making it more likely, for a variety of reasons, some of them nothing to do with the armed forces, that people who have served in the armed forces may be at greater risk of homelessness. This analysis and some previous ones point to the following themes:

- Some people whose family backgrounds and temperaments place them at greater risk of homelessness in later life are drawn to military life as a source of security, camaraderie and structure – a way of leaving behind bad habits and bad company.

- Some people find it difficult to cope with aspects of military life – being far from family and home for extended periods; the large part played by alcohol; hierarchy and authority; boredom; the trauma induced in some by combat. The impact of these difficulties may result in people leaving the armed forces prematurely and with few resources, material or emotional, to cope with what is to come. In those circumstances, homelessness becomes a significantly increased risk. The risk is exacerbated even further if mental health problems are already evident or have become manifest during service in the armed forces.

- People need preparation and advice, not just with finding accommodation, but also coping with other aspects of the transition to civilian lives, notably coping with mental health problems, alcohol and making new friends and relationships and re-establishing contact with old ones.

- Homelessness may come long after leaving the armed forces, affected by events that happened many years ago, either in early life, or during military service, and by events that have occurred since leaving the armed forces, perhaps not connected in any way with military life.

In the last few years the Ministry of Defence and the armed services themselves have developed a range of services to assist people with housing, employment and training when they are leaving the army which were described in the previous chapter. All principally fall into the realm of helping people to retain and acquire housing. There is less emphasis on the need for social and emotional support. Finding somewhere to live will not be enough for some people. If housing is not enough, the lack of other support may mean they subsequently lose even the housing. The baby has gone with the bathwater.

This and other analyses suggest some possible additional approaches. These include:

1 A greater recognition and understanding of previous problems when people join, such as disrupted family lives, trouble with the law or previous experiences of mental health or alcohol problems.

2 Greater support with psychological and emotional problems during armed service coupled with encouragement not to deny or stigmatise mental health problems or problems with excessive alcohol consumption and the associated behaviour.

3 Encouraging contact with family and friends while serving in the armed forces, particularly when serving far from home.

4 Access to emotional and psychological support services during and after the period of transition from military to civilian life. Since the respondents placed rather greater store by the
The way forward

efforts of the ex-services charities than the help they received from other statutory or voluntary sources, widening the range of help beyond housing into the areas listed above (some of which is already occurring) seems to fall well within their remit. The trust and confidence they already enjoy may give their efforts a speedier and more complete success.

5 Since people sometimes become homeless long after leaving the armed forces greater efforts are needed to keep in touch with those that leave the armed forces and, for one reason or another, are at greater risk of becoming homeless. This too could be a job for the forces charities.

6 A focus on long term as well as immediate and temporary housing options. The duty here falls on the wider world of affordable housing provision: local authorities, housing associations and so on.

Normal lives; normal habits

Services could always, no doubt, be improved and extended, but there may also be ways of preventing the factors occurring in the first place that may lead to becoming homeless. These relate to changing the military lifestyle itself, not just improving services to those who cannot cope with it, or fail to cope with its aftermath. That is a more challenging and ambitious goal.

As has repeatedly been noted throughout this report military life is necessarily different to civilian life. The job of the military is different and as a result the structure, culture and lifestyle and, to some extent, the social values of those in the armed forces are different to the generality. But if those aspects of military life make some people at greater risk of the factors such as mental health problems, family and relationship breakdown and the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption which may contribute to people becoming homeless, isolated and without paid work, it follows that seeking to ‘normalise’ military life – if it could be achieved without undermining operational requirements – would, for this group of people at least be highly desirable. Some changes are already afoot.

Two aspects of military life are perhaps most beneficially altered from this point of view: garrison living and messing arrangements. Or to put it the other way, if military personnel could live in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets with their families for a greater proportion of their time, that would add stability and reduce some the negative effects of ‘hothouse’ garrison life, notable amongst which is the availability and consumption of cheap alcohol. People would very much benefit from socialising where everyone else does and conforming to the norms of social behaviour in relation to the consumption of alcohol that prevail outside the armed forces.

‘Pay As You Dine’ (PAYD) is a proposed new system of charging, in non-operational messes, where individuals will pay only for the food they choose to consume, at the time they consume it, rather than through the food charge, deducted from the salary. Trials are taking place in a number of Army, Navy and RAF bases. PAYD could help to encourage service personnel to budget for food, and contribute to a more realistic view of life outside the armed forces.

It is now the national norm for Navy personnel to own their own homes. This has come about because there are four fixed Navy bases in the UK, with certain types of ship stationed at each base. For example, submarines are stationed at Faslane naval base in Scotland. This reduces the need for Navy personnel to move around. After tours they return to the same place, meaning they can settle more easily and put down roots. Consequently, part of the philosophy for the future of the Army is to create ‘super-garrisons’ near the main recruiting areas. These are traditionally relatively deprived areas in the north of England. This approach may promote home ownership and family and social stability.
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Removing the possibility of homelessness entirely is not a realistic goal. Nonetheless personal resilience can be strengthened and arrangements can be made to ensure that the best help – that which is given freely by friends and family – and by specialist charities is more likely to be at hand. Problems may not be solved, but their effect may be greatly diminished. Lives that are made larger make problems seem smaller.
Notes

Chapter 9

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Chapter 10

1 The Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness: 5 years of action pp5–11