



North Yorkshire & York Organisation and delivery toolkit

Autumn 2019 – Summer 2021

Funded by an Armed Forces Community
Covenant Grant



Overview and key aims

The *Festival of Friends* is a new model of collaborative activity for supporting Service children across an area, initially developed by Hampshire County Council and Winchester University in 2017/18. North Yorkshire's edition had the key aims of developing and sharing good practice across schools with Service children on roll, whilst also promoting progression to further and higher education: with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for this key group of North Yorkshire's pupils (about 6%).

An education adviser within the Council's School Improvement Service initially secured a £20,000 grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund in Autumn 2019 to run this second 'Festival' in North Yorkshire across the 2019/20 academic year. Twenty-four schools and academies signed up, many of which had had little or no engagement in Service children projects in the past, including one within the boundaries of York City Council. Each school identified a staff 'champion' who accessed training and support and ran a school improvement project to improve their school's provision for Service children. The improvement projects and their impact were captured in a case study publication for wider dissemination, and a celebratory event (the Festival) was planned, to be held at the University of York for participating school staff, Service children and their families. The Festival plan included a campus tour and an award ceremony, mirroring the similar event held at the University of Winchester in 2018.

However, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the two school lockdowns, the project was extended to run across a second academic year, and the Festival and all network meetings were changed to online events (with the latter held at the end of June 2021). In many ways, the latter was probably more successful than a face-to-face event would have been, since its audience reach was greater. Although four of the original schools that wished to be part of the project withdrew, engagement from the remaining twenty was high and sixteen case studies were written in time to be published before the end of the academic year.

The project was supported throughout by both the York St John University and University of York's Widening Participation teams, as well as by the Office for Students' *FutureHY Uni Connect* programme. This strong partnership between the Higher Education sector, the County Council's School Improvement Service and twenty schools / academies made the project hugely successful.

Project objectives

The project provided opportunities for building links between schools to share existing good practice and disseminate staff training. It was designed to be of particular benefit to schools with a small number of Service children on their rolls (the situation for the large majority of Service children), so that staff gained new ideas, a better understanding of the needs of this unique group of children and support from schools with more experience of working with military communities.

The collaborative activity of the project also aimed to promote the identity of Service children amongst their non-Service peers, offering a mutually beneficial opportunity to support one another on school-based improvement projects. These projects needed to focus on one or more of the following:

- Spread awareness of Service children;
- Support the integration between Service and civilian children;
- Promote access to Further and Higher Education.

The Festival of Friends therefore had the key objective of establishing stronger connections between schools to address the needs identified by Service children themselves. It therefore brought together

key stakeholders to support the educational progression of Service children and improve the integration of Service with non-Service pupils by raising the awareness of the distinctive needs of Armed Forces children.

Recruitment of, and expectations on, the project schools

A project overview and invitation letter was initially sent to all schools within North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) and the City of York (CoY) Council that had any number of Service children on their rolls. This was followed up through phone conversations and attendance of an education adviser at some local Headteacher 'cluster' meetings. The use of some of the Armed Forces Covenant Grant for financial awards for the best projects was included as an incentive to schools getting involved.

Interested schools were then asked to sign an acceptance form (**Appendix 1**), and by doing so agreed to identify a staff member to act as Armed Forces Champion at their school who would attend at least four training sessions (disseminating key messages to all school staff) and lead on a school improvement project. The school-based champions ranged from senior leaders or teachers to welfare support staff.

Establishing a steering group

With such an ambitious project planned to cover a full academic year (but ultimately covering almost two), an important feature of the project was the establishment of a **diverse** steering group which was chaired by the School Improvement Education Adviser. This group comprised of:

- University Outreach Officers from both the York St John University and University of York
- *FutureHY Uni Connect* officers
- Two NYCC *Service Children's Champions*
- A CoY Academy Trust's *Service Families' Liaison Officer*
- A second LA school improvement adviser
- A former Catterick Garrison Headteacher and current school governor

Over the course of the project, the group met on six occasions with each meeting about two-hours in length, with agendas (see example in **Appendix 2**) and minutes written and agreed tasks and actions shared. Without this distributed leadership of the project, it is unlikely that the project would have been as successful. It is also important to stress that the project relied on significant time commitment from the education adviser, although this was funded through the Grant so dedicated time could be allocated.

Identifying Area Service Pupils' Coordinators / a model of cascading training

The project's steering group appointed three school-based middle leaders as Area Service Pupils Coordinators (ASPCs) for the three distinct geographical districts of York; Catterick; and Hambleton/Harrogate. These ASPCs each oversaw a network of Armed Forces Champions, one from each participating school, assisted by the three Local Authority military support staff. They were appointed due to their previous commitment to projects involving Service children, and offered both professional development and supply cover funding to attend meetings and lead their networks.

The ASPCs met six times during the project to receive training and support from the education adviser. This included support in running their network meetings and training drawing on the Service Children Progression (SCiP) Alliance's *Thriving Lives Toolkit*, which was launched nationally in October 2020 following extensive research. The ASPCs then convened and chaired their network meetings with the

school-based ‘champions’ to disseminate this CPD and develop school-based projects. The steering group received updates on the project of the networks and school projects at their termly meetings.

Developing school-based improvement projects

The Covenant grant was awarded to cover three areas:

- Supporting children from Armed Forces families;
- Promoting positive mental health;
- Military and civil integration.

Whilst there was a great deal of flexibility in the focus of each school’s improvement project, we asked participating schools to plan a school improvement project to cover one or more of the following focus areas, completing a planning template (**Appendix 3**):

1/ Welcoming ethos.

Projects aimed at growing awareness and understanding of Service families and their lifestyles amongst teachers and civilian pupils in order to improve Service pupils’ health and wellbeing (the 2018 *Growing Up in North Yorkshire* survey outcomes being a key reference source);

2/ Supporting integration.

Projects aimed at developing and promoting effective practices for improving the integration of Service and civilian pupils and families, to raise educational outcomes of the school’s Service pupils.

3/ Promoting progression.

Projects focussed on promoting the progression of Service children e.g. from primary to secondary or into further (FE) / higher (HE) education.

Examples of some of the projects undertaken by schools in Hampshire earlier were shared with the project schools. Whilst we advertised that some projects could receive financial prizes, to be used to embed and disseminate them, we did not want this to put off any schools ‘new’ to this work. It was therefore not a requirement for schools to enter their projects into the awards scheme.

Impact of the school-based improvement projects (see Case Studies booklet)

To provide a legacy from this Festival of Friends, and to aid dissemination, each participating school was asked to write up their project for publication in a case study booklet using a standard approach (**Appendix 4**). A contributory ½ day’s supply cover was provided to each school that did this. Each school case study was required to include any impact seen to date. Whilst not all projects had been fully completed by the time of publication, all could nevertheless evidence some impact, with some making a significant difference to the support Service children now get from their schools. A particularly pleasing outcome was the number of schools that had ‘their eyes opened’ about the distinct needs of Service children and which are now using the *Thriving Lives Toolkit* resources. Two participating schools plan on writing up their projects early in the autumn term 2021. We plan to publish these on our Service Children’s Champions’ website: [Home - Service Children's Champions \(servicepupilschampion.co.uk\)](http://servicepupilschampion.co.uk).

Schools that wished to enter their project for an award were also invited to provide a short film overview which could be viewed by the judges and possibly shared at the online Festival. Most created these. Four members of the steering group then agreed on the prize winners using a shortlisting process (**Appendix 5**).

Holding the online celebration event (the Festival)

When it became evident that a face-to-face event at a university was not going to be a safe option, even with the project extension from the Armed Forces Covenant team, the steering group met to plan an online version. Careful thought was given to timings, length and content with the following agreed:

- An after school event to maximise pupil attendance;
- Total length of two hours, with a gap in the middle for some celebratory food;
- A first hour of 'entertainment' punctuated with virtual tours of both York universities and some filmed contributions from Service students at the universities;
- A second hour to include an inspirational talk and the actual awards ceremony, with shortlisted videos and an 'envelope-opening' ritual, followed by acceptance speeches from the winners;
- Senior military officers to open and close the event.

For our entertainment, we were fortunate to acquire the services of Steve Royle, actor, writer, comedian and recent star of Britain's Got Talent, who taught the viewing children how to juggle.



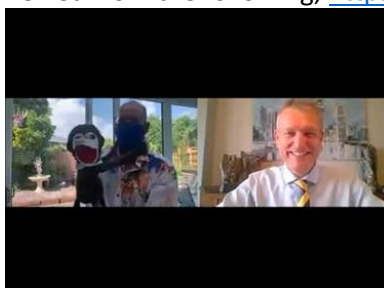
We also had a short performance from the Catterick-based Military Kids' Club choir.

The inspirational talk came from Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, who after the event said:

I thought the event was fantastic. To bring children together who have some shared experience of families in the military was really moving and also very positive in that they have their own community. For me being able to listen to that was very powerful but also I hope the event and the work they were doing helped them realise that they are not on their own.



A recording of the Festival can be viewed from the following; <https://youtu.be/-hG1SI9se6A>



Lessons learned / top tips

A key challenge for the steering group was keeping the momentum going after two lockdowns interrupted the project and focused schools on managing a pandemic. This was generally overcome in a number of ways:

- *Regular communication and updates:* between the steering group and ASPCs and school leaders, and between the ASPCs and the school champions. Setting up a dedicated Festival of Friends email address, which was monitored by one of the University outreach team was particularly successful.
- *Running a number of 'keeping warm' activities:* these included creating a primary and a secondary activity book for participating schools to use with their children over the summer holidays, as well as running a logo competition, with the winning design then appearing on all further Project publicity



- *Including some gifts of appreciation:* both a 'thank you' box of chocolates at Easter for the school-based champions, and the commemorative glass trophy for each participating school with pin badges for the children, were very well received.



- *Detailed planning of the online event:* this was crucial for the smooth-running of the Festival. It included a timed 'script' for those contributing and well as those leading it, together with a 'dummy run'. It was important to inform schools early to save the date.
- *Careful budget management:* a simple spreadsheet covering planned expenditure as well as committed and actual spending was invaluable in keeping within budget and completing the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund's reporting requirements at the end of the project.

Next steps

As well as promoting the case studies widely through the publication, we hope to organise a conference aimed at all schools in the county with Service children on their rolls to learn about the Festival and to explore the Thriving Lives Toolkit.

Matt Blyton, Principal Adviser, School Improvement Service, North Yorkshire County Council
Louisa Dobson, FutureHY Programme Manager, Uni Connect York and North Yorkshire

APPENDIX 1: School Acceptance form



FESTIVAL OF FRIENDS 2019/20

Name of school _____

Name of school's Armed Forces Champion _____

Armed Forces Champion's email address & contact number _____

By signing this acceptance form to join the project, the school agrees to identify an Armed Forces Champion who will:

- Attend four twilight training / network sessions across the academic year;
- Disseminate key messages from these network meetings to their school colleagues;
- Oversee a school-based improvement project.

The school will also invite representative pupils and parents to attend a university celebration event ('the festival') at the end of the project, anticipated to be in September 2020.

Signature of Headteacher: _____

Date: _____

Please email the completed form to *****

APPENDIX 2: Example steering group meeting agenda



‘FESTIVAL OF FRIENDS’

SERVICE PUPILS’ PROJECT 2019/20

11.9.19 Planning Meeting, County Hall,

AGENDA

It would be helpful to bring electronic or paper copies of the documents referred to.

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Overview of the project – see accompanying Covenant grant bid
An opportunity for all to be clear of the aims and scope of the project
3. Terms and conditions of the grant – see grant award letter / ToR / next steps
Not necessary for everyone to have read in detail – I will signpost
4. Recruitment of schools – update & discussion (see spreadsheet attached)
Number and geography of the Networks
5. Recruitment of (ASPCs) Area Service Pupils’ Coordinators and their role – discussion
6. University involvement – discussion to lead to a proposal
7. Dates:
 - Training of ASPCs
 - Network meetings
 - Mid project evaluation
 - University awards ceremony
 - Submission of case studies for booklet
 - Planning for awards ceremony
 - End of project evaluation
8. AOB

APPENDIX 3: School project case study planning template



	School:	Project:
Project objective <i>(please check the one that applies)</i>	Spreading awareness of Service Pupils <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting integration between Service Pupils and Civilian Pupils <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting access to Further and Higher Education <input type="checkbox"/>	
School info <i>(number of pupils/number of service pupils etc)</i>		
What does your school hope to gain from this project? <i>(eg. improve support of Service pupils)</i>		
Explain a bit about your project <i>(how will it work, who will be involved etc)</i>		
Why have you chosen to do this project? <i>(what impact do you think it will have on your school? etc)</i>		
What are you hoping the outcomes of this project will be? <i>(how will it positively impact your service pupils?)</i>		



APPENDIX 4: case study report template

Name and phase of school		
Title of project		
School context	Number on roll	
	% of Service children	
	Class structure	
	Military base(s) served	
	Distance to military base	
	Military member on GB?	Yes / No
	Any staff with serving spouses?	Yes / No
	Any other relevant information	
Why the school agreed to take part		
Project overview (50 words max)		
Main Project objective <i>(please tick the ones that apply)</i>	Spreading awareness of Service Pupils <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting integration between Service Pupils and Civilian Pupils <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting access to Further and Higher Education <input type="checkbox"/>	
Intended outcomes of the project (100 words max)		
Description of what you did (400 words max)		
Details of any funding costs (50 words max)		
What has been the impact? (200 words max)		
Next steps (50 words max)		
Stakeholder quotes (with their source e.g. 8 yr-old girl / parent)	Ideally two please	

Please return completed template to ***** by *****, along with your school's logo (gif) and at least 3 photographs that can be used.

APPENDIX 5: Festival celebration invitation



You are invited to attend the

York and North Yorkshire schools

FESTIVAL OF FRIENDS

ONLINE AWARDS AND CELEBRATION EVENT

WEDNESDAY 30TH JUNE 2021

Brought to you by



Please contact your Area Service Pupils Coordinator for further information



0 – Does not meet criteria 1 – Poor 2 – Good 3 – Exceeds Expectations