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# Creative Forces April 2017 evaluation report

Two Creative Forces events for young people from armed forces families were held at the University of Winchester in April 2017 for 60 students from nine Hampshire secondary schools and 63 pupils from fourteen primary schools.

# Context

The University of Winchester has been working with Hampshire County Council and schools in the region to develop service children’s aspirations and awareness of higher education since 2014. The University’s recent research [[1]](#footnote-1) indicates that children from military families are significantly underrepresented in higher education.

The days provide a taster of HE for the children and an opportunity to get to know service children from their own and other schools and university students from a service background. Groups of young people designed their top tips for how their school does and could support them and then fed back to school staff in a plenary. This year the secondary day was run in collaboration with Bath Spa University, participants benefitting from the perspective of students and staff from a second university. Accompanying school staff participated in a CPD session run by Hampshire County Council. Andy Heyes, School Improvement Officer, ran the session for secondary staff and was joined on the primary day by Matt Blyton from North Yorkshire County Council. Schools were asked to select a small group of service children accompanied by either a member of the senior leadership team or designated service family liaison. Primary schools sent headteachers (3), family support workers, ELSAs, LSAs or SENCOs and two schools sent governors.

# Schools

Alverstoke Junior School

Applemore College

Bay House School and Sixth Form

Brune Park Community School

Crestwood College

Henry Cort Community College

Lakeside School

Robert May's School

Test Valley School

The Westgate School

Bedenham Primary School

Elson Junior School

Fair Oak Junior School

Grange Junior School

Kimpton, Thruxton & Fyfield CofE Primary School

Lee-on-the-Solent Junior School

Mayhill Junior School

Park Gate Primary School

Ranvilles Junior School

Redbarn Primary School

Roman Way Primary School

South Wonston Primary School

St. Mark's Primary School

# Outline of the day

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| Time | Activity |
| 10.00 am | Welcome and university quiz |
| 10.10 am | Sharing experience   * University students from military service families * Q & A with students |
| 10.40 am | Break |
| 11am | Creative Writing workshop with Judy Waite (group A)  Campus tour (group B) |
| 11.50 am | Creative Writing workshop with Judy Waite (group B)  Campus tour (group A) |
| 12.40pm | Lunch in the foodhall |
| 1.10 pm | Supporting Service Children   * *Top Tips -* Children’s top tips for how schools can support them better * Sharing best practice (for school staff)   (Andy Heyes, Hampshire County Council/Matt Blyton, North Yorkshire County Council ) |
| 1.50 pm | Children feedback to school staff on their *‘Top Tips’* |
| 2.15 pm | Close and evaluation |

# Top tips for schools – a summary[[2]](#footnote-2)

Raise awareness among the school’s civilian population of what it’s like to be a service child:

* Speak about service life in assemblies
* Run or take part in charity/fun day events for both military and civilian families
* Explain why service children are sometimes granted term time absence
* Invite civilian friends to clubs or activities for service children

Keep in contact with mobile children and settle them in when they arrive:

* Transfer records about attainment, needs, experience and topics covered
* Help them keep in touch with friends
* Stay in touch and check on their progress
* Some children wanted to be overtly welcomed and their background explained, others would rather fit in quietly
* Organise buddies and mentors
* Give them memory boxes/journals/cards when they leave

Support their emotional needs and help them keep in contact when a parent is deployed:

* Give them a safe space to talk if they need it but keep it understated
* Help them write to deployed parents
* Know where and when parents are deployed and celebrate it in school
* Give the deployed parent a structure for keeping their children involved in their life when they’re away. Several groups talked about their school sending a soft toy with the deployed parent and celebrating photos of the toy on its travels
* Make sure all staff are aware of and recognise the impact of deployment on wellbeing and behaviour and make sure the young people know this
* Talk to parents

Help them build bonds with other service children:

* Provide opportunities to meet other service children
* Organise trips, treats and opportunities, particularly with a military theme
* Make a dedicated space
* Run lunchtime/after school clubs
* Help them organise and take part in charity events

And build an app for service children to communicate with each other.

# Session feedback

Teachers’ feedback reports indicated that the day was a success. Teachers were asked to rate sessions from useful to not useful. The teachers’ CPD workshop and concurrent children’s top tips workshop were rated highest. While several respondents mentioned creative writing as the best part of the day, overall creative writing was rated the least useful session.

While we did not ask what attendees will now do differently, four staff members mentioned specific actions they will take away from the day. It would have been good if we had asked this specific question to capture any other action points for staff.

# Appendix i

# Children and young people’s top tips for school staff

# Primary

More awareness when Mum/Dad is away

More family activities at school

Make other students aware of the reason – absence when a parent goes on deployment or returns is not holiday

Keep in contact after we move away – find out about our progress

Get non-service children involved in the charity work the service children do

More activities and trips as part of a service children club

Help us keep in touch – email, facetime, phone

Meerkat teddies (this was explained as an initiative in one school where the child and the deployed parent took photos of their meerkat doing things with them and sent them to each other so they could follow each others lives through the meerkat’s activities)

Let us talk about our military connection to teachers and friends

Special visitors for service children

Be supportive to children who are new

Send details of our work when we move schools

When you start a new school you could stand at the front and introduce yourself or your teacher could

Charity work

Passport for a friend to come to the service children’s club to see what it’s like

Support with behaviour

PSHE – every year new people come

Peer mentor

A special bag to take if you change school

Military buddies

Clubs and meetings

Use military money / Fundraising

Someone to talk to

Military council

Treat us the same as everyone else

Somewhere to talk to someone when you are upset

Contact new school by social media

One or two lessons each term about what the military is doing and where

A map with pins showing where parents are deployed and information about those places

More days like Creative Forces day

Discounts on school trips incorporated in pupil premium

A teddy for the parent to take on deployment and send back photos of its adventures

More opportunities to speak to ex-service personnel and serving personnel

More military assemblies

Opportunities to talk to other military children and see how they feel

Talk privately to the child

Talk to our parents

Area to talk to teachers privately

Make sure the parent knows that their child is getting support

Forces group

Talk to the child at the beginning of each month and discuss more

A teacher comes and helps and takes your mind off things

Box of supplies and school work when we move

Make sure the class knows

We like to talk about connection but depends on the situation

Guest speakers

Ask how we are daily

More communication between parents and teachers

Help us send Blueys

Remembrance Day

Journals

Don’t mention unless we bring it up

A teacher to talk to

Plan trips to meet other military children

Treat us respectfully and empathise

Goodbye cards and presents

Interaction

# Secondary

We’re so used to parents leaving we fix our own issues as the school doesn’t help

Weekly/monthly checkins on how we are coping when parents are deployed

Trips for service children (motivate)

More trips across the whole school at a reasonable price

Trip to the University of Winchester

Exceptions (eg for coming back parade)

Discounts

Help in school (homework)

Service children common room

Allowed to leave the room if you’re having issues with coping

As soon as parent is deployed student could get a corridor pass

Information assemblies

Club – lots of fun, talk, draw what you feel

An app for service children to communicate with other service children

One to one meetings

Badge to talk when you need to

More flexibility for homework

More events

Links to university students

Feelings diary

More information about charities

Communication

Someone to welcome us

Having someone there who understands what it’s like to be new

Don’t single us out

Treat us as individuals

Assemblies

Free food

Counselling if needed

They don’t do anything different but they will support us if needed

Other students don’t understand – make them aware of what we go through

GCSE year

Transport links – footpath from our homes to school

Social space

Settling in by people who understand

Go through what you don’t know when you start a new school

Staff awareness

Role models

More opportunities to have conversations

General life skills

Email/progress checks once a month or so

Student-teacher talks and support one to one

Family bonding with school

Paperwork when we move around

Keeping in touch with previous schools

Army ambassadors

More trips – bonding with other students

Objects to help with stress

Fundraising and charity events

Skype calls

A way to communicate with family efficiently

Emotional and academic support, make sure you have everything

More information on military families

Depends on the situation – if you want to talk about it

Make a club, talk to people with a similar childhood

Get a buddy

A teacher to go to if you have any concerns

Assemblies – raise awareness

Share reports and history from previous school

Check we’re not behind or repeating topics

Aware of situation if needed

Knowing who else is in similar situation

Not overdone – keep it casual relaxed informal

Not going out of way to mention it but can help if any issues – rare

Maybe good to be aware/know people with similar experiences if you need help

Share records/reports with previous schools

What topics already covered – find alternatives

Be aware of situation if needed in the future

Assembly or something different – awareness

# Appendix ii

# Accompanying school staff feedback forms

| Role | What have your pupils learnt? | Was the day useful? | Which aspects were most beneficial? | What could we do to improve? |
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| Pupil Premium Champion and service family liaison officer | That there are many students like them and that people care | Focussed me on formalising the process when students leave | Students top tips | Divide the teacher discussion into groups - those who have been before and those for whom it's the first time |
| Head of Year, RE, PSHE | How life at uni differs to school A military upbringing can build resilience for uni life | Top tips very useful - we'll create a pupil profile for all service pupils to pass on to new school | Top tips - pupils felt this was specifically aimed at the as service pupils | Creative Writing rushed. A task more aimed at building resilience/shared experiences? |
| Pupil Premium Ambassador | Others have similar experiences Staff are there to help Very beneficial hearing from uni students about their experiences | Yes. Talking about experiences and how the pupils feel/their ideas for school | CPD workshop Sharing session at the end of the day | Mix the school groups and allow more opportunities for pupils to share their experiences |
| Learning Coordinator | About the University | Good to see support for military families | The intro by actual students and tour | I think you have it right! |
| Pupil Premium coordinator | Uni life and opportunities Others' experiences of being service children | Strategies to support - they are often overlooked as we don't know what to really do with them | CPD workshop Q and A with students | More about supporting the pupils for staff |
| Learning resource manager | Confidence, creative writing tips, Uni life - excellent tour | Very useful informative and interesting | Top tips  We have been looked after very well |  |
| Service Families Support Worker | That despite challenges you can succeed and go on to HE | Reinforcing importance of supporting our service children and inspiring them to go on and be successful | Top Tips from pupils, tour of campus, opportunity to ask questions with students | Can't think of anything |
| Keyworker | University is a viable option, more informed | Useful insight into specific needs and issues | More aware of the time frame for the impact of deployment/family issues | Can't fault anything, well done |
| Pupil achievement tutor - service | Chances available to them post 16 | Very useful. Sharing practice and suggesting additional support required | Me - the session with Andy (lots of ideas) Students - Top tips and campus tour | I thought it was great! Thank you |
| Service student support coordinator | Life at university - they feel really inspired and more confident that university may be suitable for them | Discussion on practice Nice to know we are on the right track | Campus tour - seeing study and living environments | Longer campus tour. Would like ideas for nonmobile students |
| ELSA/Family support worker | What is on offer at university That there are a large number of other children who are service children too | Yes - good to hear what children want for support Q and A with service students teacher CPD was very informative | Learning what uni involves Tour  The day shows uni is NOT a big scary place | I feel this was run very well |
| Chair of Governors | That they are not necessarily special but can feel valued for the experiences they go through and supported appropriately | Yes. And for providing a designated forces governor champion | Having the opportunity to listen and engage with the children and take action on their thoughts | Nil |
| LSA | About life at university and experiences. Ideas on how school can support them | Yes particularly enjoyed the tour and the workshop after lunch | CPD workshop |  |
| Governor | It has raised awareness of options | Yes - Yorkshire talk Children's top tips | Pupils: meeting others Me: After lunch |  |
| ELSA/Family support/Service lead | That university is really diverse and everyone can find something for them | Yes useful to share good practice Helped to raise pupils' aspirations | Sharing ideas with other children and Q and A session with students CPD workshop | More focus on deployment. CPD session focussed on transition between schools but in the children's conversations it seemed deployment was a big issue |
| LSA and ELSA | Children from varied backgrounds have many thoughts/feelings/families in common | Making service families situations more high level in school's awareness | Top tips | N/A - very good balance |
| Y4 class teacher | Experience of university life, aspirations | Buddy/improving transition/communicating with old school. Lunch time club. | Supporting service children workshop - increased awareness of transition issues and how to help |  |
| SENCO | It's Ok to talk about your feelings' 'There are lots more children in the same position as me than I thought' | Thank you for organising the day. There were some really useful tips for both the children and the adults which I will take back to school to help staff understand the difficulties our pupils encounter | Opportunities to meet with other service children and young adults and hear about their lives/journeys | Possible parental involvement to talk about their feelings? |
| ELSA/Forces club leader | They are not the only naval families How a uni works and different courses They really enjoyed the creative writing | Listening to kids' top ten tips Meeting other adults from different schools | Tour of uni Creative writing Workshops | Lunch was rushed as the campus tour overran |
| HSLW/ELSA/DSL | That they have a voice How great uni can be | Kids' top tips | All |  |
| Headteacher | Experience of HE has reinforced aspirations - one child wrote 'I'm going to work harder so that I can go to university' | Hugely - particularly opportunity to listen to hints and tips from others Thank you - a brilliant day! | Listening to students speak Tour of the campus Sharing top tips | More focus on deployment. We felt it was heavily mobility themed Find out what jobs the HE students are aiming for Top tips session was long |
| Service Family Support Assistant/liaison | What a halls of residence looks like How important it is to share ideas and ask questions | It confirmed to me how important the induction process / leaving process is - we already practice this in our school | Creative writing was lots of fun and they were all engaged. Shy pupils spoke to the rest of the room which was lovely to see | More time on the campus tour - lots of people asked questions during this time so we could have had less time on Q and A first and more time on the tour |
| HLTA, forces children liaison | Top tips for coping as a forces child University life | Yes - Matt Blyton's talk on stages of transition Top tips session | Discussion with university students about their top tips | More time to talk to staff about best practice |
| RAF links/phase leader/Y3/4 class teacher/staff governor/NQT mentor | All about university and what it can offer | Very. Ideas for supporting the children in school | Creative writing Campus tour Speaking to other military children | Opportunity to bring more children |
| Headteacher | That there are lots of other children/adults from similar backgrounds | Yes  Lots of ideas in the afternoon about how to improve practice | The CPD session The children - opportunities to discuss and share ideas with children from other schools | Invite schools to speak - always good to hear from schools who are doing great things Military personnel to speak to the children |
| Headteacher and SENCO | Prospect of university and setting their aspirations high That being a service child is not a disadvantage How schools should best support them There are others in the same situation! | How best to support our service children | ALL of it Meeting university students with knowledge of being part of a forces family | I thought it was excellent! Thank you! A wonderfully organised event with friendly students leading - all things that staff and pupils could use in the future |

70% of teachers rated the ‘sharing experience with HEAs’ session as very useful. There were mixed opinions on the ‘Creative Writing’ element of the day with only half of respondents rating it ‘very useful’.

The campus tour was popular, with 80% of respondents rating it very useful. Similarly 80% or responses rated the Staff CPD workshop and Pupils' top tips as ‘very useful’.

# Appendix iii

# Primary day – Friday 28th April 17

# Evaluation – carried out by Andy Heyes (Hampshire LA) and Matt Blyton (North Yorkshire LA)

Positives:

1. Concept of the day
2. Organisation, e.g. name badges
3. Plan for the day – the university experience
4. Facilities
5. Lunch and refreshments
6. Student ambassadors
7. Venue
8. The work of Hampshire LA
9. The partnership between The University of Winchester and the LA
10. The follow up notes for staff

Even better if:

1. The day is planned with a nine-year old attention span in mind
2. The Service pupils invited are targeted as potential university material (will need to be

advertised sensitively)

1. The ambassadors Q & A session is better prepared for by schools and in separate rooms

(noise levels)

1. The creative writing session is instead a ‘wow’ session that only universities could do so the pupils experience something beyond what is possible in their own school and in secondary school
2. A longer CPD session could be built in for staff – at least an hour
3. Schools are encouraged to send someone who will benefit from the CPD session
4. A drama presentation could be incorporated for the pupils’ ‘top tips’ and perhaps two

rooms could be used for the presentations so they are half as long or twice as detailed

1. A microphone is used for the pupils’ feedback
2. An earlier start could be arranged – say at 9.30am - or insist on finishing later in order to

maximise the day due to the effort taken to plan it

1. The tour could really emphasise the ‘wow’ factor of The University of Winchester

1. McCullouch and Hall, 2016, Further and Higher Progression for Service Children, University of Winchester [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See appendix i for a full list of tips as written by the groups of young people [↑](#footnote-ref-2)