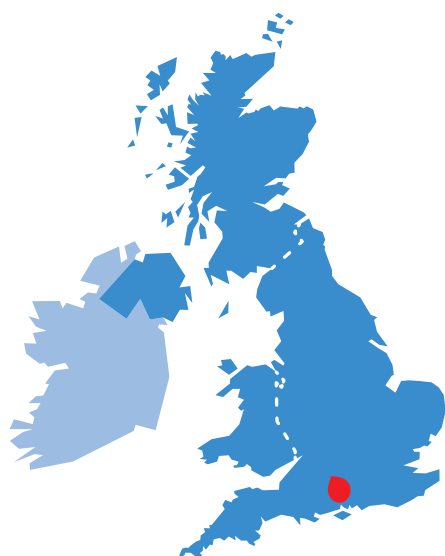


CASE STUDY



CROFTON HAMMOND INFANT SCHOOL, HAMPSHIRE

32% of this small infant school's 181 pupils are from Armed Forces families, predominantly Navy families. Pupils regularly experience separation and deployment.




This infant school identified a need for their pupils to feel connected to a parent during periods of separation. The school has created bespoke knitted dolls for over 50 families, which have travelled the world by ship and plane and provided comfort at home.

THE NEED

Staff observed high numbers of children experiencing wellbeing, engagement and learning issues when a parent works away for a period of time, or works away every Monday to Friday.

The Children's Commissioner's 2018 Kin and Country report notes that "for primary school children, short term and long term parental deployment caused sadness, worry and general unease. It seemed that the physical absence of parents contributed most significantly to creating this distress."

The school identified a need to put in place a 'deployment package' as a family prepared for a period of separation. As part of this the school looked for a way to increase a child's link with the parent once they went away.

 Sailor Daddy Doll has breakfast with her, cuddles her at bedtime, and is there to play with her... all the things she'd otherwise miss. So when your fingers are aching and your eyes are strained from all the knitting please know that what you're doing is truly incredible for these children.

(Year 2 parent)

CASE STUDY



●● One child, who found it particularly tricky that her dad worked away Monday to Friday, just pops her 'Daddy Doll' in the front of her jumper when she comes to school and consequently she can cope a lot better, and her learning has really improved. (Year 1 teacher)

WE ARE ALSO PROUD

of our New Arrivals Ambassadors, one of whom is always a Service child, in each class, who welcome new children and keep a special eye on them.

Service children meet weekly at our lunchtime 'Forces Fun Club' and twice a year we hold a 'twilight' event for Service families.

We give each child whose parent is due to deploy a copy of the book 'Sometimes' by Clare Shaw which addresses issues around separation.

SOLUTIONS TAKEN

The school identified a proficient knitter willing to create bespoke dolls in the likeness of a child and their parent, and initially created a few prototype dolls. Observation of the impact of these initial dolls led to the idea being embedded in school support as part of a 'deployment package'. The scheme has also been extended to civilian children whose parent works away during the week.

Parents report that the dolls are carried everywhere by their child, and are particularly important at bedtime. Teachers observe many well-loved dolls in school and report a particular impact when a child receives photos of their own doll on deployment overseas with their parent, or when they can Skype each other alongside their own dolls.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

- Staff have observed an impact on pupils' wellbeing and readiness to learn.
- The scheme has also benefitted parents themselves. Not only has it increased parents' engagement with the school, but it has also created a sense of community among them. For example parents aboard ship have found out through their dolls that their children attend the same school, creating supportive links with each other as well as with their children.
- These very visual signs that a child is experiencing separation have resulted in a whole school awareness of separation and deployment.

CASE STUDY

THE SCIP ALLIANCE

The Service Children's Progression Alliance leads UK and international work to improve the educational progression of the children of armed forces personnel and veterans.

We undertake research, champion better policy and support effective practice to enable thriving lives for Service children.

The SCiP Alliance's UK Hub network connects and supports hundreds of school, college, university and community professionals, so that evidence-based, effective work can be developed and shared nationally.



When we video call it's a comfort for my son to see Dad with the little doll. It has eased his anxieties when my husband goes away and has become a routine part of my husband's packing for a trip away. The school have been instrumental in ensuring that the disruption of him being away is minimalised and the doll has certainly helped achieve this. (Reception class parent)

PRACTITIONER ADVICE

- Including civilian children in the scheme increases understanding and awareness on both sides.
- Good communication with parents and advance warning of deployment dates is essential.
- The project's success is enhanced by the personalisation we aim for in every single doll, such as clothing, hair colour or hair style.
- Ask parents to send photos of the doll on their travels and celebrate these in school.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND REFERENCES

<https://www.croftonhammond-inf.hants.sch.uk/>

This support was inspired by a RNRM's Children Fund initiative called 'Knit the Family', which provides a pattern book for knitters: <https://www.rnmchildrensfund.org.uk/knit-the-family/>

The 2018 Kin and Country report: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/KIN-AND-COUNTRY-Growing-up-as-an-Armed-Forces-child.pdf>

'Sometimes', by Clare Shaw: <https://cskidsbooks.com/about/>