

**Forward Assist**

# **Straight From The Forces Mouth**

**Top Tips  
For A Successful  
Transition to Civilian  
Life**

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# FORWARD ASSIST

FORCES - VETERAN - CITIZEN



Forward Assist is a multi-award-winning registered charity based in the North East of England with a geographic footprint across the UK. We specialise in supporting hidden populations by writing research papers, campaigning for systemic change, teaching veterans British Parliamentary debating skills, facilitating therapeutic residential retreats and fostering “Post Traumatic Growth” opportunities, for military veterans with combat experience and/or unresolved trauma issues. [www.forward-assist.com](http://www.forward-assist.com)

Forward Assist believe that by promoting inter-generational activities, former servicemen and women can become ‘key stakeholders’ within not only the military community but society as a whole. By focusing on the positive aspects of military service and by giving individual veterans the opportunity to share their wisdom with younger veterans they can share hard earned life knowledge and increase the chance of a successful transition for all parties. By giving older veterans a new raison d'être by being of service to others we increase self-esteem, reduce loneliness and create a common purpose to support their peers and/or those less well off than themselves. This in turn engenders the respect of other veterans, the civilian community and significant others.

## **Where We Are Now**

Sadly, the "mad, bad, and sad" narrative is often used to describe UK veterans. This is a negative and harmful stereotype that can be a significant barrier to veterans' successful transition to civilian life. This narrative perpetuates misconceptions and stigmatises veterans, ultimately hindering their reintegration into society.

The "mad" aspect of the narrative suggests that veterans are prone to mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and that they are somehow "crazy" or dangerous. This stigmatises veterans who may be experiencing mental health challenges and discourages them from seeking help or support, fearing judgment and discrimination.

The "bad" aspect of the narrative implies that veterans are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. This stereotype is not only unfounded but also damaging. It can lead to unwarranted suspicion and discrimination against veterans in various aspects of civilian life, including employment and housing.

The "sad" aspect of the narrative portrays veterans as helpless victims who are emotionally unstable and incapable of adapting to civilian life. This characterisation can undermine veterans' self-esteem and confidence, making it even more challenging for them to succeed in their civilian roles.

When society at large buy into the "mad, bad, and sad" narrative, they may be less inclined to provide the necessary support and resources for veterans. This can potentially lead to underfunding of crucial veterans' services, including mental health care, housing support, and job placement initiatives. Employers who believe the "bad" part of the narrative may be reluctant to hire veterans, fearing potential issues and at Forward Assist we have seen evidence of this in recent years. This can result in veterans facing difficulties in finding or maintaining employment, which is a critical aspect of their successful transition.

The stigmatisation associated with the "mad, bad, and sad" narrative can lead to social isolation for veterans. Feeling misunderstood and judged, they may withdraw from social activities, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and depression. Veterans who internalise the negative narrative may, as indicated earlier, avoid seeking help when they need it, whether for mental health difficulties, substance abuse problems, or other challenges. This can lead to a deterioration of their well-being and an increased risk of negative outcomes.

***"I failed a mandatory drugs test and left the Army after 18 years' service.... it was pack up your kit... I'm escorting you to the gate...have a nice life"***

The narrative undermines the resilience and adaptability that many veterans possess. It ignores the fact that military service often instils valuable skills, such as leadership, discipline, and teamwork, which can be assets in civilian life. As such, negative narratives that imply poor mental health can also affect veterans' families, who may face social stigmatisation and discrimination, compounding the challenges faced by veterans during their resettlement and transition.

For years veteran's homelessness was an under researched concern for many in the service charity sector. Since the formation of the Office for Veterans Affairs in 2019, strategic programmes have been developed to help vulnerable veterans by giving them access to Op Fortitude, a new dedicated referral pathway for homeless veterans, including those sleeping on the streets.

Homelessness is a complex issue that affects many individuals in the United Kingdom, including military veterans who have served their country. Despite their dedication and sacrifice,

some veterans find themselves without stable housing upon returning to civilian life. Transitioning from military to civilian life can be challenging, as veterans may not receive adequate preparation for the change in lifestyle and employment opportunities.

***“I was only out of the Navy for four months before my girlfriend left me and I just couldn’t cope on my own and after a while of not paying my bills and using drugs I was evicted and started sleeping rough.”***

Veterans may struggle to adapt to civilian culture and may feel isolated, leading to difficulties in finding employment and housing. Many veterans experience adjustment difficulties which may or may not be exacerbated by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other traumas incurred during service. These can contribute to mental health issues and substance abuse problems, ultimately leading to homelessness.

The psychological toll of military service may result in depression and anxiety disorders, making it difficult for veterans to maintain stable housing. Some veterans self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, often used as a coping mechanism for their mental health issues, which in turn, can exacerbate their homelessness situation.

Military training does not always translate directly to civilian jobs, leading to difficulties in securing employment. Sadly, some veterans face discrimination in the job market, making it challenging to find stable employment. Prolonged deployments and the emotional toll of military service can strain relationships, leading to families breaking up, separation and homelessness.

Some veterans may not have a support system to turn to when facing housing instability. The government and military are starting to coordinate efforts to provide comprehensive transition pathways to equip veterans with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in civilian life.

It’s so important that veterans have access to mental health counselling and treatment pathways to address PTSD, other traumas, depression, and anxiety. Thousands of grass roots support services are working night and day to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues within the military community and give veterans the support they need. Excellent examples of best practice exist that have increased the availability of substance abuse rehabilitation programmes tailored to veterans’ unique needs. For example, Tom Harrison House in Liverpool.

We all know that more needs to be done to identify and intervene with veterans who are at risk of substance abuse issues.

***“I joined up to get fit, I was unemployed on the road to nowhere and drinking too much. I wanted a long career in the Army but was medically discharged after two years with a bigger alcohol addiction problem than before I joined up. I ended up sleeping rough.”***

Similarly, some of the recent Government backed strategies that offer job training programs that help veterans develop skills relevant to civilian employment are a move in the right direction. As are tax incentives that encourage employers to hire veterans.

It's good to see that an overarching strategy Op Community is in development to improve transition assistance, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, help with employment and additional family and social support. By implementing these solutions, the government and society can honour the service of veterans by ensuring they have the stability and support they need to lead fulfilling lives after their military service.

Yet, loneliness and disconnection among veterans in the UK remains a pressing issue that has garnered increased attention in recent years. While the government has made efforts to provide services for veterans, a significant portion of this population still experience social isolation and a lack of connection to support resources, especially those with mobility issues as a result of muscular skeletal injuries incurred during or after military service. Op Restore aims to address this cohorts' un-met needs over the next year.

Leaving the structured and highly supportive environment of the armed forces is difficult enough, it can be jarring, and veterans often struggle to adapt to the relatively unstructured civilian world. This abrupt shift can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. Many veterans (like the rest of the population) in the UK suffer from mental health problems, such as depression, and anxiety, as a result of their military experiences and or difficulties assimilating back to the civilian world.

***“As far as I am concerned I left the military 15 years ago and I am deep undercover in the civilian community: I dress like them...I act like them but I don't trust them and have nothing in common with them”***

These mental health issues can act as a barrier for veterans wanting to connect with support services. Op Courage is trying to de-stigmatise the negative perceptions surrounding mental health in the military and encouraging veterans to seek help. However, some veterans are simply unaware of the support services available to them. This lack of awareness can be attributed to insufficient outreach and information dissemination and we all have a collective responsibility to improve our efforts to educate veterans about the resources at their disposal.

The geographic distribution of veterans in the UK can exacerbate feelings of loneliness social isolation and disconnection. Veterans may live in rural areas with limited access to peer support groups or services or they may choose to distance themselves from other veterans. Military Sexual Trauma survivors for example. Any form of isolation can make it difficult for veterans to form the necessary social connections to access support.

Similarly, unemployment and financial instability, are common among veterans in the UK. Struggling to make ends meet can be overwhelming and make it challenging for veterans to focus on their social and emotional well-being.

***“Since leaving the mob two years ago I live on my own, can’t cook so eat ‘pot noodle sandwiches’ and take-away food.”***

Veterans often face difficulties in re-establishing social networks after leaving the military. The camaraderie and strong bonds formed during service are not easily replicated in civilian life. This loss of a tight-knit community can lead to a sense of isolation. Long waiting times, underfunding, and a lack of specialised care can hinder veterans from accessing the help they need. The perception of inadequate support services can deter veterans from seeking assistance. As can intersectional cultural and generational differences can affect veterans' willingness to engage with support services.

***“I’ve been out 15 years but haven’t made any civilian friends...is that odd?”***

Older veterans may come from a generation less accustomed to seeking help for mental health issues, while younger veterans may have different expectations and preferences regarding support. Some veterans transition from active duty to reserve status, which can lead to a sense of disconnection from both military and civilian communities. Reservists may not receive the same level of support as active-duty personnel, leaving them feeling overlooked.

***“I returned home to live in the North East and have never spoken to anyone, other than you, today, about what I experienced in Northern Ireland. I’ve been married over 40 years and my wife has no idea what’s going on in my head...I didn’t think you could be lonely when you were married, but trust me you can.”***

Issues within veterans' families, such as relationship problems or family breakdowns, can contribute to their feelings of loneliness and disconnection. These challenges can affect veterans' emotional well-being and hinder their ability to access support services. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic and comprehensive approach that includes improving transition support, destigmatising mental health, increasing awareness of available services, enhancing economic opportunities, and fostering stronger social networks within the veteran and civilian community. By recognising and addressing these causes, the UK can better support its veterans and reduce their isolation and disconnection from vital support services.

Veterans in the UK criminal justice system represent a unique demographic with distinct challenges and opportunities to support their rehabilitation. Op Courage is starting to address this issue and offer support to this unique cohort.

Justice system involved veterans comprise of individuals who have served in the British Armed Forces and later become involved in the criminal justice system, either as offenders or as victims. Understanding their experiences and needs is essential for ensuring a fair and effective criminal justice system if we are to address the specific issues that veterans may face.

Many veterans in the criminal justice system have had adverse childhood experiences (ACE'S) along with other mental health problems such as depression or other factors such as institutionalisation which stems from their military service.

***“When that cell door closes I feel safe. I like the structure of life in prison.”***

Collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, the National Health Service, veterans' charities, and the criminal justice system is vital if we are to address the multiple and complex issues faced by veterans involved in criminal activities.

Better coordinated efforts could provide veterans with the necessary support and resources to reintegrate into society successfully. Veterans in the UK criminal justice system represent a vulnerable group with specific needs related to their lives before, during and after military service. It is crucial for the government, veterans' organisations, and the criminal justice system to work together to address these needs, provide appropriate support, and ensure that veterans have the opportunity to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society successfully.

In summary, the "mad, bad, and sad" narrative associated with veterans is a harmful stereotype that perpetuates stigma, hinders veterans' successful transition to civilian life, and undermines the contributions and potential of this diverse group of individuals. To support veterans effectively, it is essential to challenge and dismantle these negative stereotypes, promote a more accurate and nuanced understanding of veterans' experiences, and provide them with the respect, opportunities, and support they deserve as they reintegrate into civilian society.

Forward Assist celebrated its tenth year of operational practice in January 2023. Back in 2013 there were very few veteran specific grassroots charities, community interest companies or community groups in existence to support veterans but over the last decade the landscape has changed exponentially to meet need. Unfortunately, in the past many veterans didn't get the support they needed and as a consequence struggled to assimilate back into mainstream civilian life.

***“Leaving the military was like a bereavement for me. I've never been so depressed in my life and I started drinking every day to block out the misery.”***

Almost all the veterans I worked with at that time were living chaotic lifestyles and had multiple and complex needs. A disproportionate number reported that they had had multiple jobs after leaving but none of them lasted and several had been married three times or more. Divorce was a shared experience and many described themselves as absent parents. The vast majority lived alone or with partners that owned their own homes. A small number that were subject to Community based Court Orders admitted having committed domestic violence. Many reported experiencing chronic social exclusion and chose to self-isolate.

Many claimed to have had negative experiences of trying to engage with civilian based support services that they felt that they did not understand them. Others said that they had no idea what services were available from the Royal British Legion, Combat Stress, or SSAFA.

A significant number of veterans reported that they felt they did not have transferable skills and many reported that they had no idea how to write a CV, send an email or set up a direct debit. One veteran who served 22 years said he had never had an interview during his whole career and the prospect of having one terrified him. A large number admitted having poor literacy and numeracy skills and others admitted that they could not cook and had no understanding of Government recommended guidelines in relation to calorific intake, nutrition or the negative effects of excessive alcohol misuse, and the dual use of prescribed/illicit street drugs.

Too many veterans reported that they had financial difficulties and unpaid debts. Most needed advice information and guidance, in relation to military pensions, criminal law, family law, prison law, housing law and mental health law and /or registering with a GP Dentist or housing provider. These days I can signpost veterans to services that can manage and address the above issues in a matter of minutes anywhere in the country, thanks to the Association of Drop in Centres (ASDIC) network.

Interestingly, the general public think that all veterans in crisis are combat veterans. Yet, over the last decade it has become clear that there is a distinct correlation between self-reported problems that are associated with transition, assimilation, adjustment and identity following service life. Unresolved issues relating to PTSD, bereavement, guilt, shame, addiction and anxiety when coupled with poor coping skills, alcohol and drug use, episodic bouts of insomnia and loneliness all impact negatively upon the ability of many veterans to remain in a permanent employment position or maintain family relations.

This can be particularly relevant if the issues are socioeconomic, physical or psychological in nature and not understood or addressed. Multiple and complex needs require wide-ranging and far-reaching sustained interventions. This is starting to come on line through schemes such as the NHS Veteran Aware scheme and the establishment of the Office for Veterans Affairs which is based in the Cabinet Office.

The Armed Forces Covenant and the locally driven Local Authority Armed Forces forums will hopefully help ensure organisations 'sit at the same table' and look at how the needs of veterans can be collectively met. However, there appears to be a reluctance to share good working practices, information or planned initiatives. This reticence is often driven by individual egos, institutionalised and organisational cultures and/or perceived competitiveness in regard to funding and reputation.

It is essential that qualitative and quantitative statistical data is collected on a regular basis shared and then acted upon. This requires meaningful and respectful partnerships where organisations work closely with one another, acting selflessly in the interest of the 'greater



good' and individual veterans. Specially designed, service delivery models with integrated pathways, specialised support and targeted funding would significantly improve the engagement of marginalised veterans and their families. If we really care about the veteran community we need to ensure that service delivery is both collaborative and in the best interest of the veteran and not just that of the organisation. Collaboration among organisations in the military charity sector is essential for maximizing impact and addressing the diverse needs of veterans and service members. However, despite the shared goal of supporting those who have served their countries, collaboration within this sector often faces numerous challenges.

One significant obstacle to collaboration is the competition for limited resources. Military charities rely heavily on donations, grants, and government funding to operate effectively. In the face of finite resources, organisations may be hesitant to collaborate for fear of losing out on crucial funding. The competitive nature of fundraising can create an environment where organisations prioritise their own interests over collective efforts. This competition for resources can hinder open communication and trust among military charities, preventing them from working together to create comprehensive solutions.

Another factor contributing to the lack of collaboration is the diversity of missions and approaches within the military charity sector. Each organisation often has a specific focus, whether it be mental health support, housing assistance, education, or job placement. While this specialisation allows charities to address specific needs more effectively, it can also create silos that make collaboration challenging. Organisations may fear diluting their impact by working with others whose missions differ, leading to a lack of cooperation in pursuit of common goals.

Additionally, organisational pride and a sense of independence can hinder collaboration. Many military charities are founded and run by individuals with strong personal connections to the military, often veterans themselves. This personal investment can lead to a strong sense of ownership and a desire to maintain control over projects and initiatives. As a result, there may be resistance to relinquishing autonomy and pooling resources with other organisations, even if it means achieving greater overall impact.

Bureaucratic barriers and differing approaches to problem-solving can also contribute to a lack of collaboration. Each organisation may have its own set of policies, procedures, and methodologies, making it challenging to align efforts seamlessly. Differences in organisational culture and leadership styles can further complicate collaborative initiatives, as individuals may find it difficult to navigate and reconcile conflicting approaches.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of collaboration in the military charity sector cannot be overstated. Collaborative efforts can lead to more efficient use of resources, reduced duplication of services, and a holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted needs of veterans and service members. Overcoming the barriers to collaboration requires a shift in mindset,

emphasising the shared commitment to the well-being of those who have served and recognising that collaboration can lead to greater collective impact than individual efforts alone.

### **Rethinking the Resettlement Process.**

Like many others, we are really interested what a successful transition to civilian life looks like and what does wellbeing look like for those that have second, third or fourth careers before retirement and beyond. Interestingly, it's an area that remains under-researched. So, what are the key factors that lead to a successful transition to civilian life for UK military veterans?

As we have evidenced above, wellness for veterans in the UK, as in any country, encompasses various physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health and well-being. It is essential to recognise that the experiences and needs of veterans can vary widely, so what constitutes wellness for one individual may differ from another. Access to quality healthcare including regular check-ups, to address any physical health concerns or injuries resulting from their military service is crucial. Similarly, promoting regular physical activity and a balanced diet can help veterans maintain their physical well-being. Veterans who have sustained injuries during their service may require ongoing rehabilitation and specialised support to maximize their physical functioning. All veterans may face mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or anxiety. Access to mental health care is crucial for diagnosis, treatment, and support. Connecting veterans with peer support groups or organisations can help combat feelings of isolation and provide a sense of community with individuals who have shared experiences. Healthcare providers and support organisations should be trained in trauma-informed care to address the unique needs of veterans and their families.

Transitioning from military service to civilian life can be challenging. Support services, job training, and educational opportunities can assist veterans in this process. Teaching veterans effective coping strategies and stress management techniques can help them navigate life's challenges more successfully.

Assistance with finding meaningful employment or educational opportunities can contribute significantly to veterans' wellness and overall quality of life. Helping veterans translate their military skills and experiences into civilian job qualifications can be crucial for a successful transition. Veterans may require support in finding stable housing, particularly if they are experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Providing financial education and counselling services can help veterans manage their finances and achieve stability.

Involvement in community activities and expanding social networks can provide veterans with a sense of belonging and purpose outside the military. Healthcare providers, support organisations, and communities should be culturally sensitive and aware of the unique needs and experiences of veterans.

The authors of this report are very interested in the lived experience of those individuals/veterans who successfully made the transition from military service to civilian life. We wanted to

talk with combat veterans who did not become homeless, unemployed, involved with the criminal justice system, addicted to drugs and alcohol etc, so that we could advance our understanding of the underlying sociological, psychological environmental and lifestyle factors that enabled them to have successful and happy working careers after their military careers ended. This research has several important implications: By studying those that have struggled with their resettlement and came through the other side we hope to reveal key attributes and themes that may be associated with adjustment and emotional resilience.

By identifying the protective factors that facilitate positive experiences and good life choices, future researchers could develop targeted interventions for service leavers. By investigating successful transitions and the individual veteran responses to post service stress and crisis, this research may provide insights into resilience and each individual veteran's ability to recognise and overcome adversity.

By understanding these pro-social thinking processes and responses to difficult situations it may help inform the development of training courses for service leavers and veterans.

Research that compares the lifestyle, behaviours, and environmental factors that impact veterans' lives can help us identify modifiable risk factors. This information could then inform military and public health interventions to reduce negative transition experiences.

Insights gained from studying successful veterans could lead to the development of more effective resettlement strategies. This could include personalised risk assessments and targeted interventions for those at higher risk.

By studying different approaches and resettlement models across the globe (Five Eyes Partners) We could potentially gain valuable insights into the fundamental processes and system differences that influence successful transition. These models could then help researchers test hypotheses and explore potential avenues of future research in the UK.

In summary, research into successful and unsuccessful veteran resettlement journeys is under researched but essential to advancing our knowledge of positive pathways for veterans returning to civilian life and ultimately the workforce. By studying these populations, we can uncover the environmental, and lifestyle factors that influence susceptibility and resistance to failure that ultimately leads to more effective resettlement journeys and a successful assimilation to civilian life.

### **Talking to the ‘Experts Through Experience.’**

It is a well-documented that leaving the military can be a definitive, disorientating, and complex time for the individual. It is not only well documented it is also very well known in practice by the veteran’s community. This research is based on this premise. Leavers very rarely seem to experience the same process of leaving the military. Some seem to receive considerable help and some seem to get little to none. This often relies on whether the individual leaves the service after their contract expires or if they are forced to leave due to injury or wish to leave quickly for personal reasons subject to regulations. Once institutionalised within the military system the individual may not receive adequate assistance in their transition to civilian life. Becoming institutionalised, is no bad thing, but it must be recognised and dealt with appropriately. This research looks at how we manage change and respond to adversity and setbacks. Interestingly change management models seem to apply to the leaving process. For the purposes of this document it was necessary to construct a control group of forty male and female veterans from a tri service background.

#### **Top Tips for A Successful Transition to Civilian Life.**

**‘What key advice would you give to someone serving in order for them to be successful in civilian life?’**

The answers have been encouragingly constructive. Each of the individuals asked have been successful in their civilian lives. The answers have been collated and similarities have been identified creating similar patterns of suggestions.

*“Personally, I think today the transition from military to civilian life is better catered for than when I left. For example, qualifications obtained in the military can now be transferred into a civilian qualification, that includes special qualifications and command courses which are now converted to “Management courses”, unheard of in my time. I did a year’s training to be a Mountain Leader a course longer and more in depth than any civilian equivalent but it counted for nothing in civilian life, that thankfully is now recognised. There were very few organisation’s (at least that I knew of) that stood ready to support leavers, you did your leaving routine, received your testimonial, handed in your ID card and walked out the main gate.”*

*“When I was in the Sgt’s mess in 45 Commando there were blokes there living in the mess as inliers with six months left to do and not a clue what they were going to do when they left, or where they would live. Similarly, others were married with a family living in married quarters with no idea of where they would go or live when they finished.”*

*“There were Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO’s) and above who preached the Seven P’s, Prior Planning and Preparation Prevents Piss Poor Performance. I think some of*

***them could not come to terms with the fact that it was all about to end and something would turn up. Unfortunately for many it didn't."***

***"My transition was planned well in advance. I still had five years to serve to my 22 years, but it was time to go. I was married. Once I'd decided to leave, I searched around for a job that would provide security and would also be interesting, I always had the option of staying but once I had decided to go and had a firm offer of employment that was the path I went down regardless of 'offers' from the service to entice me to stay."***

***No matter your rank in the services, when you walk out the main gate for the last time you are a mister, a civvy, nobody knows your history and probably doesn't care, nobody owes you anything. Get used to it. Only your oppo's know what you've been through and achieved hence stay in touch.***

***"I made sure I attended a resettlement course as it was then, and did courses in plastering, dry lining, just in case. I kept in touch with oppo's and joined the Royal Marine Reserves where I met a few former oppo's I'd served with. I never looked back once I walked out of the main gate. I left after 18 years' service with a bunch of flowers for my wife and a pewter mug for myself. (See above, nobody owes you anything). I have no regrets about leaving but would do it all again in a heartbeat."***

***"As a woman veteran I found leaving the military and finding another job quite easy. I used the last year of my service to gain civilian counselling qualifications and set up a small business which has really taken off. I would recommend self-employment to any veteran."***

***"Back in the early 80's, it was a case of you left so get on with it. The fact I had been medically discharged meant Jack Shit. In my case, there was no going back so I worked wherever and whenever I could to get money. What worked for me was enrolling in an evening class at a local college of further education and acquiring both 'O' levels and then 'A' levels. Once I had those in the bag, I was able to train and qualify as a registered Social Worker and re-invented myself that way. It was a wise decision and I've been in full-time employment for the past 39 years. My advice...look after your family, if you can live a sober lifestyle, never stop learning new skills and bear in mind you'll never meet anyone in a pub who's trying to better themselves. "***

***"Plan your exit well in advance. That includes what job you intend to go for, do you need to retrain, how long will that take, can you survive financially during that period if needed, have interviews well in advance, have an offer of other employment before you leave. Think about where in the country you will move to, accommodation, travel, commuting."***

*“Finances, think about your new job’s salary, your military pension (what to do with it and how long before you get it) can you survive financially if your job fall’s through or you leave it.”*

*“Keep in touch with oppo’s, don’t cut off ties, stay in touch, ask for advice if required, attend any reunions if you can, Always good for networking.”*

*“Maintain your standards, you will shine, but bear in mind your sense of humour will differ greatly from most civilian colleagues. Dark humour may not go down well. They may not understand, naked bar, dead ants, or minesweeping. Be warned...Your run ashore will be very different.”*

*“Never forget that you are the master of your future destiny. Be grateful for any help support and advice you get and always say thank you.”*

*Do your own research, what courses/qualifications are best for the career path you are looking into... Ultimately though, it is the responsibility of the individual to push for what they need to know/learn/qualify within, not everything is handed across to you in a nice 'To do' folder. Maybe slightly harsh but I have also seen a lot of blame directed at the military for what boils down to common sense and self-research. I hear all too often, 'I haven't had time.’*

*“Plan your exit well in advance. Plan, Plan, Plan. That includes what job you intend to go for, do you need to retrain, how long will that take, can you survive financially during that period if needed, have interviews well in advance, have an offer of other employment before you actually leave. Think about where in the country you will move to, accommodation, travel, commuting”*

*“Also keep in mind that for most, the career outside the service is going to be much longer than it was in the services. So, make a list of what you want to do and consider how viable they are, then try and plot a path towards each goal.”*

*“Language and ability: Most ex-military will scare the crap out of their civilian counterparts as they are doers.”*

*“Do your research... plan your second career through the numerous agencies set up to assist such as the Career Transition partnership (CTP), the Royal Marines Association (RMA)*

*“Suitable targets should be set and plans made to achieve them. Help from inside the Services is there, you just need to search for it. This is a proactive role that needs to be taken up by the individual. “*

*“Start looking 3 – 5 years before leaving, if you are working to the end of your contract and have a planned date for leaving.*

***“Start looking early, I would say at least two years out, ideally three years, start to look at ideal courses that suit you and are of interest, and start to get some qualifications behind you if you have not already done so.”***

***“You have to start thinking about your resettlement from the moment you join up in many ways, especially if you see your military trade as one you wish to take forward to civilian life.”***

***“Five years BEFORE leaving you should have an “unfiltered” presentation and Q&A on life after the service.”***

***“Learn how to prepare a civilian orientated curriculum vitae (CV.) It is a developing field so you must stay with current practice. Preparing a CV is paramount for a seamless move into the civilian work market. It is essential that you take advice on this and spend considerable time perfecting it. It must also be relevant to the civilian sector.”***

***“My advice is ‘CV’s - the difficulty lies in translating military qualifications into civilian ones. Don’t fall into the trap of going to, so called CV expert writers. As a former employer I understood the importance of someone who had passed selection or been on Senior Brecon. Civilian employers don’t. Try and ensure your CV is suitable for the job you are applying for and change/review it for every application and ensure it’s relevant.”***

***“Transferring current military qualifications into civilian qualifications, especially at managerial levels. Extract as much info as you can from the resettlement courses, including interview practice/scenarios, and CV building.”***

***“Prepare your CV and references”***

***“Go back to education. It gives you a relevant qualification that the civilian employer understands. It improves your education and it gives you a significant ‘success loop’ which helps with self-confidence.”***

***“Completing a degree and then a master’s degree was the best thing I ever did and it has given me confidence in myself to move forwards and sell myself. Achieving high level education means that I can hold my head up with some of the finest in our land.”***

***“The obvious one is to gain as many qualifications you can pre and immediately after leaving the services while they have free/grants to cover the financial costs. Of course, academic certificates are important but also vocational ones too e.g. first aid, IT, and driving licences.”***

***“Keep yourself fit and healthy. Fitness is taken for granted in the military. This is not so much the case in the civilian world. However, being off sick is normal in the civilian world and you can make yourself highly employable by being fit and healthy and never being off sick. This is something that must be worked on.”***

***“The evidence seems to suggest that when leaving the military, you should consider a sound plan and plan a clean exit.”***

***“Create relativity for your new environment by making yourself relevant to the civilian workplace and create a relevant CV.”***

***“Get help from anyone who is qualified to give it. This is a hard thing to do. Nevertheless, ask for help when you need it”***

***“Make a list of people who are willing to help and who can actually help. Beware of people who want to charge you for their services.”***

***“Work hard at family relationships it’s the ultimate support mechanism.”***

***“Keep fit and healthy as this will make your more employable. Keeping fit is already known as a process and this can be adapted to the new world demands.”***

***“Successfully leaving the military requires hard work, dedication and application by the leaver and it is essential to adapt your speaking and language skills.”***

***“Speak to a registered financial advisor every couple of years to make sure that your military pension and savings are working for you. If someone gets in touch asking you to move your money to them for a better return... don’t. You will regret it.”***

***“if you begin to struggle with your mental or physical health let your Dr know you are a veteran and access the support you are entitled to.”***

***“Life can be lonely when you leave. Prepare for it. If you have a hobby or a sport you like, then join a local club and meet new people it can be life changing.”***

***“You are more than your time in the military and have a lot of life and living left in front of you. Don’t get stuck in the past, keep up to date with technology and stay in touch with your buddies.”***

## **Conclusion**

Interacting with veterans who have made a successful transition can serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for those who are currently in the process of transitioning. Hearing their stories of overcoming challenges and achieving their goals can instil a sense of hope and determination in others. Successful veterans can provide valuable insights and practical guidance on how to navigate the transition process. They can share tips and strategies for finding employment, pursuing education or training, and adapting to civilian culture. Building relationships with veterans who have successfully transitioned can lead to mentorship opportunities. A mentor can offer personalised advice, support, and direction to individuals making the transition, helping them make informed decisions and avoid common pitfalls. Veterans who have successfully transitioned often have extensive networks in both the military and civilian sectors. Connecting with them can open doors to job opportunities,



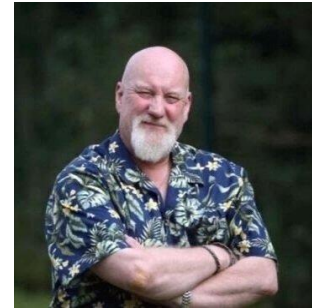
introductions to influential contacts, and access to resources that can facilitate the transition. Listening to the experiences of successful veterans can provide a more realistic perspective on what to expect during the transition process. It can help individuals set achievable goals and prepare for the challenges they may encounter. Transitioning from the military to civilian life can be emotionally challenging. Successful older veterans can offer emotional support and a sense of camaraderie to those who may be feeling isolated or uncertain during this period. Engaging with veterans who have made successful transitions fosters a sense of community and camaraderie among those who have served. It helps create a supportive network where individuals can share their experiences, seek advice, and collaborate on various initiatives. Successful veterans have a lot to give back and can help challenge stereotypes and reduce the stigma associated with military service. Their stories demonstrate that veterans are capable of thriving in civilian life and contributing positively to society.

In conclusion, talking to veterans who have made a successful transition is essential because it provides inspiration, practical guidance, mentorship, networking opportunities, emotional support, and community building. Their experiences can help current and future veterans navigate the transition process more effectively and contribute to a more supportive and informed veteran community.

Authors: Tony Wright & Chris Pretty

### **Tony Wright, Founder & Chief Executive Forward Assist**

Tony joined the Royal Marines in 1978 and was medically discharged in 1981 after seriously injuring his shoulder during basic training. Tony established Forward Assist (2013) & Salute Her UK (2021) He originally started work in the service charity sector when he set up About Turn CIC in 2009 to assist veterans involved with the CJS make a successful transition from Prison to the community. Following a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship in 2011, which involved a six-week research trip to the USA, he changed his direction of travel and began to focus on supporting combat veterans who had difficulty accessing trauma



informed care and services. He is particularly supportive of those that have survived Military Sexual Assault (MSA) and now suffer from Moral Injury, Post Traumatic Stress and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). A Qualified and Registered Social Worker, Former Probation Officer, and Home Office Adviser with over 39 years' experience of working in a variety of senior management positions within the social welfare and voluntary sector. Tony describes himself as a political activist, campaigner and agent of change. Forward Assists research projects and their ability to design 'needs led' services for invisible populations has led to significant policy change within the UK Military and increased understanding and awareness of the unmet intersectional needs of minority groups. He lives a life led by sobriety, commitment, compassion and being of service to others.

### **CHRIS PRETTY (VETERAN PEER RESEARCHER)**

Born in West Africa and educated in Suffolk. I joined the Royal Marines in 1978 in the same Troop as Tony Wright and fought in the Falklands War of 1982 and in Northern Ireland. Many skills were gained during my service, of which many were irrelevant to civilian life unless severely adapted before use. Leaving the Corps was a peculiar moment and required some considerable effort to get things right in the world. Working in the outdoors as a climbing instructor and then a General Manager of an Outdoor Centre gave me good people and management skills but little money. This led to a calculated move into the teaching profession and fulltime work in colleges of further education for two decades which culminated in becoming the



Programme Manager and Lecturer of a Degree course. I also completed a variety of research projects with Essex University during my academic career. All through my career in education I continued to climb and develop my skills as a professional mountaineer. On completion of an Honours Degree, a Teaching Degree and then a master's degree I found life to be significantly better and over the last ten years 10 years I began work with several UK veterans' charities by delivering Climbing and Mountaineering training for their beneficiaries. This was especially so for those veterans accessing the support of Forward Assist and their families. I also took part in a Forward Assist Veterans exchange in America and for the last two years have worked with Tony to organise and facilitate veteran respite/retreats for combat veterans in France. I look forward to working with Tony on future veteran retreats and innovative lived experience research projects. In my spare time I enjoy facilitating battlefield tours in Europe and I am also a soon to be published author with Pen and Sword Publishers.



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