



Empowering Veterans to thrive in Workplace & Community

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**Key Points:**

- Military service leavers' mental health is negatively impacted by identity loss and social disconnection.
- Positive group membership enhances mental health and general well-being.
- Contemporary transition support programs are limited to supporting employment and ignore the social aspects of the transition to veterancy.

**Veteran Connection Program (VCP):**

- VCP is an evidence-based psycho-educational intervention designed to empower service leavers to develop supportive social group memberships and take control of their wellbeing.
- VCP helps veterans by managing identity loss and enhances their social group memberships in ways that support their future goals and values
- **Preliminary results suggest that VCP enhances well-being, self-efficacy, and aspects of social identity, particularly in fostering a sense of purpose and reducing loneliness.**

## Veteran Connection Programme - Stakeholder Summary

### The problem

Each year, around 16,000 individuals leave the UK Armed Forces, many of whom struggle due to social isolation and loneliness (SIL) compounding mental health issues such as depression, PTSD, and suicidality. Existing transition programs rarely address these social challenges, leaving veterans ill-prepared to establish supportive civilian networks. NHS and public services bear substantial costs of these 'failed' transitions, highlighting an urgent need for targeted interventions that foster healthy, integrated civilian lives.

Many of these outcomes are influenced by individuals' experiences during the military-to-civilian transition, with many service-leavers feeling socially isolated after leaving the military, and half of veterans reporting feeling lonely. There are programmes designed to reduce the stress of leaving the military, but these mostly focus on helping service-leavers find jobs and

housing. While these are important issues, these programmes all but ignore the social isolation and lack of social support affecting service-leavers' health.

### Connecting Social Groups to Health

Research has repeatedly shown that positive group memberships enhance physical health, longevity, mental health, and general well-being. It has been shown that maintaining and gaining group memberships can protect us from many health impacts – especially during life transitions, such as becoming a student, a parent, a retiree, or a veteran – because such groups provide us with valuable resources we can rely on in times of stress.

### Supporting military service-leavers and veterans

Our intervention— the **Veteran Connection Program (VCP)** has been adapted from an existing

psycho-educational intervention called Groups 4 Health (G4H). G4H has been extensively tested in clinical populations, retirees, and elite athletes, and has been shown to significantly reduce social anxiety, loneliness and depression, and led to reductions in self-reported depression, stress, anxiety, and loneliness. Together with veterans in the UK and Australia, we have adapted G4H to fit the needs of service leavers.

As a non-medical intervention, VCP addresses identity and disconnection issues in veterans in a group-based intervention, and as such it can be easily integrated into existing career transition programmes. Rather than competing with existing transition support programmes, we perceived VCP as complementary to and supportive of the support that service-leavers already receive. As such, VCP is focused on transitioning veterans making sense of their experiences and cultivate the necessary resources alongside other veterans, to develop the confidence needed to find and sustain meaningful group memberships.

Co-delivered by trained veterans who have successfully transitioned, VCP is an adaptable and flexible group-based programme that can be delivered in a two-day workshop or in 5 weekly modules with a one-hour individual orientation and a one-hour group-based follow up session.

### **Proof of Concept showing promising results:**

In 2024 we conducted a small VCP acceptability trial with 21 participants. The results are promising. Participants showed significant improvements in thriving, group gain, self-efficacy in managing their social transition, and Military-Civilian Adjustment and Reintegration (MCARM). The subscales pertaining to beliefs about civilians and purpose and connection showed particularly improved results, which was also corroborated by participants reporting participation in more social groups after the intervention.

In post-intervention interviews participants reported that VCP *“helped massively”*, *“it showed veterans that they’ll be ok”*. Participants discussed increased normalisation, reduction of stigma, ability to be vulnerable, and increased connections with other veterans and civilians.

**These preliminary findings suggest that the intervention enhanced well-being, self-efficacy, and aspects of social identity, particularly in fostering a sense of purpose and reducing**

#### **Testimonies from Participants:**

*“You’d see the look in their eye of like ‘I’m not by myself anymore... I’m not abnormal. This is okay... They’re not alone.”*

*“The boys were vulnerable, which you don’t usually see, and you don’t see it in uniform. Seeing the vulnerability... that’s the strength of the program.”*

*“[The program] creates an opportunity where there’s reciprocation of information that creates an environment of respect, empathy, compassion.”*

*“I think it was a week after we did the first sessions, I rang [another participant] and said, ‘mate, let’s catch up on the weekend and we’ll just bring your family.”*

*“[VCP] just helped me refocus in on being more tolerant to people around me.”*

#### **loneliness.**

### **Next Steps – We need your help**

To show that VCP is fit for purpose and a useful tool for NHS practitioners and veteran charities, we are currently seeking project partners who can help us recruit 20-30 additional veterans for our research project. This will help us to confirm that VCP is appropriate and practical for service-leavers. The workshops can be delivered free of charge on your premises. Participating veterans

will receive a small reimbursement for their participation in VCP and the associated research activities (an interview and three brief online surveys).

### What we offer

During the research phase, VCP is a free offer that can supplement your existing service provision for veterans transitioning out of the Armed Forces.

It is specifically designed to work alongside existing programmes, and the research allows us to feedback specific service needs voiced by clients

participating in the programme. For example, during the first trials, which were run with some of our partners listed below, participants discussed a range of additional supports and services, which have now been implemented veteran service portfolio.

**Please join us in making VCP a reality, so that veterans can manage their own military-to-civilian transition more confidently and thrive in their communities and workplaces.**

### Our Partners



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