Written evidence submitted by Forward Assist

Forward Assist is a registered Charity in England & Wales 1150408

Forward Assist has established a Gender Specific Service for Women veterans called Salute Her. The aim of the project is to provide a Voice Advocating Holistic Compassionate Treatment & Care for Women Veterans whilst Promoting Strategic Partnerships to Improve Access to ‘Gender Specific Services’

Over the last two years Forward Assist has actively championed ‘gender specific’ mental health interventions for women veterans. Forward Assist’s Founder & CEO Tony Wright is a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), that used to be chaired by Kelly Tolhurst MP and BASW.


Two of the Recommendations relating to women veterans are:

- 24. Ensure that veteran mental health services continue to be supported and ensure plans include social work interventions that deliver preventive and restorative outcomes.

- 25. Establish a government inquiry into the mental health of female veterans with a focus on developing a framework to support them.

Emma Lewell Buck MP (Patron for Forward Assist) has been working with our charity to highlight the unmet women veterans mental health needs given that they are at this juncture as a hidden population. There is very little statistical data that accurately reflects the current level of mental health issues experienced by serving female personnel and women veterans. It is the view of Team Forward Assist that these statistics are as yet, not measured properly or fully understood.

In February 2017 Forward Assist travelled to Washington DC to meet with Kayla Williams the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs Centre for Women Veterans. The Team were able to visit several ‘grass roots’ Women Veterans community projects, allowing the team to identify and share best practice.

On 14th March 2017 the APPG hosted a ‘Women Veterans Roundtable Event’ at the Houses of Parliament. The event chaired by Emma Lewell - Buck MP and attended by Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Kelly Tolhurst MP, Dame Vera Baird (Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumberland) and Maddie Jennings from the British Association of Social Workers, along with representatives from SSAFA and Derby University. The panel heard representations from five women veterans accessing support from Forward Assist and each described their ‘lived experience’ of life after military service.
• Women Veterans can accurately be described as a hidden population within the civilian community.

• Women Service Personnel make up 9% of British Armed Forces.

• Historically, Women veterans have been neglected by politicians and by wider support services. The services that currently exist are specifically designed for men.

• There has been no national mapping exercise carried out to find out what happens to female veterans after they leave military service.

• Between October 2015 and September 2106, a total of 6,115 armed services personnel – 1,188 of them women - received an MOD Mental Health Disorder Assessment (this does not include all of those people who went for help elsewhere).

• The 2015, British Army ‘Speak Out’ Report on Sexual Harassment found that nearly four out of 10 women serving had received unwanted comments or been exposed to material of a sexual nature.

• Between July and December 2015, 1,439 members of the armed forces – 40 of them women - went to prison.

• US studies show that female veterans are 2 to 3 times more likely than the general female population to take their own lives.

• The APPG on Social Work’s Mental Health Report recommended that mental health services for all veterans include social work interventions that deliver preventative and restorative outcomes as well as establishing a Government inquiry into the mental health of female veterans.

Women Veterans are a hidden population that are not easy to identify. An area of good practice we can learn from is in Canada. Canada for many years have identified veterans using an encrypted card, this card tracks their health and social care needs enabling Veterans to receive tailored support.

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