

Mental Health First Aid training a 'game changer' for service personnel and families

Government urged to give mental health first aid training to Armed Forces

Today [Tuesday 3rd May] the independent think tank Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) urged the government to give mental health first aid training to all levels of the British Armed Forces.

Key recommendations made in the CSJ report '**Military Families and Transition**' include that the training be introduced across the Forces on a 'routine' basis, beginning during basic training.

Recognising that mental health issues may disproportionately affect the military, the CSJ report presents the government with an opportunity to build upon the support available to serving personnel, veterans, and their families. Up to 11,000 members of the military were diagnosed with mental health issues such as PTSD and depression between 2007 and 2013 and many more go undiagnosed and untreated [1].

According to the report, MHFA training could prove a "game changer" for working with both families and service personnel, by enabling them "to develop awareness and skills to help them and their families spot the signs of poor mental health and know how to respond." Research has found that more than 70% of serving personnel fear seeking help for mental health issues out of concern that their colleagues and managers might have less confidence in them or treat them differently, while more than one in three felt unable to tell their families [2].

Speaking at the CSJ report launch, Johnny Mercer MP, who sits on the Government's Defence Committee, said: "This report addresses some key areas and I would urge the Ministry of Defence to look at each recommendation contained within it."

MHFA England, the Community Interest Company which delivers the training, has approved 180 specialist instructors to deliver a MHFA course tailored to the Armed Forces community. To date, almost 6,000 members of the serving community and their families have qualified as Armed Forces Mental Health First Aiders.

Poppy Jaman, CEO of MHFA England, said:

“This report underlines the feedback we already have from the Armed Forces community that MHFA is a vital source of support. We are glad that the unique mental health challenges faced by military personnel, veterans, and families are being acknowledged and that the Government have the opportunity to offer this support. With 180 Armed Forces instructors already delivering the course within the community, we are in a strong position to continue rolling out training and we look forward to being able to provide further support to the people who serve our country.”

The CSJ recommendations echo preliminary results from an independent evaluation of the Armed Forces MHFA training programme, released by the University of Gloucestershire in November 2015, which found that the project “improves trainees’ knowledge of mental health, enhances their attitude towards mental health issues, and increases their confidence in supporting those with mental health issues” [3].

In November 2015, veterans, high-ranking military officers, and MPs attended an event at the House of Lords at which a wide range of Armed Forces personnel spoke out to support the need for the MHFA training.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

A video highlighting how MHFA can benefit the whole serving, veteran and wider Armed Forces communities can be found at [youtube.com/watch?v=Ywxxd4YCcA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ywxxd4YCcA)

For further information about MHFA England, to arrange interviews or request photography, please email Danielle Rosen at danielle@mhfaengland.org or call 020 7250 8388.

Footnotes:

[1] Ministry of Defence, 2015: Annual Mental Health Report 2014/15

[2] Kings College London, 2011: The stigma of mental health problems and other barriers to care in the UK Armed Forces

[3] University of Gloucestershire, 2015: Preliminary results from an evaluation of the Armed Forces MHFA training programme



About MHFA England:

1. MHFA England is a Community Interest Company, established in 2009.
2. MHFA England delivers the Mental Health First Aid course, the mental health equivalent of physical first aid, to members of the public, organisations, healthcare professionals and schools. The training provides participants with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues in someone and effectively guide the person towards the right support services.
3. The core principles of MHFA include: spotting the signs of a mental health issue, knowing how to stop the distress from getting worse and creating confidence in helping someone who is experiencing an issue.
4. To date over 130,000 people in the UK are Mental Health First Aid trained.
5. As well as the standard MHFA and Armed Forces MHFA, the organisation runs a number of other bespoke courses including Youth MHFA and MHFA Workplace.
6. More information about MHFA England and its courses can be found at **www.mhfaengland.org** or by emailing **info@mhfaengland.org**