

<b>Institution:</b> Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA20		
<b>Title of case study:</b> 21st century Armed Forces Community (AFC): Reappraising TRBL Wellbeing Support		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> July 2017-Jun 2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Giles Barrett	Reader in Criminology	01/08/1994 to date
Dr Emma Murray	Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice	20/09/2010 to date
Dr Daniel Marshall	Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice	01/08/2016 to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> March 2018-December 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>The Royal British Legion (TRBL) provides recreational opportunities for the whole Armed Forces Community (AFC). Established in 1948, the Legion's Breaks Service, a cornerstone for ex-military recreation and a provider of support and well-being for the whole services community, reached an average of 11,800 beneficiaries per year at an average annual cost of GBP6.7 million. Beneficiaries ranged in age from new-borns to centenarians.</p> <p>The Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion (CCSE) led a major national, transformative, outcome-based evaluation of the Service (2017-18). The evidence-base from this wide spectrum analysis contributed to a TRBL organisational review of provision in the area of well-being, recovery and veteran support with rising incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) becoming a key concern.</p> <p>The Break Service evaluation contributed to a major strategic realignment that saw an end to free wellbeing holidays and the closure of the four Breaks Centres in England in January 2020 and an accelerated closure in Portrush, Northern Ireland in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (original closure date was set for June 2020). In so doing, this represented a saving of nearly GBP7 million pounds per year. The saved revenue has been channelled directly into schemes that support beneficiaries with the greatest need.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Since the inception of the Service in 1948, this investigation was the first robust national evaluation conducted on the TRBL Breaks Service. It specifically examined the Service's impact on mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusion and sense of community, personal relationships and confidence of adult beneficiaries, as well as on the confidence and self-esteem of military children [Sec.3, Ref.1]. AFC organisations nationally are facing unprecedented levels of mental health issues among veterans. PTSD takes approximately seven years to manifest itself so a spike in PTSD cases is a significant concern following the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. There has also been an alarming rise in the number of suicides among serving and ex-serving personnel (seventy-one people in 2018 alone). The MoD spends GBP22 million per year on mental health care for veterans with a further GBP6 million in support channelled via the NHS. However, AFC charities argue this global figure is insufficient in the current climate given the levels of poor mental health care and military-related suicides. To underscore the severity of the issues, Combat Stress (CS), an AFC-related mental health charity, reported in 2020 that it would be unable to take on any new referrals in England and Wales. CS is facing up to a catastrophic reduction in its funding partly</p>		

due to a cut in its NHS funding (overall funding of GBP16 million reduced to GBP10 million). The crisis-hit social care system in England, an ageing population and greater life expectancy are also leading to unprecedented demands on AFC charities. Decades of squeezed government funding have left older veterans and older people more generally with inadequate care and crippling costs in the face of strict qualification rules for NHS continuing health care. The AFC is changing, and the types of support needed are growing increasingly complex in the current era. Those charged with delivering that support need better training and staff development [Sec.3, Ref.2]. Since 2016, TRBL has seen a 20% increase in people needing basic support with housing, financial issues, mental health and well-being, and mobility. In this time, it has also seen the average expenditure per household through its immediate needs funding rise 45% from GBP900 to GBP1330. In recent years, the regulatory framework in which charities operate has rightly become more robust to ensure organisations operate to the highest standards. However regulatory changes including the introduction of the Fundraising Regulator and General Data Protection Regulation have increased pressure on the charity's existing resources. The evaluation was innovative in 3 key ways:

1. **A multifaceted methodological and data collection procedure collected intelligence from a variety of stakeholder groups** [Sec.3, Ref.1] including a wide-range of beneficiary groups and Break Service staff via thirteen different research methods. With a strong focus on what works, the strategic research design engaged with and elicited the views of the diverse stakeholder groups including seldom-heard groups.
2. **The service evaluation engaged with 2,354 participants ranging in age from young children to centenarian veterans, enabling the evidencing and showcasing of many incidences of good practice but this wide ranging sample also brought an evidence-based understanding to areas requiring improvement and where procedures and practices needed to be ramped up to adequately safeguard beneficiaries** [Sec.3, Ref.1]. For example, child breaks provision by an out-sourced provider were found to be highly problematic in some regards. The research exposed concerns over the safeguarding of children during adventure breaks. The LJMU researchers disclosed these promptly at the second in a series of Knowledge Exchange Events (KEEs). The impact of this proactive and iterative process of information sharing was that adventure breaks for 2018-19 were suspended with immediate effect pending a thorough review.
3. **The evaluation utilised an effective method for the ongoing systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Service on beneficiary wellbeing. A bespoke Breaks Centre Wellbeing Scale (BCBWBS) was devised** which drew upon the widely known and internationally respected Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) [Sec.3, Ref.1]. The BCBWBS demonstrated that wellbeing improves substantially during holiday breaks and then largely returns to pre-break levels. In more detail, the BCBWBS revealed that the observed differences in average scores at the start of the break compared to the scores at the end of the break were statistically significant (scores rose from 50 at start of break to 53 at end of break). Up to six weeks after the break, BCBWBS returned to the levels observed before the holiday. The finding that wellbeing scores fall back to previous levels 4-6 weeks after the break is in line with other published studies that identify a short-lived impact of holidays on wellbeing.

### 3. References to the research

1. Barrett, G., Murray, E. and Marshall, D. (2019) The National Evaluation of the Royal British Legion's Breaks Service [online] Available at: <http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/12930/>
2. Barrett, G., Marshall, D. and Murray, E. (2019) Action Learning Report: A follow-up to the National Evaluation [online] Available at: <http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/12934/>

### 4. Details of the impact

The detailed findings of the national evaluation have significantly impacted upon the future of TRBL's Breaks Service both at the local Break Centre level and at the national level through policy developments. The impact of the research evaluation on TRBL Breaks Service policy and practice is summarised below:

#### **Influence on Evidence Based Decision-making Process**

TRBL published a foreword [Sec.5, Ref.1] to the National evaluation of Breaks Services 2017-18 report in which the Director of Operations at TRBL stated "this report details an intensive and all-encompassing 12-month evaluation of the Legion's Breaks Services. The intended focus of the research was to measure the impact of the service upon the physical well-being, mental wellbeing, social isolation and exclusion, personal relationships, and confidence/self-esteem of beneficiaries – yet the research team's tireless flexibility when faced with a complex and wide reaching piece has led to a much richer set of findings than we had anticipated. This approach should be acknowledged as one, which has brought academic rigour and accessibility together throughout the research process and in the compiling of the report, which follows. Through an insightful set of findings and recommendations we have gained knowledge about the experiences of beneficiaries and staff, as well as an understanding of current policy. While I commend this document in its entirety, I also note the many methods, which were brought to this evaluative research design. This has helped inform a richer understanding of the relationship between hospitality and well-being interventions, and indeed how the Legion specifically has created a unique association between the two. I would also draw attention to the important lessons gleaned about Break Centre locations (and their associated strengths and challenges); the needs of beneficiaries now and in the future, eligibility, and the voices of staff which will no doubt inform our forthcoming strategy" [Sec.5, Ref.1 Ref.2].

#### **Impact on Continuous Service Improvement**

A series of KEEs with the research sponsors enabled a cyclical process of immediate information sharing to take place and on each occasion, the LJMU team were tasked with answering the key questions of what works and what does not work? On one such occasion, breaks provision by an out-sourced provider were found to be highly problematic in some regards. The research exposed concerns over the safeguarding of children during adventure breaks. The LJMU researchers disclosed these promptly at the second in a series of KEEs [Sec.5, Ref.2]. The impact of this proactive and iterative process of information sharing was that adventure breaks for 2018-19 were suspended with immediate effect pending a thorough review [Sec.5, Ref.3].

#### **Impact on the Future of TRBL Breaks Services**

TRBL's subsequent cost-benefit analysis and strategic re-alignment of all its charitable activities followed LJMU's report, which pinpointed the short-term impact of holidays [Sec.5, Ref.3 Ref.4].

In addition, the evaluation report also highlighted evidence where the Breaks Service could act as a meaningful gatekeeper to other Legion services and services available more generally through wider partnerships but also where the Service was falling short in this regard. In light of the financial investment in the Breaks Service amidst other pressing concerns, the TRBL Executive Board and Board of Trustees on the advice of a working group established in January 2019, led by the Director of Operations took the decision to move to a managed closure of the whole Breaks Service. Aside from the short-term impacts of breaks on wellbeing, the key decisive factors in this major decision to phase out the Breaks Service was the following three factors:

1. The cost of operating the four UK Break Centres was GBP4.8 million per annum.
2. Well-developed links between the Breaks Service and other Legion welfare were not evident in the evaluation report.
3. The key service offer from Break Centres of providing a free holiday to beneficiaries was considered to be of less relative value than other TRBL services designed to meet needs that are more significant.

The GBP4.8 million direct saving from the closure of the Breaks Centres and the global figure of approximately GBP6.7 million per year derived from the closure of all break-related services has enabled TRBL to focus investment on areas it considers highly significant for the twenty-first century AFC. There has been a rapid increase in the number of people TRBL supports that are facing multiple and often complex issues that require far greater resources than current delivery routes support, with the average expenditure per household through Immediate Needs Grants increasing from GBP900 to GBP1,330 (45%) since 2016. The costs associated with providing residential and nursing care within TRBL care homes have also increased significantly over the last ten years at a time of long-term reductions in local authority funding for adult social care. Funds saved through ceasing the delivery of Break Services is being re-invested in increased funding for Immediate Needs Grants and Care Services [Sec.5, Ref.3].

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Barrett, G., Murray, E. and Marshall, D. (2019) The National Evaluation of the Royal British Legion's Breaks Service, London: The Royal British Legion
2. Knowledge Exchange PowerPoint Presentation [dated 15 March 2018]
3. TRBL Testimonial Letter from Assistant Director of Operations [dated 4 March 2020]
4. Letter announcing TRBL Strategic Review [dated 21 November 2019]