

Supporting vulnerable veterans at risk of offending

For most veterans, the transition to civilian life is usually successful. Sadly, for some, the transition can be less smooth and factors such as housing problems and homelessness, debt, health issues e.g., mental illness and PTSD, or drug and alcohol misuse, can lead some veterans to be at risk of offending, or experiencing vulnerabilities

The Ministry of Justice and Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons estimate that between 4% and 6% of the Prison Population is made up of veterans. Whilst veterans offending can be for a range of offences, veteran offending is over-represented in violent crimes, including domestic violence and sex offences.

These offences have a very significant impact on families and communities, so finding a way to effectively support veterans in the Criminal Justice System to enable them to reduce their offending is vital.

South Yorkshire Police has been working with Project Nova (delivered in partnership between RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity and Walking with The Wounded) to offer help to those who have been arrested and enter police custody. Project Nova also supports veterans who have self-referred or been referred by specialist police teams/other statutory organisations, because they are at risk of arrest or identified as vulnerable.

The unique initiative improves the lives of ex-Forces personnel by preventing them from reaching the point of arrest, tackling root-cause issues head-on and helping them to live law abiding lives.

To find out if someone is eligible for support, they should be asked "Have you ever served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces?". Veterans may be suspicious of why they are being asked that question, so it is helpful to follow the question immediately by clarifying with the following statement "If you have served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, under the Armed Forces Covenant we may be able to refer you to specialist support." This will offer assurance to the veteran that disclosing this information is of benefit to them.

Upon receiving a referral, Project Nova co-ordinators undertake a holistic needs assessment to establish what support is required by the individual, followed by emotional and practical support offered through a network of services, statutory organisations, and charities. Project Nova co-ordinators understand the experiences of ex-servicemen and women both during and after their military careers – empathy which gives veterans the strength they need to make positive changes to their lives.

Elaine Mason – Project Nova case worker says: "Ex-Servicemen and women can be reluctant to engage with mainstream support, as they do not feel that their life experience is well understood. With the support of South Yorkshire Police and other key stakeholders we can improve the lives of veterans by preventing them from reaching the point of arrest, by tackling the social issues at the root cause of social unrest. This will, in turn, improve the lives of everyone in the South Yorkshire area, and beyond, by reducing veteran offending."



The excellent joint working conducted by South Yorkshire Police and Project Nova staff has enabled over 200 referrals to have been made annually to Project Nova and this collaborative partnership highlights to ongoing commitment to veteran vulnerability.

Project Nova also continues to help and support veterans who have also served with South Yorkshire Police and over the past year has successfully assisted six retired and serving officers within South Yorkshire and Humberside into better health and well-being.

To make a Project Nova referral, a member of Police staff or other agency should obtain consent from the individual and then contact the Project Nova team, either by phone (0800 917 7299) or email (info.nst@rfea.cjsm.net).

For more information visit: www.projectnova.org.uk

Steven Brookes

Project Nova Regional Manager