

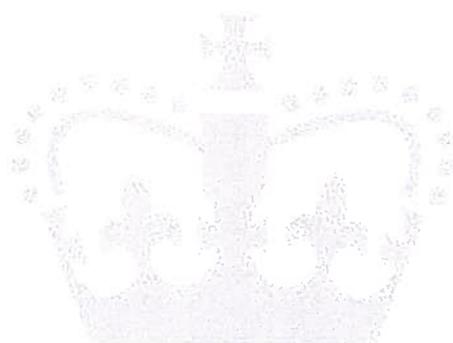


Ministry
of Defence



**ARMED FORCES
COVENANT**

SMALL GRANTS CASE STUDIES



The Surrey Care Trust: “Learning Together”
Priority met: Community Integration
Funding awarded: £19,085
Region: South East

This project grew out of a previously funded proposal, in order to extend the geographical reach of the organisation. “Learning Together” proposed to combine mentoring with ‘first steps’ learning for both military and service personnel, thereby creating an environment within which both groups can interact and engage with each other, whilst gaining new skills.

It was felt that this service would be much in demand, due to the fact that there was a local army training camp at Pirbright. This meant that many service families were new to the area, and therefore facing unique challenges, for example a lack of support networks and the on-going threat of forced mobilisation. Added to this were pressures and obstacles to army spouses finding employment after arriving in a new area. It was felt that through the provision of skills workshops, each of these challenges could be addressed.

Funding allowed the appointment of a home-based project co-ordinator. The co-ordinator’s main goal was to promote interest in the classes, whilst also seeking new ways to engage interest amongst the local community. The co-ordinator worked with the committee at the Garrison community centre and liaised with the Deepcut military base to encourage their involvement. A total of twelve classes took place in a centre close to the Pirbright army training centre, and varied across a range of different topics. These included: DIY, First Aid, Cooking, Improving Confidence and Self Esteem and Budgeting. These ‘pop up’ courses were enjoyed by participants, with many expressing their positive experiences in a feedback collecting session towards the end of the project.

On the mentoring side, the project organisers were able to offer tailored, one-to-one support to military and civilian users. The mentoring service was well received amongst existing agencies, which were able to take on referrals from the service. In total, 119 individuals took part in the short courses offered, 68 of these people were from service backgrounds.



Participants taking up a cooking class

Participants in the project emphasised their positive experience in feedback collected at the end of this project. It is clear that real benefits were felt from the work carried out by this organisation; this can be seen in that 70% of participants stated that they felt a personal benefit from attending one of the courses offered. Course evaluation forms also revealed that participants experienced a positive boost to their social interaction and felt like their confidence in social environments had increased as a result of this. The organisers stated that they particularly felt this from the new mothers in the neighbourhood who lacked support networks outside the home; they now felt that they had a hobby and interest they could explore with new found friends.

The mentoring aspect of the project also delivered some powerful results. Volunteer mentors were able to provide mentees with advice and support regarding a wide array of issues including financial problems, unemployment and a lack of suitable housing. An important case study symbolises the success of this scheme, where a military wife was referred to this scheme from the Homestart charity. She sought mentoring in order to help her find a job, and over a period of time she was able to work with the organisation to increase her confidence and improve her CV. At the end of this, she was able to find employment.

Participants expressed that they 'enjoyed socialising with other mums' and stated that they enjoyed 'the really friendly atmosphere'. The project was thus successful in fostering a positive environment within which new friendships and networks could develop.

The project was able to save some costs and utilised the surplus funding to prolong their mentoring project, and offer a few more short courses. Feedback forms indicated that service users enjoyed these learning opportunities so offering more of these was definitely beneficial for the local community. In the long term, the links established with both the Deepcut military base and the Mytchett children's centre has allowed the potential for future collaborative working, permitting the delivery of more beneficial projects in the area.

The organisers were thus successful in identifying a real local need for increased integration amongst both groups, but also in recognising that each individual had their own needs. The combined package of learning and mentoring was therefore an innovative and effective solution to address the challenges facing the local area.



Participants taking a first aid class



Participants during a craft class

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