

VETERANS' GATEWAY UPDATE OCTOBER 2017

It's now just over six months since the soft launch, please see below an update on the progress of Veterans' Gateway and what is coming next for the service.

Veterans' Gateway so far...

Since the soft launch on 03 April 2017, 1,143 telephone calls have been made to the Veterans' Gateway helpline which have led to 419 referrals to 19 different partners. There have been 110,000 website sessions (71% of which are new users) with 686 users using the 'ask a question' function and 496 live chats taking place.

Since the launch of the service the top three areas of need for Veterans' Gateway users have been Finance, Housing and Mental Wellbeing.

Pensions Awareness Day 2017

With finances, and pensions in particular, being one of the most asked about topics since Veterans' Gateway launched, we decided to mark Pensions Awareness Day (15th September) by bringing clarity to an often misunderstood area. Working with Forces Pensions Society, we produced 5 top tips for service pensions. This resulted in an increase in enquiries around pensions and referrals to our pension specialist partner, Forces Pensions Society.

The content was used widely across tri-service Families Federations, BFBS Radio and Forces TV.

Other service charities and organisations also used their social media channels to promote helping raise awareness of the financial help available via Veterans' Gateway.

In the week the campaign was running, Connect Assist saw over a third more interactions, leading to 37 case referrals - the highest number of referred cases since the service began. The majority of these were to the Forces Pension Society. Traffic to the website from users searching for finance and pension related topics also increased. On social media, there were over 1,000 new engagements on Facebook with a higher than average interaction on Twitter as well. This reflects the marketing work surrounding Pension Awareness Day.

New Supporters

Within the Self-help tab on the main website there are some new supporters who have come on board. These include:

Service pension top tips

- 1** If you leave the forces early, you'll need to claim your pensions yourself, 3-6 months before your pension age.
- 2** If you have an injury or illness caused by something that happened when you were serving, you might qualify for a disability award - even if it started after you retired.
- 3** If you're getting divorced, the arrangements for sharing your pension can be very complicated. Get some legal advice.
- 4** If you're still serving, it can make sense to buy extra pension - this can give you more money in the long run. The sooner you start to think about this the better.
- 5** The timing of your retirement can make a difference to the pension you get - get some advice.

- Contact. This is a military mental health collaboration (Help for Heroes, Combat Stress, Walking with the Wounded and The Royal British Legion) and other entities including Big White Wall, King's College London and Royal College of Psychiatrists working with the NHS and the MOD. Their aim is to simplify the way the military community can find support with their mental wellbeing.
- The Castlehill Foundation in Northern Ireland, a new partner which provides activities and services to victims and survivors affected by The Troubles, including veterans.
- Plane Saver Credit Union; is a not-for-profit financial cooperative, offering an ethical range of savings and loans for Armed Forces personnel straight from their pay (or MoD pension for Veterans). The arrangement, enabled by the Ministry of Defence, aimed to tackle problems faced by Military personnel who may find themselves with limited access to financial services, leaving them a potential target for high cost credit providers such as payday lenders and loan sharks.

We are now working with The Samaritans who appear on the In Crisis tab with a direct link to their 24 hour helpline.

Veteran's Gateway is also promoting links to the Joint Transition Surveys which are being rolled out from each of the service Family Federation's. It is hoped that veterans using our online service can help give an oversight into aspects of transition, from their reasons for leaving the Armed Forces to the impact that transition had on family life.

What happens next?

Phase three of the marketing plan for Veterans' Gateway will focus on new campaigns and partner activities that we can help promote alongside co-produced content with our partners.

Continuing to raise understanding and awareness will be a joint effort between the consortium and partners to help reach as many veterans and their families as we can. Thank you to all the organisations who have helped us to do this so far and we look forward to working with more of you as we develop our plans.