



# Forces Children's Trust

## Report

Prepared by Jane Williams  
(Observer to FCT),

Dr Neil Howlett, Dr

Gillian Shorter and

Dr Angel Chater (Primary  
supervisor)





© Forces Children's Trust 2012  
Designed by Danigmatic  
Developed by Danigmatic & Denny Wise

Support for  
young people  
and families  
who have  
experienced  
the  
bereavement of  
a parent in the  
forces

## About the Charity

The Forces Children's Trust (FCT) is a charitable organisation founded in 2004 by Mr Denny Wise.

It was set up to provide support for children and young people who have experienced the death of a parent who was a member of the British Armed Forces or civilian forces such as the Police Force.

In 2018, an executive decision was made to expand its support to children and young people whose parents suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after returning from service in the forces.

The charity supports families from the time of bereavement and continues to provide support until the young people have completed further education.

## Residential Weeks

Annual week at  
Outward Bound centres.

24 Children attend

Mr Denny Wise and 2  
Volunteers

Climbing, expeditions,  
camping, kayaking,  
gorge walking, hill  
climbing

Teamwork, leadership  
skills, building

## Christmas Parties

Day at the SnowZone

Skiing,  
snowboarding,  
sledging (lessons and main  
slopes)

Family party

## Adventure Expeditions

2017, Nepal

2019, South Africa

## Services offered

The charity offers a variety of services to support children and young people who have experienced a parental bereavement such as:

- Bereavement Counselling
- Residential weeks
- Expedition adventures
- Christmas parties
- Day trips

Additionally, the charity is able to signpost to other services, which FCT cannot offer to provide further support to children and young people (i.e. paying for sport memberships)



---

## How does the charity help young people?

---

### *Social Support*

The Forces Children's Trust is one of a few bereavement organisations which offer physical activity to support young people who have experienced parental bereavement.

Those families which access the charity benefit immensely from the services it provides. From participating in the expedition adventures and the residential weeks, the children gain valuable skills to help them cope and adjust to life without a parent.



© Forces Children's Trust 2012  
Designed by Danigmatic  
Developed by Danigmatic & Denny Wise

### *Similar Situation*

Social support, is one of the main benefits, which the young people gain from the charity and its service. Being able to meet others who have experienced a similar loss, allows the children to feel accepted, and gives a sense for being around 'someone like me'. With this, they each understand and accept each other's situations.

The services offered allow young people to create bonds with each other where they understand mood and emotions. The social support allows the young people time with peers, which can help them to adjust and cope with their grief.





## *Trust*

As all the young people have experienced the death of a parent, they feel they are in a safe space to open up to each other about their emotions, knowing that others will understand. This happens more when the adults are not around.

## *Safe Space*

## *Builds Confidence*

The residential weeks and the expedition adventures are designed to be challenging both physically and mentally, which can provoke emotions. As the young people express these emotions, it is important that they use this social support to help build and develop their resilience towards challenging situations.

## *Builds Resilience*

Through this, the young people are able to develop and build their self-confidence



## Previous Research

Using physical activity to support people who have experienced parental bereavement is not widely researched.

McClatchey and Wimmer (2009), found that residential weekends that included traditional camping activities (i.e. canoeing), alongside bereavement counselling was effective in reducing PTSD in young people who have experienced parental death.

In 2012, McClatchey and colleagues interviewed these young people and found that traditional camping activities were the most enjoyable part of the residential weekend as it gave them a chance to clear their mind, providing them with a distraction and allowing them to forget about their bereavement. Meeting others in a similar situation was also something that helped, especially knowing that they were not the only ones going through this type of loss.

Brewer and Sparkes (2011), also found that a residential weekend and taking part in physical activity was able to support young people who had been parentally bereaved. Using physical activity, gave the young people a sense of freedom, it provided a distraction from their grief and helped to build family cohesion and retain memories.



**Builds**

**Resilience**

**Self-esteem**

**Distraction**

**Freedom**

**Retaining**

**Memories**

**Family cohesion**

## How the charity is run

The founder of the charity (Mr Denny Wise), takes a hands-on approach to the day-to-day running of the charity and is a true advocate to supporting young people who have experienced parental bereavement. Mr Wise, attends all events and trains others to take the young people on the adventure expeditions. Whilst attending the residential weeks, he participates in as many activities as possible, taking an active interest in each child, young person and their family.

Having this hands-on approach, allows Mr Wise to have an excellent working relationship with the families and individuals which receive support from the charity. He imparts the values of the charity on to the children and young people, trying to support each of them individually and as a group.



© Forces Children's Trust 2012  
Designed by Danigmatic  
Developed by Danigmatic & Denny Wise

Mr Wise takes a hands-on approach with an active interest in each family.

## Overall Conclusions

Through events run by the FCT, the children, young people and families who the charity works with, gain valuable support. Grief is unique with every person experiencing different outcomes. This is a factor which the charity considers and is able to tailor the experience of the support it gives to each young person.

It is clear from attending the residential weeks and Christmas parties that the young people form strong friendships and connections, a factor which is immensely important after parental bereavement.

Through the events run by the FCT, the young people are able to create bonds, share memories, develop coping strategies and build resilience.

This charity helps those in need, to connect with others in similar situations gives them the opportunity to clear their minds, distract themselves from their grief and enjoy themselves.

Overall, observations from two residential weeks and Christmas parties, it is clear that the support and physical activity offered when attending FCT events is beneficial for those who have experienced the death of a parent.



Distraction

Support

Friendship

Resilience



---

## Previous Research

---

Brewer, J. D. and Sparkes, A. C. (2011) 'Young people living with parental bereavement: Insights from an ethnographic study of a UK childhood bereavement service'. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.10.032.

Brewer, J. and Sparkes, A. C. (2011) 'The meanings of outdoor physical activity for parentally bereaved young people in the United Kingdom: Insights from an ethnographic study', *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 11(2), pp. 127–143. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2011.633382.

McClatchey, I. S., Vonk, M. E. and Palardy, G. (2009) 'Efficacy of a Camp-Based Intervention for Childhood Traumatic Grief', *Research on Social Work Practice*, 19(1), pp. 19–30. doi: 10.1177/1049731508314276.

McClatchey, I. S. and Wimmer, J. S. (2012) 'Healing Components of a Bereavement Camp: Children and Adolescents Give Voice to Their Experiences', *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 65(1), pp. 11–32. doi: 10.2190/OM.65.1.b.

© Copyright 2019 Jane Williams (PhD candidate), Neil Howlett, Gillian Shorter & Angel Chater (Primary supervisor).

For queries relating to this document, please contact: [jane.williams2@study.beds.ac.uk](mailto:jane.williams2@study.beds.ac.uk) or [angel.chater@beds.ac.uk](mailto:angel.chater@beds.ac.uk)

Published by: Forces Children's Trust