

 **ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**

# Families Federation

Support | Investigate | Influence

# IMPACT

# REPORT

# 2023



SUPPORT

INVESTIGATE

INFLUENCE

# INTRODUCTION FROM THE DIRECTOR, MARIA LYLE



We thought 2022 was going to be our busiest year ever in terms of face to face engagement and visits to RAF units – but actually... it was 2023! More drop-in clinics – 30 in total – meant we visited nearly all RAF units in the UK during 2023, as well as attending Families Days that ran across the summer period. Our programme included visits to Gibraltar and Cyprus. However, we recognise that many families do not live on units, and dependent on job role, many personnel are unable to attend a clinic. With that in mind, we launched a new kind of online engagement in Winter 2022, the RAF Community Forum. Here we ask members of the RAF community to share their experiences with us, to allow us to influence and advocate on their behalf. I want to thank the large numbers who have come forward to join this community – including people from all over the world – and spouses and partners, as well as personnel from across the ranks. Our Community Forums have specific themes, and often include subject matter experts who are responsible for defining and setting policy, so they can hear the impact of the policies on our community.

The beginning of 2023 was a challenging time for many personnel and families living in military accommodation. The introduction of new maintenance contracts led to some significant drops in performance within a system that was already complex and frustrating to navigate at times. Our team saw a nearly 100% rise in accommodation cases in early 2023 compared to the same period the year before and worked exceptionally hard to support people – some of whom were in extremely difficult circumstances. The numbers of people contacting us on accommodation dropped markedly as the year went on, giving the team some breathing space to prepare for a planned rollout of an extensive new approach to military accommodation in 2024.

Thank you to all those who share their views and experiences with us – please continue to share these. The team is passionate about improving the lives of all who serve and the families that support them, so get in touch if you need help.

# ABOUT US

We exist to make life better for RAF personnel (Regular and Reserves) and their families, at home and overseas. We provide reliable and understandable information, and support people by helping to resolve problems resulting from Service. We use this evidence to make long-term positive changes happen for the Armed Forces community.

## HOW WE HELP

### INFORMATION

When you don't know what information to trust, our website offers reliable and up-to-date information on the matters that impact Service life.



### GUIDANCE

When you don't know which way to turn, we can help you navigate the plethora of support and services available to the Armed Forces community.



### SUPPORT

When you have exhausted all avenues, we can help identify the best routes to get any persisting problems resolved.



### ADVOCACY

When you feel unseen, we can help your voice be heard by the chain of command, government, and service providers.



## HOW WE HAVE HELPED

Securing RAF family SEND placement



Securing continuity of Orthodontic Care



Supporting with accommodation maintenance complaints



Leaving the RAF and relocating with special educational needs



Ensuring Personal Independence Payment eligibility



Securing TV license rebate



## HOW WE HAVE HELPED

Taking Job Seekers Allowance to appeal – and winning



Waiving mobile phone charges on overseas deployment



Security clearance for family members following overseas tour



Allowing cars to be taken overseas on PCP agreement



Overcoming NHS waiting list disadvantage



## **The RAF Families Federation exists to:**

### **SUPPORT**

We support RAF personnel (Regular and Reserves) and families, by responding to individuals who need our help with some aspects of service life. We help hundreds of people each year, some of whom have complex needs. We also provide understandable and up-to-date information and resources via our website.

### **INVESTIGATE**

The RAF Families Federation investigates issues that people are experiencing and deliver this background information as evidence. We do this via quantitative evidence (e.g. surveys we run, and summarising findings from a range of other surveys on an issue). We also use qualitative information from the experiences of our community.

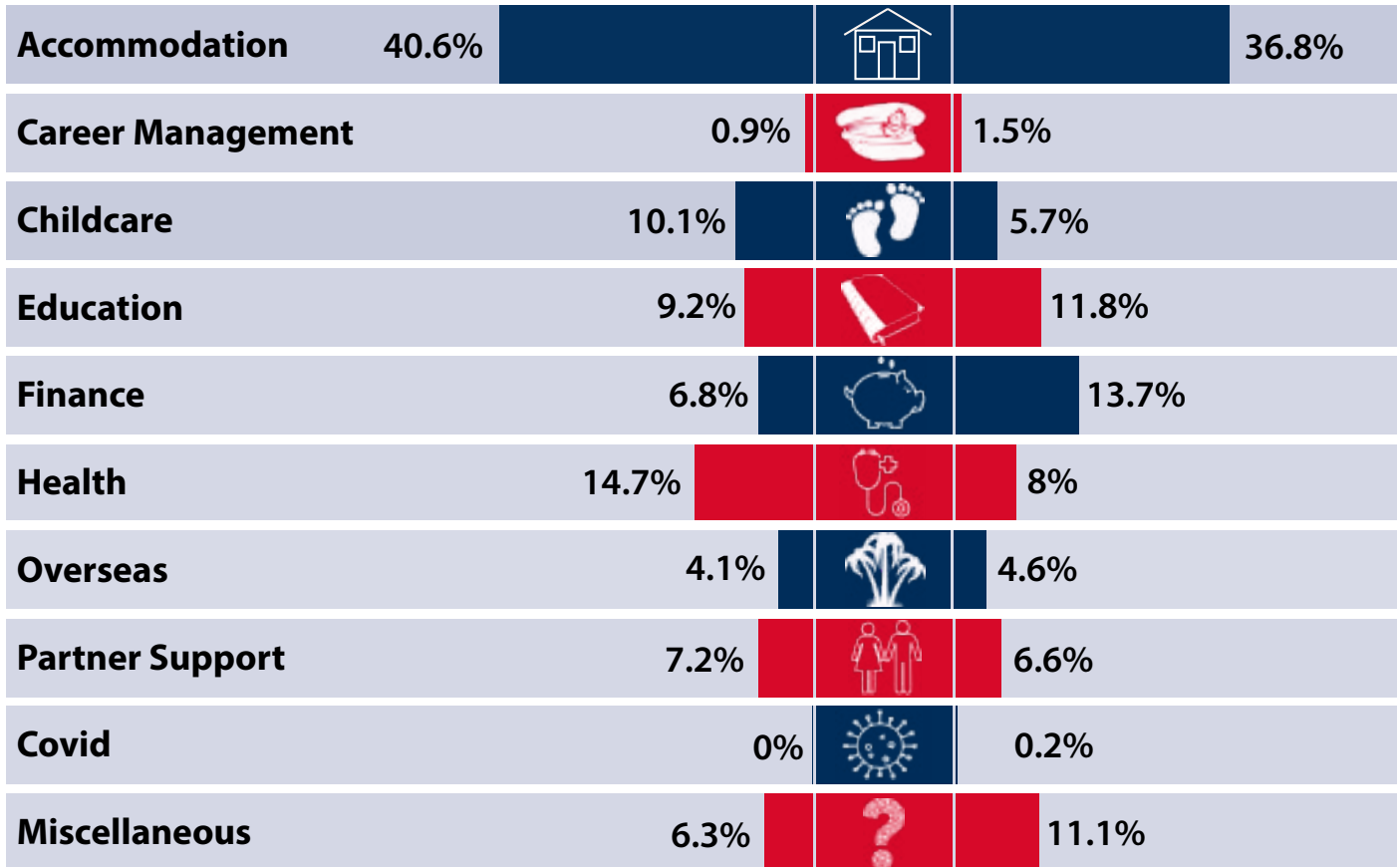
### **INFLUENCE**

We influence organisations, government bodies and private sector companies on behalf of RAF personnel and families. Our aim is to make life better for personnel and families by working with decision makers so they better understand barriers they face. We present to the Defence Select Committee on a number of occasions each year, and challenge organisations to do better – the MOD, the NHS, the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – as well as local authorities.

# SUPPORT

## Cases received by the RAF Families Federation

◀ 2022 vs 2023 ▶





# ACCOMMODATION

This is the biggest area where we provide support. We saw a deluge of cases in early 2023. Cold weather, heating issues and new contractors struggling to deliver maintenance meant a lot of understandably unhappy personnel and families. Whilst cases did fall throughout the year, we continue to be contacted by significant numbers of personnel who have sub-standard accommodation, and face frustrating issues when trying to get problems addressed.



*Mark and Stan, Accommodation Specialists*

## Service Family Accommodation (SFA) heating:

A couple took over SFA at RAF Brize Norton in early December 2023 without heating – an issue that wasn't identified straight away, as the family were gradually moving in. In mid January 2024 the RAF Families Federation held a drop-in clinic at RAF Brize Norton. The Service Person visited the RAF Families Federation team and he explained how the issues they were experiencing were impacting on him and his pregnant partner. Through the RAF Families Federation speedy engagement with DIO and VIVO, within three days the heating (boiler / radiators) had been replaced:



“ I can confirm that the team arrived and... the system is now working... the house is warm. I wanted to say thank you for your involvement – a swift and sharp resolution and wouldn't have happened without you and the team. Many thanks for all your help and for chasing! ”



## PARTNER EMPLOYMENT

The RAF Families Federation provides a range of support to spouses. The challenges of mobility and/or operating as a single parent due to the demands of service on personnel, means that progressing careers can be a significant issue for partners. Our work includes a variety of advice to spouses looking to move abroad. We also run a hugely exciting project, the Military Coworking Network (MCN), offering coworking spaces on a range of units across defence – with new ones opening soon: [militarycoworking.uk](http://militarycoworking.uk)



*Sue, Partner Employment and Overseas Support Policy Advisor, on duty as an RAF Reserve Musician.*

We understand how difficult it can be for spouses to continue to work when accompanying the serving person overseas. Earlier this year we were able to offer guidance and support to a spouse which resulted in them being able to take their role overseas and continue to work remotely, rather than take a career break.



“ I am grateful for your support, wisdom and guidance around my request. It really has been invaluable and provided a profound opportunity for me as a military spouse. ”

# FINANCE

## Restoration of Entitled Benefits

A family were posted overseas with their adult dependent family member. Due to an error by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) their Personal Independence Payments (PIP) were stopped after 13 weeks in line with policy for civilian claimants. This immediately created a significant financial burden on the family who contacted us after a lack of response from the DWP. We supported the family to apply for immediate charitable support, then contacted the DWP Armed Forces Champion to resolve the issue. With the correct supporting evidence to prove that Armed Forces Families are exempt from the 13-week rule, we were able to demonstrate the significant disadvantage to this family. Their PIP benefits were restored to them by the DWP.



“ Thank you so much to you and your team for the help and advice you provided. It was good to know we had someone to turn to when we needed that support. ”

# EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

## School admissions

The RAF Families Federation provide information, support and guidance to Service personnel and families with enquiries about school admissions. Over 1 in 4 of our educational enquiries in 2023 focused on school admissions and appeals and we were pleased to offer advice and signposting to families at what can be an uncertain and challenging time. Following support and engagement from our education specialist, one family shared their relief when they secured a place in their preferred school:



*Ali, Education and Childcare, supported the Service Children's Progression Alliance West Midlands Hub relaunch*

“ I wanted to let you know that we won our appeal. What a stressful process, we are so happy and relieved! Thank you for your help and support throughout the process. ”

## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

When an RAF family were informed by their child's school that they were unable to meet their needs, the RAF Families Federation engaged with the Local Authority and successfully supported the family to access an appropriate school place and school transport for their child: [How we help: RAF family SEND school placement < RAF Families Federation \(raf-ff.org.uk\)](#)



*Caz, Health and Additional Needs Policy Advisor, and Vanessa, Policy Manager*

## Transitioning out of the RAF

The RAF Families Federation were able to support an RAF family, who were leaving the RAF, to secure housing and a school place in their new area: [How we help: leaving the RAF and relocating with special educational needs < RAF Families Federation \(raf-ff.org.uk\)](#)



# OVERSEAS SUPPORT

This year we developed the overseas resources on the website, adding an interactive map to make it easy for personnel and family members to find information for an assignment location. It brings together information from multiple sources into a central map where each location pin takes you to guidance for that area. Visit [raf-ff.org.uk/overseas/location-information](http://raf-ff.org.uk/overseas/location-information)



# SUPPORT IN PARTNERSHIP

## RAF Families Federation, RAF Association and RAF Benevolent Fund collaboration:

In another complex case this year, the RAF Families Federation were able to mobilise a range of charitable support for a spouse who separated from her husband and was moving from an SFA to Social Housing in her local area. The RAF Association (RAFA) paid for the deposit and for the first month of her storage costs. An application was submitted to the RAF Benevolent Fund (RAFBF) for Temporary Financial Assistance. The case remains open with the RAFBF should she need help with rent in advance, deposit, and removals costs when the family gets permanent accommodation.



Mark our Accommodation Policy Adviser, WO Subby Subramaniam WO RAF and Tim our Communications Manager at the WO Conference at Henlow



# INVESTIGATE

We published a number of reports in 2023, where our evidence is brought together:



- 🎯 On childcare, we responded to the Education Select Committee call for evidence with this report about the experiences of the RAF Community: [committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/116679/pdf/](https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/116679/pdf/), and this report to the Scottish Parliament on the impact of childcare on parental employment in Scotland: [Response 808947589 to Addressing child poverty through parental employment - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space](#)
- 🎯 We submitted evidence to the Defence Select Committee Enquiry on Women in the Armed Forces: [committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/125675/pdf/](https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/125675/pdf/)
- 🎯 We also collected and presented evidence for the Scottish Parliament consultation demonstrating the impact of policies on funding for further and higher education for students from an Armed Forces background in Scotland: <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/20230330-RAFFF-Scottish-HE-FE-response.pdf>

## Overseas & Partner employment

We know how important it is to understand the impact of taking a job overseas, so have created a working group with the other Family Federations and MOD representatives to develop solutions to the issues that impact partner employment overseas. We have compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions to help families be better informed on the barriers to a non-serving spouse working overseas. These are with the MOD for comment at the time of this document's publication.



## EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

- In addition to using evidence shared by Service personnel and families contacting the RAF Families Federation, we conducted a survey on early years and childcare. We also conducted a survey looking at further and higher education funding for the Armed Forces community to support with our responses to Government consultations in 2023.
- The RAF Community Forum on Education and Childcare in April 2023 provided an additional opportunity to connect with families and collect evidence on the experiences of RAF personnel and families to share with key stakeholders as we work to improve the quality of life for Service families around the world.
- The RAF Families Federation regularly engage with a range of stakeholders working in education and childcare and helped to facilitate a Service Children's Progression Alliance event in September 2023 to improve support for Service children.
- As part of the Service Children In State Schools (SCISS) Executive Committee, the RAF Families Federation supported the 2023 Voice of Schools Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) survey. We look forward to working to share the findings and recommendations in early 2024.

# COMMUNITY FORUMS

The RAF Families Federation launched our Community Forums in 2022 after recognising the need to offer Service personnel, (Regular and Reservists), an alternative channel to discuss issues that impact them.



Our Community Forums are themed by subject, held online via Teams 'webinars', and hosted by subject matter experts. They provide an opportunity for us to hear first-hand from our people and this enables us to then investigate issues as well as gather and provide the qualitative evidence for the RAF, MOD and Ministers to effect changes for our personnel.

So far, the evidence we have gathered from these forums has allowed us to:

- ① Inform discussions with the Armed Forces Pay Review Body when Director Maria Lyle gave evidence to them in 2023.
- ① Add real examples to the figures we already held on accommodation and cost of living challenges when the Director gave evidence to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee in 2023. The session can be seen here: [Parliamentlive.tv - Defence Committee](https://parliamentlive.tv/Defence-Committee)
- ① Informed the conversations we have had with the Haythornthwaite Review team – this Review was published in 2023 and contains some significant recommendations of how personnel and families should be supported and incentivised in the future – including aspects of service life including overseas services and partner employment. You can see reference of the Families Federation's work in the report: [https://qna.files.parliament.uk/ws-attachments/1645419/original/14.278\\_MOD\\_HRAFI\\_headline\\_report\\_WEB.pdf](https://qna.files.parliament.uk/ws-attachments/1645419/original/14.278_MOD_HRAFI_headline_report_WEB.pdf)
- ① Shaped the quarterly discussions we have directly with the Minister for Defence People (The Right Honourable Dr Andrew Murrison MP)

# INFLUENCE

## HOUSES AT RAF WADDINGTON

The RAF Families Federation was presented with several concerns from RAF Service personnel at RAF Waddington about significant maintenance issues and poor contractor engagement. We engaged with DIO, Pinnacle and Amey, as well as the Station Community Support Officers, and the personnel impacted. Supporting the Unit Chain of Command to reiterate the case that overall service levels were unsatisfactory meant that a focused meeting was brought together with management representation from all parties, and action plan put together. This is still very much a work in progress, because we believe that the systems and processes themselves that personnel are having to work within when raising complaints are not fit for purpose, and require significant reform.



## PARTNER EMPLOYMENT

We understand how important the issue of partner employment is – the rising cost of living means two salaries are often essential.

By working collaboratively with Army Families Federation (AFF) and Navy Families Federation (NFF) on Forces Families Jobs, with [Military Co-working Network \(MCN\)](#) and on the Positive Futures project we are ensuring that there are opportunities for spouses and partners for employment and training. We are regularly forging links with employers and training providers, and keeping partner employment in the limelight.

# CHILDCARE

The RAF Community Forum provided a platform for Service personnel and families across the world to tell us about their childcare challenges – this was often linked to the availability, accessibility and/or affordability of childcare. Complex challenges are faced by families overseas. We have highlighted this to the MOD and they are exploring this through their Families Team. The MOD launched an overseas survey in 2023 and are now exploring the options.

At the RAF Families Federation, we recognise it is increasingly important for families to be able to have dual incomes. The Scottish Parliament consultation addressing child poverty due to parental employment enabled us to use some of the information we received from our Childcare survey. We were also able to use information from a recent Partner Employment Community Forum to highlight the importance of available and affordable childcare to enable parents/carers to seek and maintain employment.



*RAFAKidz childcare at RAF Odiham.  
Image: Credit RAFAKidz*

## HEALTH

We are aware that continuity of healthcare treatment can be a challenge when moving between countries and between the Devolved Administrations. Due to the complex nature of NHS funding, it can be difficult to continue NHS England funded treatment in other countries and administrations. We supported a family who were receiving Orthodontic care overseas, (funded by NHS England), who moved to Scotland; they were struggling to access continuity of care. We requested support from the NHS Armed Forces Champions in NHS Scotland for this family. We not only secured the much-needed treatment for the child immediately, but we also engaged with the Scottish Government to put in place a process for service personnel and families returning from other Devolved Nations and overseas to Scotland that need ongoing orthodontic treatment. A collaboration between Scotland's Chief Dental Officer and Director Defence Healthcare has seen updated information sent to dental practices throughout Scotland, designed to encourage practices to uphold their responsibilities under the Armed Forces Covenant.

## ACCOMMODATION

### **Modernised Accommodation Offer (MAO):**

During 2023 the RAF Families Federation endeavoured to highlight to the MOD the needs of all cohorts of personnel who use service accommodation. As we prepared to publish this report, the news broke that the expected launch on 11 Mar 24 was paused.

Elements of the MAO that remain:

- The Dual Accommodation Waiver for Single Living Accommodation charges relating to PStatCat and age are being retained for now and extended to other cohorts who maintain a main home away from their assigned location. These measures will continue for at least 12 months whilst an

alternative mechanism is scoped. Service personnel will be given at least three months' notice before the waiver is removed.

- ◉ From 11 Mar 2024, the Modernised Accommodation Offer will also provide further support for Service personnel becoming first time buyers on assignment, refunding up to £1,500 of their legal expenses.
- ◉ Elements of the offer relating to Service Families Accommodation, including the move from rank to needs based allocation and the widening of entitlement, **have been paused for review**. The terms of the review are to be determined with Ministers, including timescales for delivery.

These have all been aspects of the 'offer' that the RAF Families Federation has been campaigning for, to offer a more equitable and entitled approach for single personnel and those in long term relationships.

We lobbied the Defence Select Committee for improved maintenance for SFA, and also flagged the issue of funding for ageing SLA – watch here: [Parliamentlive.tv - Defence Sub-Committee](https://parliamentlive.tv/Programme/Defence-Sub-Committee)



*Our Director Maria Lyle presenting at the most recent House of Commons Defence Select Committee evidence session on Accommodation*

# COMMENTS FROM AIR CDRE ALAN OPIE

This Impact Report rightly highlights the extensive support that the RAF Families Federation provided throughout 2023. Its continued advocacy for all of us and our families is critical in shaping Defence and RAF policy, ensuring that the perspective of RAF people and their families is reflected appropriately at all levels and helping to resolve individual issues and concerns.

I warmly welcome the substantial increase in the number of drop-in clinics held on station, which offer such a valuable opportunity for people to highlight their concerns and enlist the support of the Federation alongside their unit welfare and community support colleagues. I am also pleased that, following its creation at the end of 2022, the RAF Community Forum has gone from strength to strength; it is an excellent way to reach out to people across the whole RAF Community, wherever they are living.

I remain acutely aware of the issues following the launch of the new Accommodation Maintenance Contracts in early 2023. The Federation was instrumental in lobbying for real improvements in the service and have played their part in holding the contractors to account for their delivery of the recovery programme. However, we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent and the RAF and the Federation are continuing to work closely with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and its contractors to sustain and reinforce the improvements in support for people living in Service Families Accommodation.

The RAF remains fully committed to the core principle of the Modernised Accommodation Offer to provide an offer for all our people on the basis of their need. The Federation has been a valuable critical friend throughout this hugely important project, championing the needs of our people and their families as they change throughout their time in the RAF.

At a time when the retention of our people in the RAF is key, we are very fortunate to be able to rely on the Federation to listen to our people to gain an independent perspective of where improvements are needed. Drawing on this valuable evidence allows the RAF to influence and inform Defence policy and target where investment can best improve the lived experience of our people and their families.

This is my final Impact Report before I hand over as Head of People and Families Support to Air Cdre Chris Todd. During my 11 years in post as a Regular and Reserve, it has been wonderful to witness the transformation in the service provided by the RAF Families Federation. It provides a vital independent voice for our people and their families as well as an expert source of reference on a wide range of increasingly complex issues. Please continue to make full use of its wise counsel and play your part in ensuring that all our people are aware of its tremendous support.



# RAF FAMILIES FEDERATION QUICKVIEW 2023

## What we are:

The RAF Families Federation is an independent voice for all personnel (single, married or in a partnership) and all of your families.

## What we do:

We exist to make life better for Service personnel and their families, at home and overseas. We provide reliable information on the topics that matter most to you, support you through to the resolution of problems resulting from Service and make long-term positive changes happen for the Armed Forces Community.

## Our vision:

A well informed and empowered RAF community, where any disadvantages that come with service life are understood and addressed.

## RAF Families Federation website:

**181,416** Website users

**129** Website pages

**2.2k** News items

## Social media followers:

**8079** Facebook

**1261** Instagram

**11502** X

**832** LinkedIn

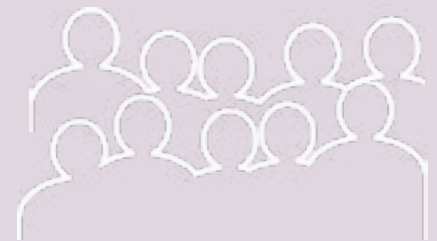
## 2023 Engagement Visits:

**90** Station across the UK and overseas, including:

**24** Drop-in Clinics

**12** Families Days

**24** Unit visits to support briefings and wellbeing





The RAF Families Federation's contract is held by the RAF Association registered Charity 226686 (England & Wales), SC037673 (Scotland).



The RAF Benevolent Fund is a supporting partner of the Families Federation