SUMMARY

Evaluation of SSAFA Forces Help transitional mentoring for wounded, injured and sick service personnel

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with Deborah Bazzard
Charities Evaluation Services
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Acknowledgements

Our thanks to:

- the service leavers receiving the transitional mentoring service
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- Graham Liley, Project Manager
- Susie Worley, Director of Client Services/Project Director (previously Head of Volunteer Training)
- Karen Oldfield, Mentoring Co-ordinator
- Key stakeholders who attended the stakeholders meeting in February 2012
- Staff from Army Recovery Capability (ARC) including the PROs who attended the focus group

Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Army Recovery Capability</td>
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<tr>
<td>BACP</td>
<td>British Association for Counselling &amp; Psychotherapy</td>
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<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
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<td>PRO</td>
<td>Personnel Recovery Officer</td>
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<td>PRU</td>
<td>Personnel Recovery Unit</td>
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<td>WIS</td>
<td>Wounded, injured or sick service personnel</td>
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Summary

Introduction
SSAFA Forces Help, otherwise known as SSAFA is one of the UK’s leading Armed Forces charities, providing practical, financial and emotional support to anyone who is currently serving or has served in the Army, Navy or RAF, and their families.

In June 2011 SSAFA was commissioned by the MoD to pilot a volunteering mentoring service to better support the wounded, injured and sick (WIS) service personnel leaving the service, to help them transition successfully from military to civilian life; the pilot started in October 2011. The mentoring service is a pilot scheme independent of the Army’s Chain of Command and is overseen by a dedicated Project Manager.

The evaluation
Charities Evaluation Services (CES) is an independent charity that has been commissioned by SSAFA to carry out an outcomes-focused evaluation of its pilot transitional mentoring service.

The evaluation focused on the process of setting up the mentoring service including lessons learnt, how well the service has been running, feedback on satisfaction and some outcomes data. The evaluation focused on getting the views and experiences of both mentors and service leavers through a start and mid-survey.

A final report will be produced in March 2013, which will focus on the extent to which the pilot transitional mentoring service has made a difference to service leavers’ lives.

Satisfaction with the service
The analysis of the start and mid-survey of the mentors showed how satisfied they are with the three-part recruitment process and the four strands of support available to them. In particular, mentors praised the residential training and the opportunity to meet other potential mentors. Mentors commented on their mentoring sessions and the support provided to their service leaver (mentee) including what has gone well and not so well with the service. Similarly, the service leavers were asked about their mentoring sessions, the type of support received their level of satisfaction with the service, including their mentor.

Both mentors and service leavers provided many positive comments about the transitional mentoring service as well as some suggestions for future improvements.
Benefits to service leavers

Although the focus of the transitional mentoring service is very much about the service leaver and their transition to civilian life, the evaluation found that mentors also benefited from becoming a mentor. There have been benefits to service leavers although quite limited due to the short time they have been mentored.

Suggestions for future improvements

Mentors and service leavers were quite complimentary about the transitional mentoring service saying that the service is much needed. However, there have been concerns about the lack of communication and in some cases, the poor engagement of service leavers with the service. Mentors, service leavers and other stakeholders involved in the project made some suggestions for the future. These included:

- Clearer roles for mentors and the PROs role within mentoring, also more information about the different interventions provided by the ARC
- More skills practice, case studies and role plays in the training course
- Additional information to be covered in future training including confidentiality, complaints procedure
- Mentors to be matched with service leaver soon after training
- More information about SSAFA local branches and how to joint them
- Publicity and public address will be key to moving this project forward and perhaps securing funding
- Future matching of mentor with mentee should be needs-led
- Some brief background information about mentee provided prior to introduction
- Telephone contact would be useful. It’s easier to ignore an email than a phone call.
Recommendations

SSAFA should

- Continue to offer transitional mentoring service to WIS service personnel
- Consider expanding the service to include veterans and other service men and women who might benefit from the service
- Ensure mentors are allocated a service leaver soon after being recruited
- Allocate service leavers to mentors on the basis of needs, not location ie, matching has to be needs-led
- Provide clearer information about the role of mentors and PRO relationships
- Continue providing four strands of support to mentors but to consider choice and flexibility for the roll-out
- Continue to use e-mentor pro for formal recording and sharing progress between mentor and mentee
- Encourage peer support via e-Mentor Pro
- Provide more skills practice, case studies and role-plays in the residential training
- Share learning from pilot including from mentors and service leavers to improve the service for better.
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