

# FROM MUM TO MILITARY PARENT

By Lesley Ure, parent and King's Group Academies Community & Service Lead

My son is home from his first deployment, and I cannot express how happy I feel.

I thought I'd be ready; I've spent my whole adult life connected to the military, as a submariner's wife, and working in a career supporting service families. I've helped others through deployments. I've led programmes, reassured worried partners and children, listened, guided, and encouraged.

**I truly believed I had the resilience to handle it, but this was my son - my youngest, and oh boy, did it hit differently.**

Being apart for months for the first time was hard. There were moments of constant worry and sleepless nights. This was a huge adjustment for him and therefore, me too. Not every day was difficult and that felt like a relief, so I could take a breath... but something sat quietly in the background. A feeling I hadn't quite expected - what is this?

A room kept ready for his return, occasionally dusted, vacuumed, with the mail piling up on his bed. A food shop adjusted from four people to three - yes, we are that family that now has it delivered in a box. News headlines that suddenly felt close to home - too close. The small adjustments you hadn't considered: the creation of an additional separate family chat on WhatsApp, so we didn't bother him with everyday reminders of home - "have you fed the dog?" and "what are we having for tea?" Careful not to make too many plans "let's wait until he gets back and we will decide" and "is this going to be the first Christmas without our son?"

**Military life has always shaped the pace of our family,** and it looks like this will continue, so I kept going - I've done this before, right? Many times. But this time I offered support to his girlfriend, and her family who are still new to this life and I wondered "what must they be thinking?" I felt that it was my duty to minimise the impact of him being away on others, to explain as much as possible and to protect the things that he cared about - "please let our 13-year-old Beagle survive until he got home!"

I carried on with work, much of it focused on supporting other service families. I played the role people expect of me - the one who holds it all together, who gets the job done, the one who 'knows how this works.'

This is the life we chose, right? As a mum, though, there isn't a choice. You do it, unquestionably, because they are yours. Still, beneath the surface, something was shifting. I was beginning to understand - maybe for the first time - what it truly means when your child is serving. **There's a quiet, invisible grief that no one really talks about.** I didn't have the words for it before when I asked myself what this feeling was... I finally knew the answer.

I am extremely proud of what my husband has achieved and the career that my son is building - of who he is and all he's

chosen to become. **I'm proud of our family, of the life we've led, of the values that military life has embedded in all of us: resilience, adaptability, loyalty, and most of all unconditional love.**

I had the opportunity to talk with serving people that I knew well, to try and understand the process from his side. Their openness and honesty helped me to normalise some of the changes I noticed - I couldn't believe the powerful emotions that they experienced, and how they learned to overcome them. I also spoke with a few military parents that I am lucky to know, who had been through it and the shared experience was striking. I often talk about transitions in my work, and I know that the transition into a first deployment for the serving member and, in my case parent, is huge. I cannot tell you how much these conversations helped me.

**I believe we, as parents, have something powerful to bring to this space. We listen and guide, even though it is now at a distance. We've done our job of raising decent, independent people and we continue to show up quietly in the background, day after day, without question because we know that in some respects, they need us more than ever.**

I'd really like to hear from others who've been through this - what helped, what didn't, and how we can find better ways to connect and inform. How can we offer support that's bespoke to parents of serving personnel? Not general guidance but something that truly speaks to this experience.

It feels like the right moment to open up this part of the conversation — the one we don't always say out loud, but so many of us feel.

Send me a message or email: [lure@kgahampshire.uk](mailto:lure@kgahampshire.uk)

*'My son joined the military in 2016 as a 16-year-old - looking back he was just a boy, but it was all he had ever wanted, and I was so proud of him and the choice he made. Roll forward to 2020 and he was posted to a new Unit - we were in Covid times, and he had also experienced a relationship breakup. Suddenly my outgoing, fun-loving, active son became withdrawn - stopped exercising - and hid in his room. Nobody realised as so many were also hiding away. I was miles away and felt so helpless - to hear him broken was so hard for me as his mum, who just wanted to make it better. I was lucky - I work for the RN, and after speaking to my RN Manager she was able to signpost me to a CPO who I will be eternally grateful to for bringing me back my son. I spoke to her, and she said she couldn't do anything unless he asked for help. When you are feeling low the hardest thing is reaching out, but thankfully he made that call. From then onwards, she took action and introduced several key interventions for my son. **The measures she introduced not only gave me my son back, but also gave the military a resilient individual - who has gone on to champion coaching and is now an instructor who can draw on his experience and be proactive, not reactive.'***

- Mother of a son in the military