

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Jenny Ward, Head of Evidence and Research



Anyone who has followed the Naval Families Federation over the last few years may have noticed that we tend to ask you for your views on a wide range of subjects. We often ask you to also get involved in research studies and focus groups too, which are being led by different universities and academics. So, why do we need you to take part, and what difference does it actually make?

Our job is to gather evidence from you, the families of serving personnel who are living this life, as you know better than anyone about what it is really like. The good, and the not so good days, those weeks leading up to a deployment and those wonderful days when you are reunited. **All the uncertainty, the moves, the periods of separation and the fact that most of the time, you just get on with it, because that is what military families do.**

So, how do we make sure that the people who make decisions that impact on you know what that life is like? Well, apart from creating reports and briefings using the anonymised evidence that you give directly to us, we work with academics, researchers and universities to gather information on specific subjects that we believe are important to you. That could include how Service children with SEND are supported through the education system; the impact that lifestyle behaviours can have on the health and wellbeing of non-serving spouses/partners; or how the Armed Forces Covenant is being delivered at a local level.

There is a huge amount of research underway at any given time and our aim is to work with the teams behind them, to make sure that the unique issues you face are considered, as they develop their ideas, draft their questions and deliver their surveys or interviews. We have created guidance for researchers too, **so that they understand the challenges that can occur when trying to engage with Armed Forces families** – it's hard to take part in a focus group that has been set up to take place during the day, when you're trying to work, you're lone parenting as your serving spouse is away again and the dog needs a walk too!

Can you make a difference by taking part? Absolutely.

Your voices are essential to ensuring that researchers and policy makers understand what it is like to be part of a Royal Navy or Royal Marines family – if you don't, then the wrong assumptions could be made. By speaking up, sharing your experiences and commenting on plans and proposed changes, you can help to improve life, not only for your family, but for families in the future too. As I write this, we are actively involved in at least nine different studies, as well as promoting online MoD surveys, and our own questionnaire which is gathering evidence for our forthcoming session with the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

If you want to know more about taking part, whether it's in an academic study, an MoD survey or one of our online questionnaires, check out the 'Have Your Say' on our website and our social media platforms. To give you an idea of the range of subjects being looked into, over the summer we were asking for your views on Armed Forces Pay and Allowances; the MoD wanted to hear from folks who have been assigned overseas; the University of Northumbria was engaging directly with young people from Service families; and Oxford Brookes University were asking the families of Reservists for their views on the welfare support available to them – there really was something for everyone!

If you are interested in the various studies that have been undertaken by academic researchers, why not visit the Centre for Evidence for the Armed Forces Community website and have a look through their repository?

The Naval Families Federation is very much part of the naval charity network, who all offer a great range of support in different guises; our expertise is advocating for evidence-based change and championing naval families in all their diversity. Our vision is to enable families to have their views heard and thrive in their communities of choice; please take part in surveys, contact our team to talk through issues to see how we can help, chat when you see us at events or follow us on social media to learn how the NFF continues to support serving personnel and families...like yours!

