

## VETERANS HELPING THEMSELVES

### Welcome to the 'Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs', run by Veterans, for Veterans.

RATHER THAN HAVING SOMETHING PUT IN PLACE FOR THEM, WHICH DOESN'T SUIT THEIR NEEDS, THIS IS SOMETHING VETERANS ARE DEVELOPING THEMSELVES, FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL ARMS, VETERANS, SERVING & SERVICE LEAVERS

The difference between 'civvi street' and those who have served in the armed forces simplistically stated is this: -

- If you as a civilian were to change your job tomorrow, all that really changes for you is this: - You commute to a different place of work at 7:30 in the morning, work with different colleagues, perhaps a different role but for which you will have skills and experience, and perhaps a different salary. But you still go home to the same house each evening, associate with the same friends, probably go out to the same places etc... nothing much else changes... right?
- If you leave the armed forces (which everyone must at some stage), you lose not just a 'job', but a vocation for which you were not only trained to do but have been continually 'conditioned' to do throughout your service. You also lose your income, your home, your work clothes; usually around 1500 friends (who are nearer to being family than friends!), a medical/ social/welfare system tailored for your distinct needs; you lose your identity in many respects. In short, your entire way of life has to change. It isn't called 'service LIFE' for nothing.

When men and women leave the Armed Forces, despite the bluster you hear about resettlement from the Government about the 'Armed Forces Covenant', and the now vast array of charities that exist, the reality is, other than their own families in their home towns (if indeed they are headed back to their home town), there really isn't anyone physically there for them. They are alone, and the isolation is something they never really experienced in the forces. They were always part of a team. The Armed Forces trains and conditions the individual, constantly, to be a soldier/sailor/airman/marine, but it does not 'recondition' men and women to be a civilian. When leavers are younger, perhaps in their late twenties, it is something they often haven't given much thought to, and because of their 'conditioning' the 'Pride' which is instilled in them, and their conditioning to persevere, to keep going, no matter what, they simply try and make the best of it. To find a job, find somewhere to live, and all too often they are too proud to ask for help. This is sometimes so alien to them, that they end up homeless or in prison, and simply this cannot be allowed to continue.

It is a dreadful time (I know), especially for those that have been in for a long time, and/or have associated psychological problems, such as Combat PTSD. In my experience, the effects of PTSD are minimized during service, because of the mutual support of those in your unit, but after your service is over, the isolation the veterans tend to feel, magnifies underlying psychological issues like Combat PTSD.

There are also plenty of veterans out there not so drastically effected, working and supporting families, who were once part of a cohesive, professional team for which the military had conditioned them, and are now struggling with feelings of isolation. This is often greatly magnified if said individuals have experienced combat. Many struggle to come to terms with this,

and feel guilty because they believe they shouldn't feel isolated when they are part of a family, which is what we have found, and I have experienced myself.

I already know that the Breakfast Clubs are life-changing for many. We have many, many examples of veterans who have said that it has radically changed their lives for the better. Many come to Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs and cannot explain what it is about them that makes them feel the way they do, but the positive effect is quite often drastic. Partners tell us "he's a different person" ... "She's happier" ... "It saved our relationship". These are phrases I have heard personally. I often say to people that I go to the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club for a 'recharge' and that's what it feels like to me. I always come away feeling like I can face the week ahead. I simply wanted to afford more veterans the same positive influence, which is why I founded an organisation in my home town of Hull. It's not a charity or a business; no money is involved at all (except paying for your own breakfast), it is purely aimed at the welfare and support of its members. It is a very simple concept, yet it is exploding here in the UK and proliferating abroad, and it's what many veterans are saying to me that it's "the missing link" between military service and 'civvi street'. As I write this, there are currently 241 Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs globally, (go to Facebook & type 'Breakfast Club' into the search bar as an illustration), and more are starting all the time! I am not starting them myself, veterans are!!

Almost every day the importance of the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs is substantiated by the messages I receive from members & comments that I read from organisers of clubs all around the country, and further afield, whose conviction has led them to take up the baton in their own area. The longer it continues the more convinced I become, that this network is becoming a real physical safety net, which simply did not exist before, to catch those that have left the armed forces. The tangible presence of people who were once servicemen and women and speak their language. Who are able to advise, help and guide those that are newly out of service, and make them feel like they are not alone; letting servicemen and women know there is somewhere they can go. Not cap-in-hand to some charity, which flies in the face of the values that have had instilled in them, but to people like themselves, who have already travelled the hard road which lies ahead of them. A new circle of comrades, but with a wider experience of civilian life. The Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs are already helping veterans with a myriad of issues such as housing, employment, benefits etc. At the same time they are making new friends and reuniting old ones.

There are no subscriptions and no official rules as such, however we have a constitution which is laid down for all clubs to follow. We have a webpage and a common Facebook group for the administrators to share ideas and information, but individual Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs are encouraged to be autonomous and make their own decisions to meet the needs of their members whilst adhering to the AFVBC Constitution. Some prefer to have veterans only attend and involve partners and families at other times; some involve partners and families in everything they do. Most meet every weekend, some bi-weekly or monthly, Saturday or Sunday mornings, eat breakfast together, share experiences, solve problems, and indulge in some good old military banter.

The Breakfast Clubs are groups of Veterans, (and often some serving members) of all arms of Her Majesties Armed Forces, who, in short, look out for each other; regaining some of what they have lost- their service 'family'.

It is much like the best bits we remember from when we were serving. For many, this also leads them to meeting socially at other times, with wives and partners, at Regimental Dinners (with our respective Regimental/Corps associations), for nights out, barbecues, parties and family occasions etc. and they network among the variety of trades that veterans all now work in, helping each other in their daily lives, while retaining the pride of their own individual units.

It really works because all have a similar outlook on life; similar sense of humour and in many respects the social life many of the veterans of the breakfast clubs now enjoy is similar to the days when they served.

All the services are represented; Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, reservists as well as regulars... so if anyone wants to join, as long as they have a uniform service history, or association with such, and feel they can 'tolerate the banter', they just turn up on a Saturday or Sunday morning at one of the breakfast clubs, and they are made welcome. The extent of network even means that members are going to Breakfast Clubs when they are away on holiday, and meeting even more ex-forces, and they are already cross club interaction, such as 'games nights'.

To find their nearest Breakfast Club, they simply use the website search facility [www.afvbc.net](http://www.afvbc.net) type in a place name or post code. This will give them the name of their nearest club, venue, day and time of the meeting, as well as a link to their Facebook Page; this is also good for those who do not use Facebook

Breakfast Clubs have apparently already drawn the attention of Prince Harry while he was visiting a development to house homeless veterans in Newcastle, and we are currently contacting MPs following the success of the DIY big build for veterans in Manchester.

More recently, here at the original Breakfast Club in Hull, we have been featured on British Forces Broadcasting Service's Forces TV, our local BBC radio station, Radio Humberside, our regional TV news program, BBC Look North Yorkshire, we have been visited by our local Councillor, and we are due to be visited by four of our local MP's; gradually the Breakfast Clubs are beginning to make people sit up and realise that something is lacking in the care for those who have served their country.

