

Stepped up mental health funding for veterans of Afghanistan

Samaritans are to launch a new veterans support helpline, backed by more than half a million pounds of government funding, to provide peer-to-peer emotional support to veterans.

The new helpline is one of more than 50 projects announced today from the Office for Veterans' Affairs Afghanistan Veterans' Fund, totalling £5million.

Around £150k is being provided to RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity, who will improve the wellbeing of veterans through volunteering with Afghans who now live in the UK, including Afghans who worked with the UK military and were evacuated during Operation Pitting.

Other projects include:

- Providing veterans in Scotland with opportunities to engage with mindfulness and recovery in nature, through the charity Mindfulness Scotland
- Encouraging veterans to connect with one another through sports such as rugby, golf, climbing and horse riding.
- Increasing access to assistance dogs for veterans struggling with their mental health in England to assistance dogs to help alleviate symptoms and triggers of PTSD.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Leo Docherty said:

We are forever grateful to those who served in Afghanistan and members of the Afghan community who worked with them. Their courage and commitment to this country will never be forgotten.

This targeted funding for charities across the country will ensure that, regardless of location, those who have served and their families can access services easily.

The Afghanistan Veterans' Fund was announced by the Prime Minister last year, following the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The fund supports the Afghanistan veteran cohort with help adjusting to civilian life.

The fund, which is being distributed by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, will also increase dedicated support mechanisms for young veterans and their families. The £5 million boost will also help increase the user friendliness

and accessibility of services, better signposting veterans to the range of state and charitable services available to them.

The Samaritans project will see volunteers from the military community trained to provide peer-to-peer support by the charity, to encourage improved mental resilience and wellbeing in the armed forces community.

Chief Executive Officer of Samaritans Julie Bentley said:

Samaritans is proud to be supporting our Armed Forces community, many of whom have put their physical and mental health on the line to serve their country, with the creation of a new dedicated support service for military veterans.

Sadly, we know from calls to our helpline that veterans consistently make up over 70% of the calls from the military community, and that they are almost twice as likely to report suicidal thoughts compared with the general population.

That's why it's so important that veterans facing a crisis can easily access support and contact a trained veteran volunteer to help improve their wellbeing.

Chief Executive Officer of RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity Alistair Halliday said:

The funding from the OVA will enable RFEA The Forces Employment Charity to deliver vital support. We will be working with UK Veterans to support Afghan people who are arriving in the UK and who worked alongside our UK Armed Forces during the 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan.

The aim of our programme will be to enable those arriving from Afghanistan to access employment providing financial independence and inclusion in UK society. The sustained links that we will create between UK veterans, many of whom served in the Afghanistan conflict, and those arriving from Afghanistan will create long-term benefit for both groups”.

Notes to editors

Details on the recipients of the Afghanistan Veterans' Fund can be found [here](#)