

# What Are the Barriers to Reaching Forces Families and to Evaluating the Impact of Working with Them?

Assessing the effectiveness of Reading Force, a programme to promote shared reading within the Forces community

## Alison Baverstock

Associate Professor Alison Baverstock PFHEA (Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy) is a publisher and co-founded the MA Publishing at Kingston University in 2006. She is the author of many books on the industry, the best known of which is *How to Market Books* (5th edn, Routledge, 2015), and has been a winner of the Pandora Award for Services to Publishing. She was an Army wife for 30 years, during which she and her husband had 19 postings.



[a.baverstock@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:a.baverstock@kingston.ac.uk)

This paper builds on a previous paper in this journal (Baverstock, *Logos* 24 (3), 2013) which covered the establishment of Reading Force, a shared-reading initiative to promote improved communication between members of British Armed Forces families and to help mitigate the particular difficulties of service life. It begins

by considering the range of difficulties experienced by Forces families and the literature associated with their effective management and support. It then considers the various means of communication with Forces families and associated opportunities and barriers. It examines how project effectiveness was assessed, and

**why accessing data and hence precise analysis have proven difficult, and considers other methods of estimating outcomes. Finally, prospects for future project development are considered.**

*Keywords:* services, Forces, Army, shared reading, scrapbook, reader development

### Introduction

A life in the Forces, whether as a member of the armed services or as a family member, can involve many challenges: long periods away on exercise; sudden postings; unanticipated changes due to national and international developments—and the corresponding requirements of the civil power. Although Forces personnel may be ready to anticipate the unexpected, and those who have established partnerships with them may be similarly informed, the challenges are also often acutely felt by their wider families. There is certainly a strong hereditary element in Forces recruitment, but not all parents and siblings of Forces personnel understand their life, and children born into this environment have no choice in their home circumstances. Both nuclear and extended family may find adaptation to change problematic and the associated difficulties are rarely acknowledged.

Though not unique to Forces life, the specific issues faced by services families perhaps have an increased impact because they may overlap—and hence reinforce each other. In general they can be described as relating to disruption and movement, isolation, separation, difficulties in communication, and corollary stress. In combination, they can lead to dissonance within a family and a barrier to wider understanding of Forces life, hence potential difficulties of integration between services personnel and their local civilian community.

### Disruption

A life in the Armed Forces involves regular disruption. Postings may be for individuals or for whole units, but disruption is an inevitable consequence: moving house or rebasing has the potential to interrupt education, spousal career, and friendships; this can be particularly problematic for children who have to move mid school year, leave established friendship groups, and then integrate into a new class that is already well established. The process also disrupts access to specific support ser-

vices. These can range from access to medical treatment (e.g., specialist treatments that require long-term access to sustained services, such as infertility or diabetes); social services (e.g., the long process that leads to adoption); special needs for children in education (e.g., specific classroom support or specialist schooling); career progression (e.g., employment opportunities for other family members); particular housing requirements (e.g., accommodation for extended-family members or a dependent with individual physical needs). All these factors can disrupt community relationships; an awareness of imminent postings can lead to reduced motivation to integrate.

### Isolation

Service accommodation is available to personnel who have established a committed relationship, and although members of the Forces often embark on partnerships, and become parents, earlier in life than their civilian counterparts (Rowe et al., 2014), the disruption of moving can result in isolation from a family network and support that would otherwise be available. For example, owing to distance, a young mother may not be able to access the support she would most likely draw on in civilian society: that of her own mother and other relatives. Regular postings can create significant geographical distances from the wider family, meaning that Forces children may have relatively little direct contact with their grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Journalist Lesley Garner had an enormous response to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* about parents of service-people who felt isolated by the deployment of their children, particularly when they were no longer the next of kin (Garner, 2009).

Unit re-basings can see whole communities transported from one location to another, the mass move making it difficult to integrate with the local population, who may view the new arrivals as an undifferentiated group rather than a range of individuals. Services accommodation does not (for security reasons) feature on local street plans, and this can again promote the tendency of the Armed Forces to remain relatively unintegrated with the wider community. The regular sight of removal vans can reinforce an impression that it is not worth getting to know individual members of the Armed Forces, since they will soon be on the move again. Community organi-

zations with long waiting lists (e.g., Scout groups, swimming lessons, popular schools) may have few Forces participants because they are not resident long enough to qualify to join.

### Separation

A career in the Armed Forces involves a lot of separation within the family. The structure and frequency of deployments may be familiar from the press in the context of world events and associated media coverage; what is generally less well known is the surrounding commitment to training and post-deployment activities, so that a typical Army six-month tour of duty will routinely involve at least 10 months' separation.

What is rarely mentioned is that before they leave for a tour of duty the soldiers have an extremely charged six-month training schedule, so the impact on families is felt well before they leave for combat. Some may spend as little as 30% of their time with their families during the training period and as a tour lasts six months, this, in effect, means a year of separation and disruption. Inevitably, that takes a toll on everyone. (Winston, 2011)

The Navy and Marines are usually away longer (9–10 months) and in the Royal Air Force (RAF) deployments can range from a few weeks to 9–10 months.

In between postings there will be additional periods of separation owing to the requirement to attend career-based courses and training. These long periods of separation, and in particular issues of pre-departure anxiety and subsequent difficulties around reintegration, can promote feelings of 'separateness' in the family.

### Difficulties in communication

There are associated difficulties of communication within Forces families. It can be hard to keep a partner, or the wider family, involved, particularly given some conditions of service (submariners being particularly hard to reach, for obvious reasons). The instability of perpetual change can put a strain on relationships; both divorce and separation are higher in Forces families than in the general population (Rowe et al., 2014). Discussing the issue most on everyone's mind can be difficult because it

is often so closely allied to the professional role of the Forces' member, and issues of security and the lack of secure networks for communication may mean relevant conversation is impossible once the departure has taken place. Some kind of common ground around which families can connect is helpful.

**Discussing the issue most on everyone's mind can be difficult because it is often so closely allied to the professional role of the Forces' member**

In addition to these issues, consideration should be paid to the particular Armed Forces culture and ethos. Forces families tend to be proud, independent, and disinclined to make a fuss; the instinctive 'privacy settings' can make it hard to reach them. This culture also includes discouragement of wives commenting or 'rocking the boat', which spreads to the children, who may bottle up their fears about deployment because they feel they have to be 'strong for their mum', who is using all her energy to keep things going at home. (Though mothers do go away too, the more common experience is for the deployed parent to be male.)

### Corollary stress

All these factors can result in stress; particularly when experienced in combination.

### Key influences and relevant literature

Research into the impact of separation on Forces families has been reported variously. There is a requirement in the Armed Forces that military personnel do not comment in the media, and this culture broadly extends to families of services personnel; first-hand accounts of the pressures on families are rare (Baverstock, 2007) and more often anonymous (e.g., Jones, 1990; Winston, 2011).

Previous research has suggested that the most important predictor of marriage dissolution in the Forces is experience of combat and conflict (Call & Teachman, 1991; Ruger et al., 2002; Goff et al., 2007). More recently, however, work undertaken by the King's Centre for Military

Health Research has suggested that, rather than arising from the experience of deployment to Iraq, the risk of negative relationship change is influenced more by other factors, and vulnerabilities include 'those who display symptoms of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], are binge drinkers or misuse alcohol, have difficulty adjusting post-deployment, have argumentative relationships, and are more likely to be younger personnel with no children in the lower ranks of the military' (Rowe et al., 2013). Keeling et al. (2016) have undertaken research with British Army personnel to identify the practical, emotional, and cultural dilemmas soldiers have to balance to maintain successful marriages and Army careers; the researchers were hoping in the process to identify how such factors could be used to shape the content of interventions to increase the resiliency of military marriages.

This paper reports on such a potential intervention. Reading Force promotes shared reading to ameliorate the difficulties experienced by Forces families. The project's origins lie in my own formative experience of the role that books can play in connecting people. An Army wife myself, during a range of separations (Northern Ireland 1982–1998; Kosovo 2002; Iraq 2006–2007; Afghanistan 2008) and through many house moves, I developed various strategies for maintaining communication among the family; one of which was shared reading. During times apart, the family would regularly read books and then send them to each other (there were initiatives enabling parcels up to a certain weight to be sent to deployed Forces for nothing); in the process we discovered common ground through sharing content. The knowledge that a book that had been read could be posted out to the field, and be there within days, brought comfort to all the family.

My previous involvement in reader development schemes such as Well Worth Reading (McKearney and Baverstock, 1990), often funded by local government and other local bodies, led to an appreciation of the role that reading can play in building a community of shared experience. Work with the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering on resources for 'looked-after' children enabled exploration of the role played by scrapbooks in storing memories for those with disrupted lives, concluding that, for children in care, with relatively few transportable belongings and limited access to information about

their personal history, it was important to produce resources that had high standards of production and conveyed a care benefit. Finally, work with educator Gill Hines on parenting, and two resulting practical manuals (Hines and Baverstock, 2006, 2009), isolated the positive role that scrapbooks can play in helping young people reflect upon, and hence navigate, difficult times.

A wider body of literature relates to the value of reading in general; for example from Book Trust, the National Literacy Trust, and the Reading Agency. In particular, Hicks (2003) explored the link between reading and health and well-being, and in 2015 an extensive review of the relevant literature by the Reading Agency in consultancy with BOP Consulting assembled a wealth of evidence that reading for pleasure correlates with a number of positive long- and short-term outcomes for the individual's life chances in education and careers and psychological and physical health. There is a further stream of literature that examines how communication about books within families can promote strong relationships, in that projecting ideas and difficulties on to third party situations in books can make them easier to discuss (Clark, 2009; Clark & Hawkins, 2010).

The project also drew on a range of Forces-related research at Kingston University, notably: the impact of British Army operations on Forces families and host communities (Dixon, 2000) and the role of parents as gatekeepers to recruitment (Dixon, 2012); work on the regimental and national loyalties that are the basis of group cohesion within the Black Watch regiment, and the impact that separation and casualties have on both soldiers and their families (Reid, 2011, 2013, pp. 15–18, 31–32, 80–82); how creative writing can impact on community-building, maintenance of relationships, social interaction, and skills development among ex-Forces personnel (Campbell, 2012). Finally, there has been research by a developmental psychologist on PTSD among children, adolescents, and former soldiers (Phippard & Samara, 2012) as well as work done in supporting care leavers through university.<sup>1</sup>

There is also literature on the use of shared reading to build cohesion within universities, notably the pre-arrival shared reading in US universities. Ferguson (2006), Golden (2012), and Twiton (2007) discuss the role such schemes can play in widening participation and promoting engagement. This is relevant to Forces communities,

since disengagement from school by service children anticipating another move has been regularly remarked on by teachers attending Reading Force presentations. Literature relating to pre-arrival shared reading in universities is generally included within marketing information rather than subject to academic scrutiny, and data about this can be hard to capture, but there are indications of the wider relevance of such initiatives. For example, although Twiton's project drew just 130 responses from a student intake of around 2500 (0.05 percent), success may be discerned in the qualitative comments of those who did provide feedback, the significant numbers attending related events, and anecdotal responses from those involved. Baverstock et al. (2016) offer more detailed analysis from surveying participants and show how the implementation of a shared-reading initiative across an entire university correlated with improved student and staff engagement and a significant decline in the student drop-out rate for the academic year in which the scheme was introduced.

**Methodology**

Reading Force had its immediate origins in a specific opportunity—the beginning of a three-year posting to Aldershot in December 2009. Aldershot is officially the home of the British Army and accommodates a local population of 10 500 troops and their families. Our new location offered potential access to a specific population and an ideal geographical area in which to site an initiative. Although my status as a services partner and member of the Forces community gave me knowledge of, and access to, the supporting information dissemination systems, from the outset the project sought to build an ongoing infrastructure based on personal and professional experience rather than be reliant on an individual's temporary role within the military chain of command.

The project was to have a sustained emphasis on shared reading and associated discussion, to promote improved communication through participation, to reflect on responses to change through a physical record, and to foster an understanding of Forces life. It was suggested that families choose a title that all wanted to read or have read to them, together aloud or individually, and then to pool their thoughts and responses—via text messages, emails, drawings, photographs and e-blues<sup>2</sup>—in a bespoke scrapbook. This could be either kept

as a memento of a particular time or (temporarily) returned to the organizers for feedback and submission into a competition for a range of prizes. All scrapbooks would then be returned by secure delivery.

Given the relatively short and non-extendable period of time in Aldershot, and the opportunity this afforded to be part of, and hence reach, the local military population and to gain temporary access to community funding, I decided to proceed with a pilot project based on previous non-service initiatives and to run this as action research (or practice as research), monitoring outcomes and making associated changes as the project progressed. It was important to implement quickly and analyse the project's development, through delivery, through the involvement of collaborators, and through the responsiveness of the target audience.

Through feedback from those involved, both participants and those delivering materials to the market, the scrapbook has now been through three iterations. An initial, consciously 'old-looking' scrapbook was replaced by one that looked more fun, more colourful, and less like coursework. As it emerged that many of those submitting scrapbooks were families with young children, the spaces for writing were made bigger to accommodate those with developing motor skills, leading to the

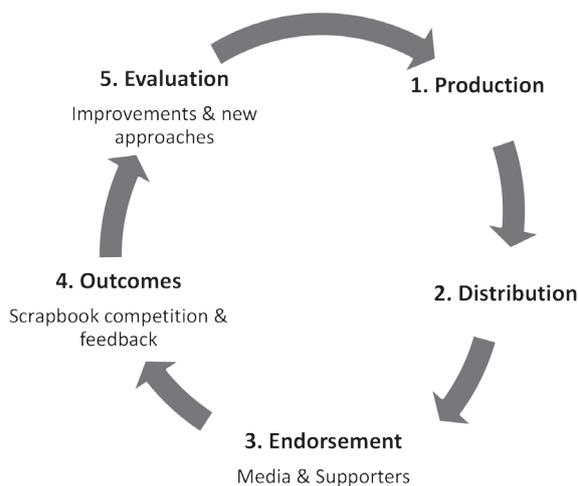


Figure 1. Diagram showing how the project developed as action research. Feedback from the market to whom the scrapbooks were circulated and evaluation of completed scrapbooks offered important information for the further development of materials.

piloting of Reading Force, Little Ones, a related initiative in nursery schools sponsored by the Soldier's Charity. Initial resources were printed, but as the area over which the scheme was operating became larger more was made available online, including downloadable PDFs of printed Reading Force materials, a more sophisticated website, and an e-newsletter. Initially, the resources were tied in to a series of localized submission dates and associated competitions. As the area over which materials were made available extended, resources were made available year-round (Figure 1; Table 1).

Given project constraints, a multi-agency approach was adopted, distributing information through as many channels as possible and monitoring feedback. All these methods of reaching the market proved effective to some extent. I shall now examine in more detail the opportunities and barriers associated with each route, as well as their cumulative impact. The following will be considered:

- Forces infrastructure
- Forces support mechanisms within the services community
- regional and local government
- schools
- the media
- other agencies targeting the Forces

**Forces infrastructure**

Given that the project began in Aldershot, home of the British Army and 3000 Forces families, there was an ideal opportunity to contact the potential audience directly, and at anticipated low cost, and a variety of methods to disseminate materials and reach local families were employed. Information was sent to the commanding and families officers of local units and leaflets were circulated through the pigeonholes of service personnel within units.

Various barriers to communication were quickly evident. Firstly, there was a marked resistance among service personnel to taking materials home, something I had observed during my role as garrison coordinator for the Federation of Army Wives in Osnabruck in 1991. My experience with Reading Force was similar. We found that leaflets circulated through unit pigeonholes were often not accessed, or were disposed of before they could be taken home and shared with the families. Security considerations meant that access to shared postal facilities was difficult, but it emerged that every shared distribution facility has a waste bin and many materials sent for families got no further than that. We were reluctant to damage the project's reputation by encouraging a perception of the material as waste and so reliance on distribution through units was reduced.

Insertion in shared communication vehicles (e.g., the

<i>2011 Pilot</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
Aldershot (February–July)	Four counties (April–September)	Four counties (Continuous)	National + Overseas (Continuous)	National + Overseas (Continuous)
Army, Serving	Army, Navy, RAF, Serving	Army, Navy, RAF, Serving	Army, Navy, RAF, Serving + Reservists + Veterans	Army, Navy, RAF, Serving + Reservists + Veterans
Reading Force ran for a few months from an official launch to a competition closing date. But this restricted its availability to troops being deployed at other times of the year.		Reading Force runs continuously throughout the year with competitions closing in April and October.		

**Table 1. The availability of Reading Force in its first four years. Throughout this period, it has been available to all British Forces in the UK—including serving, injured, and retired personnel and Reservists—and their families.**

Aldershot garrison magazine) risked making the scheme seem 'official'. Forces personnel are extensively monitored, and this can have the impact of making families switch off from official schemes during their leisure time. In any case, lead times for such mechanisms were long and outside the anticipated operational time of the scheme.

House-to-house delivery was possible but expensive and the pilot was running on a small budget. For security reasons, Forces accommodation does not feature on standard local road mapping and frequent postings can mean consumer mailing lists are consistently unreliable—hence a corresponding assumption that all information delivered is for someone else.

Unit welfare officers were identified as a useful means for getting the scheme better known, particularly given their key role in supporting families when spouses are away, for example by running coffee morning and days out. But over-identification of the scheme with the welfare systems risked the project being perceived as one of use to families experiencing difficulties—and hence potentially a source of stigma. Unit welfare officers from various units within garrisons do get together at regular intervals, and so it was technically possible to talk to several at the same time, but it was difficult to find out about the scheduling of these meetings and often they had a regular agenda which squeezed out any additional items. As with all Forces contact, building relationships took a long time. Frequently, once contact was made with a relevant member of personnel, they would then move on because of new postings, which generally came at least every two years.

### **Pre-tour briefings**

One of the most effective ways of reaching families likely to participate in Reading Force was to contact them before a family member departed on a period of time away, and preferably as part of the official pre-tour briefing. However, there were several barriers to this seemingly straightforward path towards engagement. Such briefings are generally organized by unit welfare officers, who can be hard to reach. Finding out about such opportunities took considerable effort; it was necessary to ask about units deploying and then to find out about pre-tour briefings, rather than being routinely informed. A list of participants for such events was often already

established and gaining a spot on the programme was difficult. Finally, the project's limited staff resources made it impossible to attend all such events. A resource pack was developed including a guide booklet on how to run the scheme for welfare staff, and examples of scrapbook submissions. This could be despatched to those organizing pre-tour briefings. Although such information on Reading Force was technically available, it did not replace the impact of personal communication about what you might do while your partners are away.

Regular contact with families offices post departure was another successful route to recruit participants into the scheme. Based on experience of observing the cycle of deployment, and anecdotal feedback from families and welfare staff, there was some evidence that mothers could be more open to hearing about activities and potential help a few weeks after a deployment has started, i.e., once the departure was over and a new stage in the cycle of deployment had begun.

Other specific communities were particularly hard to reach. Some families have opted to have a permanent base to which the service-person commutes—in some cases utilizing accommodation normally available to unmarried Forces personnel during the week, if vacancies exist. For such families, support during a tour would likely be local to where they are living, and often wider-family orientated rather than unit based. Reservists and veterans (also entitled to participate in Reading Force) were similarly hard to reach and monitor via existing support mechanisms. Reservists, increasingly relied upon in the Armed Forces, are based in their usual communities and can be very hard to reach; their children may be particularly isolated.

### **Forces support mechanisms in the services community**

In addition to unit families offices, the Armed Forces look after their families through a range of services that are based in the community. Most notable of these are the HIVEs.<sup>3</sup> Each Forces unit has access to a HIVE, usually sited within a community centre or close to the local base shop from where they offer support to services families. HIVEs are an ideal way to highlight initiatives likely to be of benefit to the community, and, following the arrangement of specific briefings, HIVEs offered early enthusiasm and support for Reading Force. There were repeat requests for materials and reports from

those manning the HIVEs on how they were being used in families.

The population using HIVEs was, however, self-selecting; those making visits were perhaps the most proactive members of the community. Once installed, Reading Force material was competing for the attention of HIVE visitors—with everything from local tourist attractions offering discounts to Forces families to transport information—generally within a small and overcrowded space. Enthusiasm from HIVE managers was a powerful means of support, but, as the majority of those working in HIVEs are services spouses, the inevitable changes in personnel and structure meant that links needed to be renewed on an ongoing basis. Owing to restructuring of the Armed Forces, many HIVEs were subsequently closed and others forced to reduce their hours of opening. This impacted on the accessibility of Reading Force.

### Regional and local government

Wider local community support for the project was an early ambition, and both the regional governmental authority (Hampshire County Council) and the local authority (Rushmoor Borough Council) were approached. Both expressed support and in particular their desire to collaborate in connecting with a community that was of particular importance to them but that they had consistently found hard to reach.

Timing was opportune. The process of engaging support for the specific needs of the Forces community received a boost with the Department for Education's introduction in 2011 of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP)<sup>4</sup> for maintained schools in England as part of the commitment to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.<sup>5</sup> The SPP offered schools additional funding for every Forces child on their roll. Schools bidding for funding were required to establish how many Forces children they had in their community, and this focused helpful attention on the size of the Forces community in their school. (Forces parents had not always identified themselves as such in order to promote the integration of their children. Many schools had therefore been unaware of the number of service children on their roll.) Reading Force also fitted particularly well within Rushmoor Council's aims to promote inter-generational relationships, community stability, and tolerance through the passing on of community values in the structures of family life and

third-party childcare. Rushmoor expressed interest in not only the likely benefits to literacy and the designated community but also the scheme's potential adaption for other 'hard to reach' groups such as children of those in prison, or looked-after children in the care system.

Although both the regional and local councils were interested and supportive, and provided early financial support for the project, the barriers that such administrations face in implementing community integration were shared by Reading Force's administration: notably services families' geographical location in estates of bespoke accommodation, which invites their depiction as a faceless and pre-grouped community rather than as individuals; and pressure on resources and many other options for spending—particularly at a time of severe governmental cutbacks.

Overall, Reading Force's collaboration with regional and local government has considerably expanded the project team's understanding of how local government works, and highlighted future areas of potential development. Access to this network offered new opportunities for disseminating the scheme, and so far three invited presentations (e.g., Boorman, 2015) have been made at conferences organized by Public Policy Exchange,<sup>6</sup> which provides an 'interface for policy discussion, debate and networking ... and the opportunity to feed into future policy development across all areas of public policy'. Appearing on the same programme as Ministry of Defence (MOD) policymakers enabled the making of important connections. Although such events attract significant audiences (100+ each time) and a shared desire both to understand the Forces community and to make support for their children and families more coherent is generally palpable, there is an acceptance that there are lots of gaps and inadequacies in provision. It was at such a presentation that a philanthropic organization attending made an offer of sponsorship to Reading Force. Over the period covered by this paper, momentum for local authorities and Armed Forces units to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant improved understanding of the Forces community. Andrew Lloyd, Chief Executive of Rushmoor Borough Council, became a trustee of Reading Force when it became a charitable incorporated organisation in 2015. The project has also twice provided evidence to governmental enquiries (e.g., House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills

Committee, 2014–2015).

### Schools

Given the project's emphasis on family communication, and the key role schools play in relocating Forces children, schools were a consistently important route to the market for Reading Force. Early contacts with local schools in Aldershot played a particularly significant role in the project's development. Of notable importance was the establishment of a steering group drawn from senior management and nominated project support in local schools with a significant number of Forces pupils on their roll (ranging from 10 to 90 percent in a total of 18 schools). It met at regular intervals throughout the initial phase of project development and identified several issues that arguably would not have been available without face-to-face contact.

For example, the group discussed the vocabulary that should be used in explaining Reading Force to teachers: whereas teachers are unlikely to respond to a 'reading scheme', since it sounds like assessed work, parents may view this term positively and hence be more inclined to take part in a project that will benefit them while ostensibly supporting the literacy of their children. How to make the project sound 'fun' rather than 'worthy' was also discussed, as was whether or not the term 'scrapbook' would be universally understood. Several of these schools held assemblies to introduce Reading Force and wrote letters to accompany materials sent home to parents. Three thousand scrapbooks were circulated. This group also hosted the project launch in 2010, held at the Wavell School (a mixed comprehensive for 11–16-year-olds), but also involving children from Marlborough Infants (3–7 years) and Newport Junior Schools (7–11 years).

As the project expanded over a wider geographical area, a number of barriers to effective dissemination through schools emerged. The main issue was consistently time. Schools are busy with the ongoing and effective delivery of the established curriculum, much of which requires measurement, and new governmental initiatives are added at regular intervals. Reading Force does not require administration within schools—it is essentially an activity to be organized at home—but its effective dissemination through schools is a very important channel to reaching families. Many schools did not

reply to mailings and those which did respond—or were contacted direct—regularly reported being too busy to consider another addition to their list of organizational involvements. Others saw involvement as a one-off event, or only wanted to do it once before moving on to another initiative, preferring to change what is on offer annually.

In schools that were interested, there was also the issue of which role/individual was best positioned to liaise with Reading Force. The project was several times highlighted as likely to be of benefit to special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and many were enrolled early on as Reading Force ambassadors. Although all interest from schools was welcome, there was concern that housing the scheme within the responsibility of the SENCO might arouse resistance from the scheme's wider designated beneficiaries. Reading Force staff wanted to see the scheme presented as being of interest to all Forces families in the school's community rather than offered just to a particular group of pupils with specific difficulties or be identified as 'curriculum support', but had little say in how the school presented it to service children or whether it was made clear that the activity was intended for the whole family. Since the launch of the SPP there are now more schools with dedicated personnel looking after Forces children, which makes it easier for Reading Force to access school communities.

There was also the issue of time for Reading Force staff. The process of building relationships with schools is resource intensive and with limited staffing resources it was difficult to implement schools liaison fully in person; we had to rely on general information dissemination methods such as postal mailings.

Physical space within schools was also a potential problem. The scheme delivers printed materials—the physicality of the scrapbook being put together by family reading groups being a key part of the experience—and this creates a requirement for storage in schools before the scrapbooks are distributed. Although 25 school librarians are Reading Force ambassadors, storage of the associated materials in their libraries can be difficult, depending on the number of Forces children on the school roll. School libraries are, in any case, often under pressure; as roll numbers rise, many have either been turned into teaching space (it's not uncommon to find library resources are now in a corridor) or been amalgamated



**Figure 2.** The launch of Reading Force at Wavell School in 2012. Forces children at the Wavell School were joined by children from nearby Marlborough Infants School and Newport Junior School. In the front row are Carnegie Medal winning author Meg Rosof and Captain Keith Page, SO3 Ops O&D, the Services Project Liaison Manager appointed from 145 (South) Brigade, based in Aldershot.

into shared spaces with technology and learning support. Establishing display space consistently proved difficult (Figure 2).

Another issue was how to standardize how the scheme was explained in schools, particularly once Reading Force staff had moved beyond the locality and communications relied on telephone calls and materials sent through the post. It was suggested in the Reading Force introductory packs that one person in a school should take on the role of Reading Force ambassador, and this could be a teacher, librarian, literacy coordinator or service pupils champion (which become more common after the availability of the SPP in 2011). They should then be responsible for distributing materials inviting families to take part. There were, however, regular reportings of schools that had been sent the scrapbooks but used them in unintended ways, e.g., as workbooks in school class instead of sending them home for the families. Reading Force staff were concerned that presentation of the scheme as coursework would deter family involvement.

There were also various levels of involvement within schools and a difficulty of matching scheme communication to levels of awareness and enthusiasm. Reading Force consistently sought to remain flexible: to provide sufficient information about the scheme to explain its

use and value, but also to be available for those who wished to expand their involvement through a phone call or visit. There was a wide variety of engagement with the needs of Forces children. Some schools would take every opportunity to provide positive activities/experiences to the Forces children; others would play down the specifics of service life and the children in their care and therefore miss potentially beneficial opportunities. One instance was reported of a service pupils champion who was told her pupils were not allowed to talk about service life in assembly as they had suggested they would like to. This was in contrast to the supportive teacher who set up a lunchtime group for her service children to do Reading Force together, because she was aware their families would not take part in the scheme at home.

Formal school groups, organized as a result of the need to identify Forces pupils after the announcement of the SPP, offered new opportunities for the use and recommendation of Reading Force. Many schools—previously unaware of every Forces child—appointed someone in the school to monitor all potentially involved and have responsibility for Forces families. Some used Reading Force materials as the basis of group activities, often with great success:

We liked reading this book together because all the books we had were really good books and I made lots of new friends. My group has had a lot of fun together and we would really like to do it again.

I also made new friends who I did not know they were Service children. I liked sharing my book with everybody and having lunch with them and having pizza with Mrs Rendle and Eleanor.

Schools with fewer Forces children also emerged as a special category in Reading Force, needing particularly sensitive treatment. Families that have opted to be stationary in the family home, or to live with extended family, with the Forces person moving between bases, may find their children's experience as Forces children is not well understood in their schools. It was also discovered that schools without other Forces children are sometimes deliberately chosen by parents for precisely that reason: they do not wish their children to be 'labelled'. For example, feedback was received from one

parent who had received Reading Force material but did not wish to see her children highlighted as being any different, and in particular identified as being from a Forces background. Although this led to consideration of whether the needs of Forces children may be stronger where their numbers are smaller—the corresponding risk of isolation or lack of understanding of their particular situation being potentially greater—the fact that their Forces background had not been registered, and so was unknown to the school, made the path to making Reading Force materials available to them particularly difficult.

I liked the fact that we could all get together and read a book as a family. Except we were missing one person. It was my Dad. He had moved away because of the army, and we stayed. But it was nice anyway because my mum has a full-time job and I have school and so does my sister, so we barely had time to spend together. So that's what I liked about it!

In 2013, questionnaires to schools about their use of Reading Force produced a slim response, but provided a general picture of schools hearing about the scheme through the mailings (69 percent), referral (13 percent) being the second most common route. The vast majority of schools who registered were primary (79 percent); 13 percent were secondary and eight percent were pre-schools. The majority of schools that responded positively were junior schools, given the colourful appearance and child-friendly layout of the materials. Focus groups with secondary-age children confirmed that the materials are not attractive to them, appearing too childish. Although that current materials are technically relevant to families with children of all ages, and can be presented as an option for older siblings to develop with younger family members, it will be necessary to pilot older-looking materials before seeking more widespread adoption of the scheme in secondary schools.

### The media

Media coverage was one of the key means by which Reading Force could become better known, and there was early interest in its activities in both local and national press. For example, Aldershot Garrison Radio was very supportive, offering an interview opportunity plus

regular reminders aired by the station presenter, and the station's wider function as Aldershot's local radio station extended the reach. There was also extensive coverage in the national press (*The Guardian*;<sup>7</sup> *Independent on Sunday*), local press (*Oxford Mail*; *Witney Gazette*; <http://www.readingforce.org.uk/index.php/media-and-pres><sup>8</sup> *Portsmouth News*;<sup>9</sup> *Royal Borough Observer*, 2013) and educational press (*Times Educational Supplement*, 2012; *First News*, 2012), and in publications relating to higher education (e.g., Gordon, 2013) and publishing (Campbell, 2012; Gordon, 2012). There was also extensive coverage on both local radio (e.g., *BBC South News*, 2012; Heart FM; Express FM) and British Forces Broadcasting Services radio programmes. Several authors who had participated in Reading Force events also wrote about both their experience and the wider scheme, on either their own or the Reading Force website (e.g., Gibbons, 2011; White, 2014; Moss, 2016). More general coverage about the Forces, for example television series such as *Military Wives Choir* (Malone, 2011), has led to a broader understanding of the impact that a government's defence policy has on the day-to-day lives of the Forces community—and opportunities for coverage of Reading Force. A full list of media coverage can be found on the Reading Force (<http://www.readingforce.org.uk/index.php/media-and-press>).

**The media, however, are motivated by drama and it quickly emerged that, rather than speaking on behalf of the project, the agency was being asked for individual interviewees from the Forces community.**

Pursuit of media interest was, however, very time consuming. Given our limited staff resources, in 2012 a relationship was established with a media agency with particular links to the publishing industry, to manage press relations on behalf of the project. Although both their interest and relevant experience appeared strong, difficulties in establishing a working relationship emerged relatively quickly. As Reading Force is most likely to be used when Forces families are experiencing

particular pressures, it was being used by potentially vulnerable families. It had been anticipated that the project managers could speak to the media on behalf of the scheme, particularly given their own first-hand experience of services life. The media, however, are motivated by drama and it quickly emerged that, rather than speaking on behalf of the project, the agency was being asked for individual interviewees from the Forces community. Such contact was trialled with individual participants but it was quickly found that accessing those involved in the scheme and preparing them for interview, with the strong likelihood that scheduled coverage could be dropped should a bigger news item arrive, was both inappropriate and invasive of the privacy of a vulnerable group; it was also highly labour intensive from the project management point of view. It was concluded that the specific and continually changing needs of programmes were not helpful to the Reading Force participants.

After expiry of the initial contract, Reading Force returned to relying on its own efforts and has secured coverage of individual campaigns, usually their launch and conclusion, in media local to where the initiative took place and through dedicated Forces publications, which understand the specific requirements and sensitivities of working with the Forces community and have been keen to support Reading Force. There are many potential

outlets for such dissemination. Among printed publications (each with an accompanying website for updates), some are for service-specific dependents (e.g., *Army & You*; *Armed Forces Families Journal*, 2011; *Homeport*; *Navy News*, 2013); others relate to function (e.g., *Equipped*); others are unit specific (e.g., each garrison has its own magazine). Such publications offer a direct route to Reading Force’s constituency and an ongoing avenue to further coverage, since once informed about the scheme they appreciate being updated on new information, and after features have appeared it has regularly been observed that reader enquiries follow. The routine collection of quotations and project endorsements from Reading Force participants, from both the scrapbooks submitted and general correspondence, was systematized. Once the material had been anonymized and permission gained for its wider circulation, this provided a wealth of information to use in media features and updates. This approach has offered a true flavour of how the scheme works in practice without the need to secure individual interviewees (Table 2).

**Collaboration with other agencies targeting the Forces**

A multi-agency approach to reaching Forces families emerged early as important; families were more likely to take part in the scheme if they had heard of it before, and a wide variety of routes led to a decision to partici-

2013	2014	2015
Four counties	National + Overseas	National + Overseas
Tri-services, Serving	Tri-services, Serving + Reservists	Tri-services, Serving + Reservists + Veterans
Multi-agency working	Building database	Building database
Email campaign	Multi-agency working	Multi-agency working
Partnerships	Mailing samples	Mailing samples
Welfare briefings	Events	Events
Competition/prize	Incentives	Incentives
	Web/social media	Web/social media
	Newsletters	Newsletters
	Partnerships	Partnerships
	Competition/prize	Competition/prize

Table 2. A summary of the route taken to reach the designated population and the agencies through which the project operated once it no longer relied on personal links.

pate—as well as promoting additional word of mouth. Although personal contact with the market is optimal, as the territory over which Reading Force was available increased, more non-personal direct marketing was needed. It became necessary to plan materials for different target approaches. The tone of voice and vocabulary used in each of these were of crucial importance. However, given shortage of funds such information sought both to answer the questions of those who had heard of the scheme before and to introduce it to those unfamiliar, all with the same document, backed up by a website and an email address for further information and enquiries.

A grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Libor Fund and attendance at events that demonstrated the diversity of organizations working to support Forces families, such as the Army Families Federation conferences and pre-tour briefings, brought an increased awareness of opportunities for collaboration. The Forces are served by a range of separate charitable organizations, and although their aims are similar—promoting and ensuring the welfare of the Forces and their families—the history of collaboration has not been particularly strong, particularly with the arrival of Help for Heroes, which from a standing start in 2007 has attracted a very high media profile. There is evident confusion among the public about the differences between these charities, and sometimes the marketing activities of one have led to charitable donations for others.

Given that each charity has its own infrastructure and they are supporting essentially the same group of people, Reading Force has sought to build alliances and benefit from structures that can be shared. Significant links were established with ABF The Soldiers' Charity (formerly the Army Benevolent Fund) to extend Reading Force in nursery schools and playgroups. Research had revealed that awareness of their organization was greater in families with older children and less in families with very young children and, as Reading Force participants were drawn more from families with younger children, they saw this as a way of reaching a younger Forces demographic. Reading Force has collaborated since 2014 with the Tri-Service Red, White and Blue Day (RWBD)—primary age children offered the chance to dress up in red, white and blue and make a donation to demonstrate their support for the Forces<sup>10</sup>—and an associated story

writing competition that Reading Force management have helped to judge.

In developing links with these organizations, it has proven important to build contacts at all levels of the organization, not just between those who established the partnership or were signatories to the initial agreement. For most organizations with potential funds to allocate, it has been important to find a specific project upon which collaboration can be arranged and success monitored, rather than requesting a donation or grant for general overheads. For example, when Reading Force was working with ABF The Soldiers' Charity a new 'Little Ones' scrapbook was designed for families with younger children (with larger spaces for those with less developed motor skills). Such initiatives can help with the costs by sharing resources, but also give increased credibility and reach. Similarly, a successful partnership with Storybook Waves<sup>11</sup> was developed whereby children got a copy of the book read by their absent parent, plus a Reading Force scrapbook.

The project has also made ongoing attempts to share information with others studying the impact of change on the military. Papers have been presented on Reading Force at the British Psychology Society Conference, Military Subsection, and through the conferences organized by the Service Children's Support Network, based in High Wycombe. A recent link has been made with a researcher into PTSD at Surrey University who plans to consider Reading Force as part of the support structure available to promote mental well-being among Forces families.

#### **Establishing direct communications with families**

Since inception the project has relied, as outlined above, on multi-agency access to the community, as a way of both maximizing opportunities to reach the market and combating the intrinsic instability of the target population. Increasingly, however, opportunities for direct communication have also been pursued, by including in the scrapbook a postcard inviting families to register both to participate in Reading Force and to get a free book.

Although the postal addresses of Army and RAF families<sup>12</sup> change constantly, owing to postings and rebasings, families seem to maintain their email address as a permanent method of communication. Reading Force has a high repeat factor—families who have taken part

in the past are often keen to do so again—and it emerged that participants had sufficient trust in the organization to give their email address where this was sought.

There has been important learning about additional particular circumstances in which the project can be useful. For example, it was already known that Reading Force benefited families separated by postings and deployments, but the scheme's value emerged in a range of additional specific circumstances such as: family breakdown and long-term illness; reintegrating at the end of the tour when those who have been separated for a long time need to connect again; and coping with long-term injury or permanent disablement.

Reading Force has had a particular value for children from a Forces background whose parents are divorced or separated. Once the family are no longer living in service accommodation, and hence dependents are no longer included in official communities or counting mechanisms, project involvement has provided a valuable reinforcement of Forces connections. Given the extent to which Forces families see their identity as coming from their Forces roles (Ricketts, 2009), this is significant.

Thank you for taking time to look at our scrapbook. Completing it helped myself and ex husband have a focus with our children. We all very much enjoyed taking part. (Services partner going through a divorce at the time of completing a scrapbook with her family)

Finally, the gathering of data about the Forces, and their maintenance in a contact database, is likely to provide a useful resource for effective future connection and development of Reading Force.

### **Assessing and measuring the outcomes of Reading Force activities**

It was always important to assess the outcomes of Reading Force, but the gaining of greater public funding increased the imperative to closely monitor its success. At project inception, in Aldershot, it was relatively straightforward to rely on local knowledge of the schools; to collect submitted scrapbooks, return them after feedback, and allocate prizes. As the scheme grew, however, and external funding was received, more formal arrangements for accounting and tracking were needed.

A variety of different methods of assessment were established, from charting the number of scrapbooks distributed and free books requested, to qualitatively measuring the depth of engagement demonstrated by those taking part. Participating organizations (e.g., schools, HIVEs) participating were questioned and feedback sought. Although there are difficulties in obtaining a full picture, some statistics can be offered.

### **Key statistics**

From 2011 to 2015, Reading Force has given out over 70 000 scrapbooks to Forces families, gifted over 6300 free books to service children, from birth to young adult, and worked with over 500 schools and preschools to distribute project materials. The scheme has also been offered through welfare organizations, HIVEs, community groups, and service family events, and presented at military-related conferences, seminars, and forums. Through scrapbook competitions, prizes and certificates have been awarded to over 500 service children. Arrangements were also set up with children's advocacy groups such as HMS Heroes<sup>13</sup> and working through Service Children's Education (SCE)<sup>14</sup> overseas schools.

In general, the further the project moved from personal contact, the lower the number of scrapbooks returned. The figures break down as shown in Table 3.

Besides monitoring scrapbooks returned, other methods of gaining market feedback on the value and benefits of Reading Force have been pursued. For example, in 2012 a telephone survey of participating schools was undertaken with a random selection of headteachers, all of whom stressed that they wished to remain involved in the scheme. The Headteacher of Harestock Primary School in Winchester commented,

Reading Force had a very positive impact on the Service Families who took part, encouraging the sharing of books with family members. Our Service Families Support Worker supported the children through this venture and we are as a school really excited about launching Reading Force again this year.

In December 2014, a survey of participants drew 91 responses from a total mailing of 500 (18.2 percent), again with very positive responses. Eighty-eight percent of respondents had shared the book or talked about it and 56

percent had used a Reading Force scrapbook. The book had been shared with parents (74 percent), siblings (37 percent), grandparents (32 percent), and friends/other family members (19 percent), confirming anecdotal feedback that the project impacts across both nuclear and wider family. Twenty-nine percent of respondents had shared the book with someone living away from their home, 21 percent with someone on deployment. Methods of sharing included Skype/FaceTime (33 percent) and phone (23 percent), but only six percent used post or e-bluey. Ninety-three percent of respondents rated Reading Force at either 4 or 5 out of 5. Respondents were split between roughly half for the Army and a quarter each from the Navy/Marines and RAF. Reasons for not taking part were largely to do with lack of time and the competing demands of younger children.

A survey emailed to the schools participating in the 2015 Road Show to 10 schools with a high density of Forces families produced similarly positive responses. All reported that the project had brought about increased enthusiasm for reading. In one school it was reported that subsequent standard attainment tests in schools (SATs)

for literacy were higher than anticipated. Schools additionally commented:

Our primary aim was to promote engagement with the community with so much mobility and to engage parents further. It did this as we had our highest turn out of parents to any reading event we have held (Esther Brown, Carnagill Community Primary School, North Yorkshire).

We particularly struggle to engage Service families, so it was really encouraging to see so many families attending after school fete with their children. Many service children do not have strong (male) role models for reading, so it was great to have both Tom and Jim speaking to the pupils (Chris Baker, Bulford St Leonard's Primary School, Wiltshire).

It enabled a highly effective focus on the value of reading, and the 'after shocks' are still being felt, with children regularly requesting copies of the books (Ian Denison, Downlands Community Primary School, Dorset).

	2011 Pilot	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Aldershot (February–July)	Four counties (April–September)	Four counties (Continuous)	National + Overseas (Continuous)	National + Overseas (Continuous)
Scrapbooks distributed	2000	8000	5000	19 300	14 100
Organizations and schools distributing materials		122	90	366	300
Books gifted (post-cards or website request)	Not offered	Not offered		2000	796 (postcards/website) + 2000 at Roadshow
Scrapbooks returned for submission to competition	23 (1.1 percent)	16 (0.2 percent)	9 (0.2 percent)	86 (0.5 percent)	79 (0.5 percent)

Table 3. Scrapbook distribution and return, 2010–2015.

A survey was emailed to 120 parents/carers who attended the after-school fete with their children. Thirty parents/carers responded. Unfortunately, many did not answer all the questions in the survey, so although the following data are useful they reflect the responses of a minority.

- 10.7 percent of parents/carers who attended the fete were male.
- When asked, 'Did you enjoy the family fete?' on a scale of 1-8 one percent chose 10 and 28.6 percent chose 8.
- 90.5 percent of parents/carers said they thought their children enjoyed the Roadshow.
- When asked, 'Has the Roadshow inspired you to read more, or encouraged your family to read more?' 76.2 percent of parents/carers answered 'yes'.
- Seventy percent of parents/carers said they had not heard of Reading Force before the Roadshow.
- Sixty percent of parents/carers answered that the Roadshow had made them more interested in reading with their children
- Ninety-five percent of parents/carers picked up a Reading Force scrapbook at the fete. 63.2 percent said they have used it or will use it. A further 31.6 percent were not sure whether they would.
- 38.9 percent think using the scrapbook is a good way to keep in touch, a further 38.9 percent think the scrapbook is a good way to have a shared experience while they or their partner is deployed or away on training or exercise, and 100 percent think it is a fun activity for children.

Children were also surveyed: 150 pre-Roadshow surveys and 225 post-Roadshow surveys were completed. Thirty-two percent of eight-year-old attendees answered the pre-Roadshow survey, compared with 48 percent of 10-year-old attendees who answered the post-Roadshow survey. Comparisons must be mindful of this inconsistency. The percentage of boys and girls answering both surveys was equally balanced.

The children who did complete surveys answered only once, so it has not been possible to build a developmental picture of 'before', 'after', and 'later'. But overall we can identify:

**... a 19.6 percent increase in children reading fiction, an 11 percent increase in children reading magazines, a 13.8 percent increase in children reading comics or graphic novels, and a 27.6 increase in children reading non-fiction books ...**

- a three percent increase in the number of children reading with family after the Roadshow;
- an eight percent increase in the number of children reading everyday/almost everyday/a few times a week after the Roadshow;
- an eight percent decrease in the number of children rarely/never reading after the Roadshow;
- an 18 percent increase in the number of children reading for information outside class after the Roadshow;
- a 19.6 percent increase in children reading fiction, an 11 percent increase in children reading magazines, a 13.8 percent increase in children reading comics or graphic novels, and a 27.6 increase in children reading non-fiction books after the Roadshow (the higher proportion of 10-year-olds answering should be taken into account when considering the type of reading matter children were reading);
- a combined 14 percent increase in children reading with brothers, sisters, and grandparents after the Roadshow, as opposed to only reading with parents/carers.

Feedback was also continually gained from those involved in the scheme; this was mostly spontaneously offered when scrapbooks were returned or given via the Reading Force website:

It felt really good to share a favourite book and I know that sharing is a good thing to do. Thanks for your help Mrs Bird you made me think that reading is fun from all the words you said. (2012 participant; Mrs Bird was headteacher of Marlborough Infants School and a member of the original Aldershot project steering group)

Although more direct responses from participants would help us to evaluate the scheme more effectively, it is helpful to consider wider practice in the creative economy when it comes to seeking to establish the benefits of projects that have a broader potential impact than is immediately countable. Thus media organizations running advertising campaigns (arguably a form of practice as research) have regularly thought laterally about how to put a numerical value on the potential effectiveness of propositions through metrics such as ‘opportunities to see’ or ‘potential eye traffic’. Museums and galleries count ‘footfall’ without necessarily noting how long visitors stay or how much they engage. Similarly, magazine publishers regularly make claims for the impact of a publication—based on their understanding of how their readers deal with the publication they buy—and thus often concentrate on ‘readership’ (the estimated number of people accessing each copy based on a noted tendency to pass copies on) rather than ‘circulation’ (the number of copies sold). ‘Circulation’ in any case needs further interrogation, since it may include copies circulated to newsagents and newsstands but not sold. It’s becoming commonplace for media to count their influence according to their followers on social media rather than their paid membership/circulation. The Society of Authors, for example, has a membership of around 10 000 but a Twitter following of over 29 000.

#### **Other metrics for establishing project effectiveness**

##### ***Analysis of the scrapbooks returned***

These were an effective testament to the value of the project among its target audience, often revealing significant engagement and contributions by several members of the same family. Several criteria were used when considering the scrapbooks for the awarding of prizes, including: the number of individuals involved; the depth of engagement; and the range of communication media involved (Skype, pictures, email, letters, handwritten contributions). Many of the submissions scored high on all criteria.

##### ***Wider use of the materials***

Several of the schools involved in Aldershot asked if any scrapbooks not circulated to Forces children could be used more generally in promoting literacy in the school

population, thus validating the usefulness of the material in encouraging reading for pleasure.

##### ***Commendation by policymakers***

Information about the project was passed to the organization Service Children in State Schools (SCISS). Reading Force was isolated as an example of good practice and nominated by Amanda Rowley, Headteacher of the Wavell School, for the special attention of the Department for Education, which noted the project as an example of good practice and sent representation to two meetings of the Aldershot steering group. The project twice had letters of commendation from the Prime Minister, and members of the management team were invited to present the scheme to the Duchess of Cornwall at a special reception for Forces families.

##### ***Formal contributions to policymaking groups***

Reading Force was twice invited to give evidence to parliamentary enquiries relating to educational performance and literacy.

##### ***Direct involvement with Forces families***

Families registered directly with Reading Force and often took part in sequential years.

##### ***Project feedback***

Qualitative feedback received by participants in the project has consistently been engaged and detailed, with a high value placed on taking part.

##### ***Why accessing data and hence precise analysis have proven difficult***

Practice-as-research projects raise difficulties for those more accustomed to traditional academic research. There is no complete research process, pre-planned and then delivered, to analyse and consider in retrospect—and on which to base consequent action. More often observations are being made in real time, and recorded as the project develops, in order to assess and analyse what is taking place—and to decide what should happen next. The particular issues of seeking to work through various channels have been explored; additional barriers to project effectiveness came from the nature of the project itself:

***The project was not necessarily containable within the time-frame specified***

The project relied on a number of stages: a group of family and friends hearing about the project; understanding what was involved and deciding to participate; choosing a book all would read; agreeing to discuss it as a shared activity; implementing what had been decided upon; and motivating participation. This was a complicated and coordinated series of involvements and required significant administration and the allocation of time, e.g., reading being completed within a particular period of time; circulation of the book (if multiple copies were not bought); completion of the scrapbook; its despatch to Reading Force.

***The number of participants exceeded the number of scrapbooks returned***

There were regular reports from those distributing Reading Force materials (notably HIVEs and schools) that families were participating and finding the process useful, but the number of families did not equate to the number of scrapbooks submitted. Various reasons may be suggested—from families starting the project and planning to complete it sometime later, to families using the project to emphasize reading as a family activity but not completing a scrapbook. It is also known that some families saved the project for their next separation, and its operation thus fell outside the period of monitoring. Once Reading Force was operating over a larger geographical area, many more prizes were needed and free books and certificates were offered rather than the more glamorous incentives of the first year of operation. This may have impacted on participation levels.

***The project was not necessarily best contained within the format provided***

The project sought to promote shared reading and improve communication, but this could take place without completing a scrapbook and thus families could participate without delivering any measurable outcome. For example, a playgroup in Camberley developed their own scrapbooks which were seen by Reading Force management only because a local health visitor who represented Book Start spotted them and asked if she could borrow them for that purpose. Without this, Reading Force management would have been unaware of the im-

part of their scheme in this group. There may have been other similar developments.

***The number of scrapbooks returned for feedback and analysis decreased as the project moved away from its first geographical base***

Located in Aldershot, based on personal contact with local schools from whom scrapbooks could be collected and returned in person, the project necessarily moved to a model that, although promising careful treatment of the scrapbook and its return by recorded post, required participants to post the scrapbook to an unknown third party.

***Effective engagement with the project promoted personal thoughts and responses***

But those involved did not necessarily want to share these, either with their immediate family or with project administration. Anecdotally, teenagers reported that they would rather share thoughts on their reading with each other than with their parents. This has led to related initiatives for Reading Force such as Reading Force Buddies, trialled in Risedale Sports and Community College in 2014, to be reported on at a later date.

***Restricted access to the Forces population***

In order to protect them and the work that they do, particularly at times of heightened security, information about Forces personnel's whereabouts, and access to them, is necessarily restricted.

***The natural reluctance of the target population to being observed and recorded***

Service families are used to being monitored and recorded, through many official channels, and wives and partners may be reticent about receiving information directly and developing new obligations. This is a market whose privacy settings are instinctively high.

***Conclusion***

Although barriers to reaching and working with Forces families remain, and will continue as part of the structure that organizes and protects the Forces' operation, they are in some ways breaking down. Government initiatives have highlighted the specific needs of the Forces community. Both a higher profile of charitable

organizations supporting their specific needs and more media coverage have brought about a widened empathy towards Forces families, a broader understanding of their lifestyle and the specific challenges they face. At the same time, online media have offered new ways for Forces families to remain in touch and provided them with a network that may potentially outlast each physical move. Reading Force has benefitted from, and drawn on, these various trends.

Looking ahead, at the core of Reading Force will remain a range of partnerships that seek to maintain and expand delivery of the key operational elements. The organization will continue to rely on a range of intermediaries—service welfare units, schools, libraries, and community groups—and these relationships will be marked by an ongoing determination to capture data and related information in order to develop a direct relationship with those involved and to more effectively research and analyse the scheme's impact on the Forces community and their wider friends and families. This will help to ensure that those running the scheme will know how it is being received, that opportunities for service development and improvement will be identified,

and that the messages of most relevance to the target beneficiaries will be communicated.

But in addition to formalized partnerships Reading Force will seek to maintain the strong local and community involvement on which project expansion has relied and which has imparted the scheme's highly personal feel. New methods of reporting associated activity online, as well as asking that scrapbooks be returned to Reading Force management, are being explored.

In summary, while barriers to the Forces community necessarily remain in place, in order to protect them and the work they do, it is expected that delivery through both formal structures and word of mouth will enable Reading Force to continue to offer a valuable resource to the services community, and indeed be embedded as a core resource for the Forces with a sustainable future, with secure income from government, private, and corporate funding. As well as promoting effective communication through shared reading in Forces families, the project will continue to encourage a wider appreciation of the special conditions of services life and the services' role in society—not least among the Forces community themselves and their wider families. ■

## Notes

- 1 <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/news/article/55/08-dec-2009-charity-applauds-kingstons-help-for-care-leavers>.
- 2 Email version of a standard Forces method of communication—the 'bluey'. Sent digitally by the Forces person from the place of deployment, then printed out and sent in the post to the family at home.
- 3 This originally stood for 'Help, Information, Volunteer, Exchange' and is an advice bureau for services families. HIVEs now operate in the RAF and Army; in 2015 the Navy and Marines renamed theirs 'Welfare and Information Support Centres'.
- 4 The SPP is designed to help the school to provide mainly non-educational support (pastoral care) to these children. It is important to differentiate this from the Pupil Premium, which is for 'raising the attainment of disadvantaged children'.
- 5 The Armed Forces Covenant is supported by the Community Covenant and the Corporate Covenant. The Community Covenant encourages local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their area and promote public understanding and awareness.
- 6 <http://www.publicpolicyexchange.co.uk>.
- 7 Page, 2011.
- 8 Bardsley, 2012.
- 9 Scammel, 2012; Nassif, 2012.
- 10 RWBD is run jointly by three charities—ABF The Soldiers' Charity, the RAF Benevolent Fund, and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.
- 11 <http://www.aggies.org.uk/storybook-waves-2/>.
- 12 Naval families are more commonly stable, the Forces member travelling to their posting on a daily or weekly basis.

13 A tri-service and national support group and network of after-school clubs for the children of service-people and their relatives: <http://www.plymouthcurriculum.swgfl.org.uk/hmsheroes>.

14 SCE provides schools and educational support for children of the UK Armed Forces, MOD personnel, and MOD-sponsored organizations stationed overseas: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/service-childrens-education>.

## References

- Armed Forces Families Journal*, 2011. 'Love Books? Join Reading Force', Spring, p. 19
- Bardsley, F., 2012. 'Books Bring Service Families Together', *Oxford Mail*, 11 May 2012
- Baverstock, A., 2007. 'Trouble and Strife on the Home Front', *Sunday Times*, 18 November, p. 9
- Baverstock, A., 2013. 'Reading Force: Practice as research in the context of a shared reading project for Forces families', *Logos*, 24 (2), pp. 24–32
- Baverstock, A. and Gordon, H., 2013. 'Reading Force: Can an experience of shared reading be used as a conduit to effective communication within both services families and their wider communities?', *Children in War*, 1 (10), pp. 77–88
- Baverstock, A., Steinitz, J., Bryars, L., Kerin, M., Peel, N., Stohler, R., and Waddington, E., 2016. 'The Implementation of a Shared Reading Programme in a University: A case study', *Logos*, 27 (2), pp. 48–61
- Blogger's Guide*, 2011. 'The Blogger's Guide to ... Reading Force', *Independent on Sunday*, 20 March 2011
- Boorman, E., 2015. 'How Reading Force Helps with Resettlement and Reintegration of Armed Forces Families'. Public Policy Exchange, Fulfilling our Commitment to the Armed Services Community: The Challenge for Local Authorities, Broadway House, London, 3 February 2015
- Call, V. R. A. and Teachman, J. D., 1991. 'Military Service and Stability in the Family Life Course', *Military Psychology*, 3 (4), pp. 233–251
- Campbell, S., 2012. *Courage and Strength: Stories and poems by combat stress veterans* (London: Combat Stress UK/ Kingston University Press)
- Clark, C., 2009. *Why Fathers Matter to Their Children's Literacy* (London: National Literacy Trust)
- Clark, C. and Hawkins, L., 2010. *Young People's Reading: The importance of the home environment and family support* (London: NLT)
- Dixon, P., 2000. 'Britain's Vietnam Syndrome? Public opinion and British military intervention from Palestine to Yugoslavia', *Review of International Studies*, 26, pp. 99–121
- Dixon, P., 2012. *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency* (London: Palgrave)
- Ferguson, M., 2006. 'Creating Common Ground: Common reading and the first year of college'. *Peer Review*, 8 (3), pp. 8–10
- First News*, 2012. 'Reading Force!', 5 November 2012
- Garner, L., 2009. 'I Am Proud of What My Son Is Achieving in Afghanistan but Fearful for Him Too', *The Telegraph*, 22 September
- Gibbons, A., 2011. 'Books a Lifeline for Military Families', January
- Goff, B. S. N., Crow, J. R., Reisbig, A. M. J., Hamilton, S., and Kazak, A. E., 2007. 'The Impact of Individual Trauma Symptoms of Deployed Soldiers on Relationship Satisfaction', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21 (3), pp. 344–353
- Golden, S., 2012. 'Common Reading, Common Ground', *Inside Higher Education*, 11 January
- Gordon, H., 2012. 'Force for Good', *The Bookseller*, 2 September 2013
- Gordon, H., 2013. 'The Rise of Shared' <http://kingstonpublishing.wordpress.com/2013/05/31/the-rise-of-shared-reading-for-children-part-two/Reading-for-Children/>, *Kingston Publishing*, 31 May 2013
- Hicks, D., 2003. *Reading and Health Mapping Research Project* (London: Arts Council of England)
- Hines, G. and Baverstock, A., 2005. *Whatever! A down to earth guide to parenting teenagers* (London: Piatkus)
- Hines, G. and Baverstock, A., 2009. *It's not fair! Parenting the bright and challenging child* (London: Piatkus)
- House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, 2014–2015. *Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Fifth Report of Session 2014–15*
- Jones, A., 1990. *Gumboots and Pearls: The life of a 'wife of'* (Camberley: Owl)
- Keeling, M., Woodhead, C., and Fear, N. T., 2016. 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Soldiers' Experiences of Being Married and Serving in the British Army', *Marriage & Family Review*, 56 (6), pp. 511–534
- Malone, G., 2011. 'Military Wives'
- McKearney M. and Baverstock A., 1990. *Well Worth Reading: An experiment in fiction promotion* (Winchester: Southern Arts)
- Moss, M., 2016. 'Reading Across the World', *Reading Force*

- Nassif, A., 2012. 'Miles Apart—but Families United by Love of Reading', *Portsmouth News* 24 May 2012
- Navy News, 2013. 'Reading Force Rewards', May 2013, p. 22
- Page, B., 2011. 'Plan to Bridge Separation of Service Families with Joint Reading Scheme', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2011
- Phippard, T. and Samara, M., 2012. 'Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Relationship with health problems, social support and life experiences in ex-British military', paper presented at British Psychological Society (BPS) Conference, 'The Psychological Wellbeing of Serving Military Personnel and Veterans', Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 15 November
- Reid, P., 2011. 'Postdevolutionary Drama', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, ed. Ian Brown, pp. 188–199 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press)
- Reid, P., 2013. *Theatre and Scotland* (London: Palgrave)
- Ricketts, A., 2009. 'Army Strong and Its Postwar Meaning'
- Rowe, M., Murphy, D., Wessely, S., and Fear, N. T., 2013. 'Exploring the Impact of Deployment to Iraq on Relationships', *Military Behavioural Health*, 1, pp. 1–9
- Rowe S. L., Keeling, M., Wessely, S., and Fear, N. T., 2014. 'Perceptions of the Impact a Military Career Has on Children', *Occupational Medicine*, 64, pp. 490–496
- Ruger, W., Wilson, S. E., and Waddoups, S. L., 2002. 'Warfare and Welfare: Military service, combat, and marital dissolution', *Armed Forces and Society*, 29 (1), pp. 85–107
- Times Educational Supplement*, 2012. 'They're All at Sea, but a Book Brings Them Together', 11 May
- Royal Borough Observer*, 2013. 'Mini Books in to Visit Windsor School', 15 March 2013
- Scammell, R., 2012. 'Forget the TV, It's All About Reading for Us!', *Portsmouth News*, 27 November 12, p. 13
- Twiton, A., 2007. 'Common Reading Programs in Higher Education', Patricia Lindell Scholarship research project
- White, K., 2014. 'Reading Forces Go into the Noisy Jungle', *Reading Force*
- Winston, S., 2011. 'No Medals for Those Who Stay at Home', *The Guardian*, 22 January