



Supporting military families



The shared reading activity
for Forces families





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Photo: Eamonn McCabe

All parents know how difficult family separation can be. As your kids grow and change, even a few days or a week can be enough to make you feel as if you've lost touch. Yet for Armed Forces families, separation is a fact of life. And when it lasts for weeks and months, keeping in touch can turn into an emotional obstacle course.

I was honoured to be present at the launch of Reading Force in Aldershot back in 2011. Since then, it has grown from a tiny idea with almost no funding, to a charity working across the UK and overseas, involving families from all three services.

The idea of Reading Force is a simple one – to build a bridge of books between absent parents and the children they've left behind; to offer a point of contact, a shared experience, something to talk and laugh about together, an intimate experience that dissolves distance.

If you've ever read a picture book to a baby or lay in bed with an almost-teenager sharing a book you love, you know the amazing feeling of connecting through books. Reading Force allows parents and children, separated by thousands of miles, to read the same book. Then, over Skype or Facetime, they can imagine for a few minutes that they're snuggled up together, talking about the book, choosing their favourite characters or arguing about the ending.

It's no surprise that so many grown-up Forces children, on hearing about Reading Force, say they wish it had been around when they were military kids. Given how much of their family life these kids have sacrificed for us, the least we can do is to give something back to them.

It may seem like a small gift, but the shared experience of reading can be a powerful expression of love.

Meg Rosoff

Meg Rosoff
Carnegie Medal winning children's author



Hello and welcome to Reading Force,

This brochure tells you all about the Reading Force initiative – how you can offer it to families and encourage them to take part, and how Service children of all ages and their families benefit from getting involved.

What is Reading Force? It's a fun shared reading activity that helps keep Service families close and connected, even if disturbance is looming or a parent is serving away from home. It is FREE for all Armed Forces personnel and their families (including Reserves, Cadets, Veterans and former Forces families) to participate.

How does it work? We provide special scrapbooks and books to families. They then choose a book and share it, reading it together at home or over Skype or FaceTime if a loved one is deployed or away on training. Many families involve the wider family, sharing a book with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins – and friends. It doesn't matter if family are living round the corner or on the other side of the world – doing Reading Force is a great excuse to get in touch and do something together.

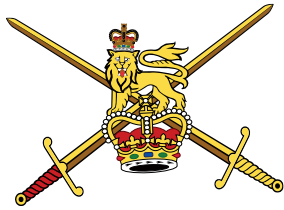
While reading the book families can complete the scrapbook, filling it with their thoughts about the book, photos and drawings. Scrapbooks can be submitted to the bi-annual **Reading Force Scrapbook Competitions**, and every entrant receives a certificate and the prize of a book.

Why get involved in Reading Force? I launched the scheme six years ago in Aldershot, having been a soldier's wife for 25 years – seeking throughout that time to keep my family connected during all the moves and deployments. I've lost count of the number of families who have said doing Reading Force was a positive experience – that it was great to turn off the TV and do something together, that it gave continuity while a mum or dad was away, that deployed parents felt they were still involved with home life, that sharing a book led to really good chats.

We hope you too will understand what Reading Force offers the Forces community and decide to get involved.

Alison Baverstock

Dr Alison Baverstock



**General Sir Nicholas Carter KCB CBE DSO ADC
Gen Chief of the General Staff**

Army Headquarters, Blenheim Building,
Marlborough Lines, Andover, Hampshire SP11 8HJ



Dear Anna,

Reading Force is an excellent scheme and I am very happy to lend my support.

Not only does Reading Force offer significant benefit to a broader audience than the military, it is particularly important in supporting families with a loved one overseas. Though I know you will know this, some forget just how active the Army is following Afghanistan – for example, over 40,000 soldiers were deployed in 41 countries last year. Keeping the connection between the soldier deployed and the family back home through a scheme involving feedback, prizes and active communication with whole family involvement, and which will have the added benefit of improving literacy, is an inspired idea.

The idea behind Reading Force is simple. Service families under pressure often find it difficult to communicate. It is often challenging to explain what you are up to, when you are deployed in demanding circumstances, several thousand miles from home.

And it is equally difficult to understand the perspective of those at home, whose life might seem mundane, but who have to shoulder the burden of living alone and the uncertainty of not knowing what deployment involves.

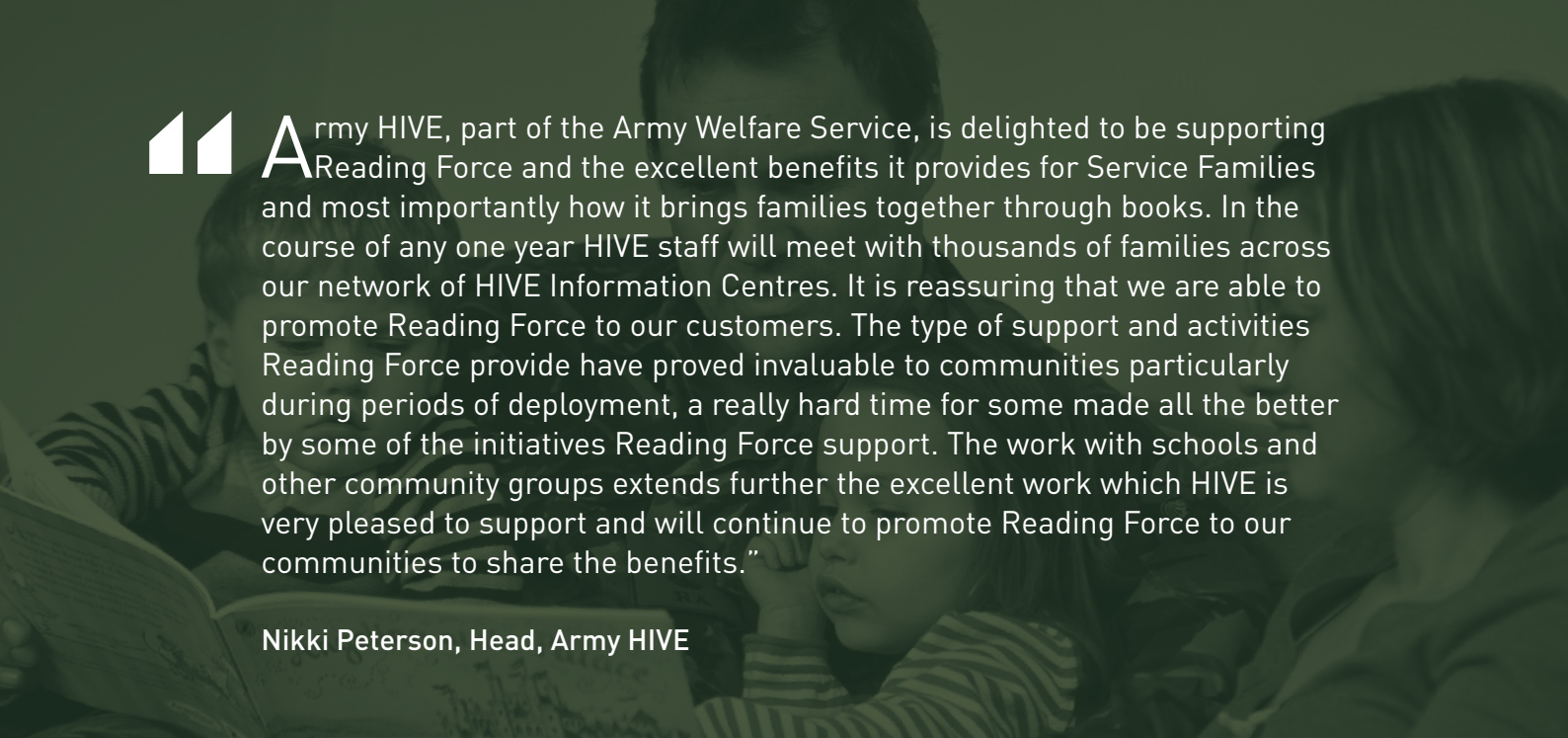
No amount of telephone calls can ever close that gap, so making the connection through informal reading groups, sharing feedback through the vehicle of a Reading Force scrapbook and using it as a basis for communication is a tremendous idea.

I wish it had been around to support the many deployments my family has experienced in my career. I wholeheartedly commend the idea to you.

Yours sincerely
Nick

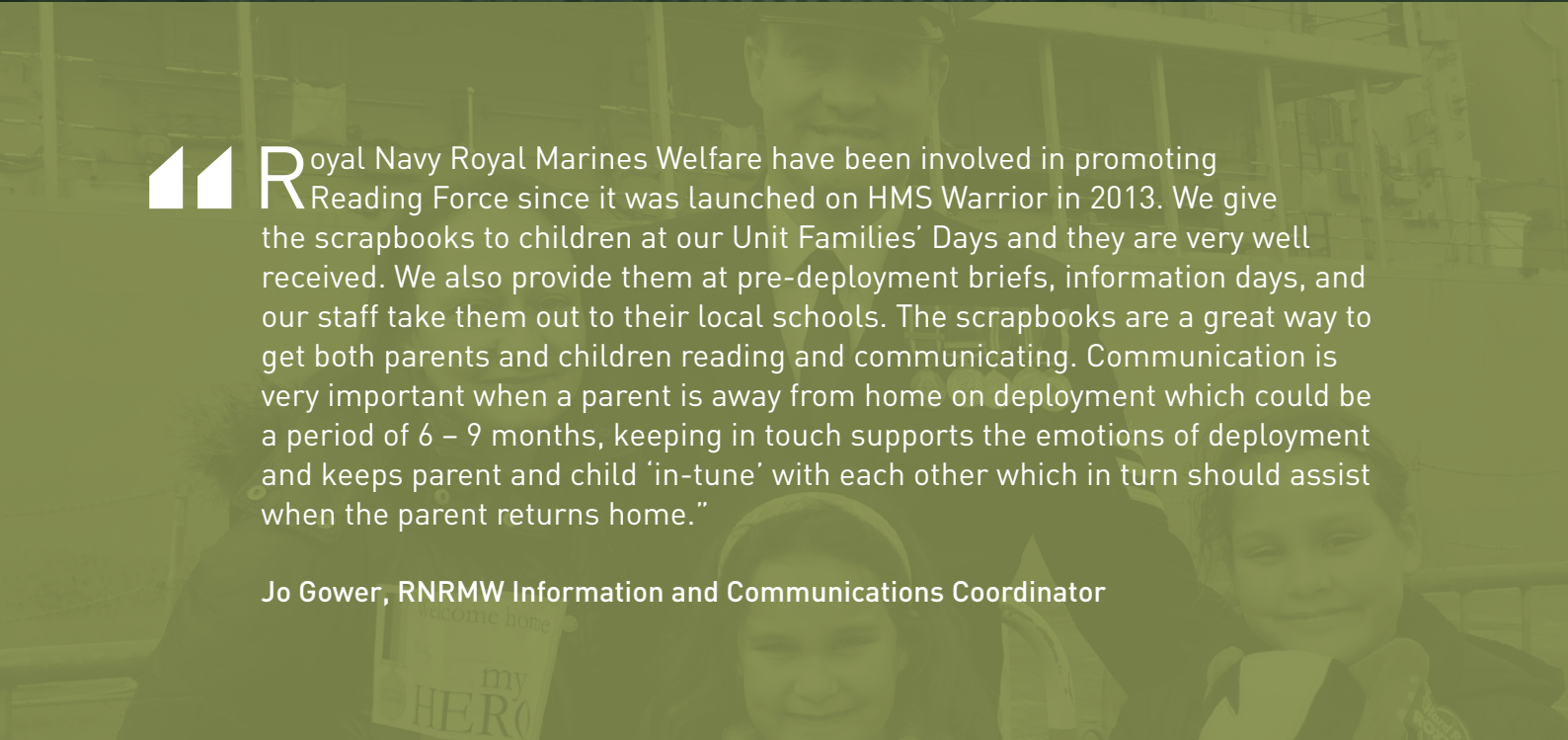


General Sir Nicholas Carter




“Army HIVE, part of the Army Welfare Service, is delighted to be supporting Reading Force and the excellent benefits it provides for Service Families and most importantly how it brings families together through books. In the course of any one year HIVE staff will meet with thousands of families across our network of HIVE Information Centres. It is reassuring that we are able to promote Reading Force to our customers. The type of support and activities Reading Force provide have proved invaluable to communities particularly during periods of deployment, a really hard time for some made all the better by some of the initiatives Reading Force support. The work with schools and other community groups extends further the excellent work which HIVE is very pleased to support and will continue to promote Reading Force to our communities to share the benefits.”

Nikki Peterson, Head, Army HIVE



“Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare have been involved in promoting Reading Force since it was launched on HMS Warrior in 2013. We give the scrapbooks to children at our Unit Families' Days and they are very well received. We also provide them at pre-deployment briefs, information days, and our staff take them out to their local schools. The scrapbooks are a great way to get both parents and children reading and communicating. Communication is very important when a parent is away from home on deployment which could be a period of 6 – 9 months, keeping in touch supports the emotions of deployment and keeps parent and child 'in-tune' with each other which in turn should assist when the parent returns home.”

Jo Gower, RNRMW Information and Communications Coordinator



“There are many great positives about family life in the RAF – the variety, the chance to live in different places and the sense of community and belonging, for example. However, there are also additional challenges that Service children and their families frequently face that are unique, often stressful and invariably linked directly to the harsher realities of Service life. Sharing books and doing Reading Force is a great way of helping RAF families and their children of all ages to cope with these challenges and the RAF Families Federation is genuinely very pleased to support its efforts on behalf of a very special group of people.”

Bill Mahon, Director, RAF Families Federation

Welfare and Community Support

Reading Force is a fun activity for welfare, community support, HIVEs and information hubs to offer families. It can be included as part of the support provided to families whether they are new to the patch and settling in, going through periods of separation, or experiencing other challenging circumstances. It is suitable for children of all ages from babies to teens.

All scrapbooks, leaflets and materials are free and welfare, information and community support settings can order them online.

FAMILY STORY

The Wilson family

Mum of two young boys, Vicki Wilson, describes how the local HIVE helped her discover Reading Force.

'Our school wasn't military focused because there were hardly any Service children. There was nothing. I found out about Reading Force from the HIVE Facebook page, then we went onto the Reading Force website and requested a scrapbook. We had just moved and it was perfect timing for us.

Euan was three and Finn was four. We did the first scrapbook when their Dad was in Afghanistan. We did the scrapbook at home and their Dad was able to talk with them about the story over FaceTime. Normally he would get nonsense out of them, so to talk about the book was great. Finn read to his Gran in Scotland too – he wouldn't have if not for Reading Force – we wouldn't have thought of it.



The Wilson family use FaceTime to do Reading Force and stay connected when Dad is away



We've done Reading Force three times now, and will keep doing it. It has definitely helped us keep continuity. Dad's in Afghanistan desperate to speak to his boys, and the book gave them common ground to talk about. And it meant he was all set to do bedtime stories when he got back.

For us it's been brilliant. This has been right up our street!'

CASE STUDY

RCET – Scotland's Armed Forces Children's Charity

The Royal Caledonian Education Trust supports the children of Scots who are serving, or have served, in the British Armed Forces.

Education Manager, Moira Leslie, has put together 'resource boxes' containing materials to support Service families, particularly during deployments and postings.

'I am delighted to be involved with Reading Force. Parents frequently ask for suggestions of activities which they can do with their children when their spouse / partner is deployed away from home. It is a pleasure to be able to suggest using the Reading Force scrapbooks which offer fun activities for the whole family. Everyone I know who has used Reading Force has thoroughly enjoyed the experience.'



Moira includes Reading Force scrapbooks in resource boxes

CASE STUDY

Mission Training & Mobilisation Centre, Chilwell Barracks

The MTMC in Chilwell, Nottinghamshire, prepares all branches of the Reserve Forces and Civilians for Service with the Regular Forces, in addition to Regular Individual Reinforcements. This can range from the deployment into an operational theatre or commitment for a peace time attachment. Welfare Clerk, Denise Rodgers, has supported Reading Force since 2013.

'Elaine from Reading Force came to see me and I've been putting the scrapbooks in the welfare packs ever since. Anyone who mobilises through us has to fill

in a welfare pro-forma and families include the ages of their children, so we are able to give them scrapbooks to suit the age of their children. We've got families all around the world, so we have sent hundreds and hundreds of the scrapbooks with them globally.

We put up the posters and have flyers in the welfare office. When we do family days we hand out scrapbooks then too.'

CASE STUDY

45 Commando RM, Arbroath

Lorna Robertson is a Welfare Support Worker at RM Condor, home to 45 Commando Royal Marines in Arbroath.

'The Reading Force scrapbooks were very popular at our families day last year and I have had phone calls since from others wanting a copy. I have placed both editions of the scrapbook in the Families Centre and families help themselves to them.'

CASE STUDY

Bristol Abbeywood Tri-Service HIVE

Bristol Abbeywood Tri-Service HIVE works with families across eight locations and in remote areas. HIVE Manager, Carolyn McGlynn, includes flyers in leaflet drops and family information packs, and displays posters in the HIVE, where scrapbooks are freely available for families to pick

up when they call in. Carolyn also hands out scrapbooks at HIVE events and at their Christmas party.

'We have over 300 families here, our children range from 6 months to 16 years and I thought it would be fantastic for

them to get involved in Reading Force and that having everyone together would be a great opportunity to hand the scrapbooks out. The families really enjoyed the scrapbooks.'

Welfare and Community Support

Families hear about Reading Force from a variety of places and information hubs, HIVEs and Welfare Offices are perfectly placed to support families with free scrapbooks.

FAMILY STORY

The Graham family

Mary-Anne Graham, mum of twins Melissa and Danielle, explains how she first heard about Reading Force.

'I first heard about Reading Force from welfare when my hubby went on deployment. He was away on HMS Richmond for nine months and we were given a scrapbook in a deployment pack.

Danielle and Melissa had their own scrapbooks and sent off their free book postcards. Both were excited to receive their own, different books in the post.

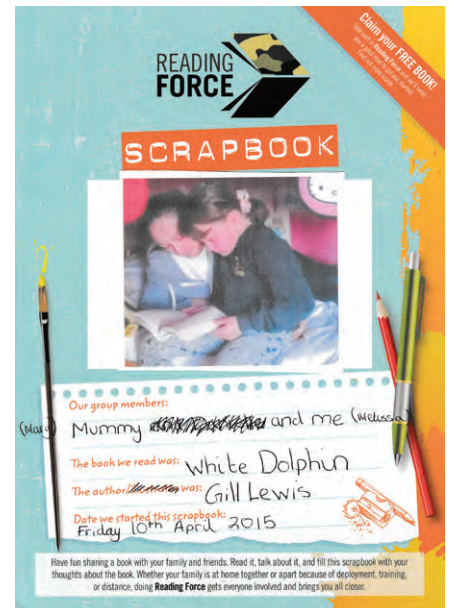
Every Sunday we had deployment time at home and we wrote letters to Daddy, did Shoeboxes for Our Heroes, and Reading Force. My twins love reading so Reading

Force is great. They read the book then we talk about the book, do the scrapbook together and they tell their Daddy about the book in emails.

When the twins were younger they had no sense of time when their dad was away, but now they're older they know the concept of time and so it's got harder. They welcome being part of the service community and taking part in activities like Reading Force.

He'll be joining another ship next year, so we'll be doing another scrapbook then.'

Mary-Anne is a Reading Force Facebook follower and keeps up to date with events and our spot-prize giveaways.



The Graham family do Reading Force when Dad is away at sea

CASE STUDY

RAF Wyton, Cambridgeshire

HIVE Manager Nancy Packham actively promotes Reading Force and gives scrapbooks to families in the HIVE, at coffee mornings and family days, and includes them in deployment packs.

'When I take the scrapbooks to coffee mornings lots of mums say "I've done that, it's really really good!" and have enjoyed doing the scrapbooks.'

Nancy also displays posters and scrapbooks in the HIVE and posts links to the Reading Force website on the HIVE Facebook page.

'I think it's a really good thing. My youngest son is a bookworm and he loses himself in books. As a parent, I would have jumped on this when he was young as I know he would have absolutely loved the scrapbooks and got so much out of it, whether dad was away or during a holiday. It's a lovely project for children to work on.'

- Keep a stock of scrapbooks and flyers – it's easy to order these free resources by email or on our website
- Put up posters in the HIVE, community centres and places where families meet
- Put scrapbooks out on display for families to pick up
- Tell families it's free to take part and they get a free book for every child!
- Include scrapbooks and flyers in welfare and deployment packs
- Hand out scrapbooks at family days and events
- Include a link to the Reading Force website and Facebook page on your blog, in your newsletters and on your Facebook page
- Hold a storytelling session and link it with free Reading Force books and scrapbooks
- Let local schools, preschools and libraries know about Reading Force so they can get involved too
- Encourage families to enter Scrapbook Competitions by 30th April and 31st October every year! All scrapbooks are returned by registered post with a book prize and a special certificate



Register for your resources pack at www.readingforce.org.uk

CASE STUDY

Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare

Jo Gower, RNRMW National Information and Communications Coordinator, based at Whale Island, Portsmouth, stresses the value of Reading Force in helping families cope with separation. Jo encourages all RNRMW information centres to offer Reading Force to their families.

'The scrapbooks are a great way to get both parents and children reading and communicating. Communication is very important when a parent is away from home on deployment which could be a period of 6 – 9 months, keeping in touch supports the emotions of deployment and

keeps parent and child 'in-tune' with each other which in turn should assist when the parent returns home. RNRMW have been involved in promoting this service since it was launched on HMS Warrior in 2013.

Copies of the scrapbooks are given out to children at our Unit Families' Days and they are very well received, the children love the scrapbooks. We also provide them at pre-deployment briefs, information days and our staff take them out to their local schools.'



Sara promoting Reading Force in Portsmouth

Schools

Children with a loved one in the Forces generally experience greater disruption than their civilian peers. Schools providing support to their Service children and families can use Reading Force as a positive initiative that brings many benefits to Service children whilst complementing their pastoral work.

Whilst Reading Force is primarily for families to enjoy at home, schools find it helps develop stronger home-school links, shows Service parents how much they care, and supports reading and literacy development.

SCHOOL STORY

Harestock Primary School, Winchester



Girl pirate author Sara Starbuck gave Harestock Primary School pupils a swashbuckling fun time

Army children are continuously joining Harestock Primary School, Winchester, throughout the year and make up approximately 17% of its pupils. With strong pastoral support in place, Harestock encourages Service families to take part in Reading Force. The Service children did their school proud by winning a prize for the whole school by submitting the most scrapbooks to the bi-annual Scrapbook Competition.

'The scheme had a very positive impact on the Service Families who took part, encouraging the sharing of books with family members. An added bonus was an author visit that the children won on behalf of the school; this was enjoyed immensely. Our Service Families Support Worker supported the children through this venture and we are as a school really excited about encouraging participation in Reading Force in future years.'

Mrs Jackie Sankey, Headteacher

**What can go in
a scrapbook?...**

...ANYTHING!

Photographs
Stickers
Drawings
Thoughts about the book
Feelings the book inspired
letters

**Every family who enters the
Scrapbook Competition wins
a book prize and certificate.**

Schools – how schools can take part

After registering on www.readingforce.org.uk, schools are sent a full pack of resources including posters to help promote Reading Force along with information leaflets and scrapbooks (with free book voucher) for children to take home and keep.



SCHOOL STORY

Risedale Sports & Community College, Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire

Risedale Sports & Community College in Hipswell, Catterick Garrison has around 45% Service pupils and a high level of pupil movement. Helen Porritt, Risedale's Service Child Advocate, encourages the children and teens from Year 7 to Year 11 to do Reading Force and the positive impact on pupils has been noticeable in a variety of ways.

'They don't like being labelled as Service children but they were being acknowledged with Reading Force and they liked this. They were touched that they got a free book. It started lots of discussion with friends and family.'

Doing Reading Force increased their reading age. It improved their literacy skills and vocabulary. We've seen a real difference. When they write they are a lot more imaginative. Anything that encourages a child to read is excellent.'



Risedale Sports & Community College pupils with their Reading Force books

Does your school have a Service children's club?

Service Pupil Champions and leaders of Service children's clubs find Reading Force helps children make new friends and feel part of a community. Introducing children to Reading Force and giving them scrapbooks in support clubs and *Military Kids Clubs* is a fantastic way to get children involved and started.

SCHOOL STORY

Military Kids Club, Parc Eglos Primary School, Helston, Cornwall

'It has been lovely to see families sharing books together. We invite parents in for a chat, and we send the scrapbooks home with them. Some of our dads spend the best part of two years away and they've read on a Kindle while the kids at home read the book. Parents now realise it's really good and worth doing. Every time a parent is preparing to deploy, I send a scrapbook and leaflet home. I think it's brilliant, I've seen the benefit, and I'm doing a scrapbook with my own son. It's having that common goal to share a book and the calmness reading together gives. I love it.'

Tricia Monks, TA and MKC Co-ordinator



SCHOOL STORY

Military Kids Club, Le Cateau Primary School, Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire



*'We have 300 Service children and we've done Reading Force since 2014. I hand out the scrapbooks and information flyers to the children in the MKC, for them to take home. When they get their free books the kids love it! Some of our kids don't necessarily have a lot of books at home, and **they really love getting a book to keep.**'*

Louise Porter, Military Kids Club Co-ordinator

SCHOOL STORY

Service Pupils' Champions, North Yorkshire



Annabel Hall and Nickie Young work as Service Pupils' Champions in many schools across North Yorkshire

*'North Yorkshire has 3,000 Service children across hundreds of schools, with 32 MK Clubs and other clubs. Some North Yorks schools send scrapbooks home, we also give scrapbooks through the clubs. The children love having their free books, and have really enjoyed having that link with their Service parent. We think **having a free book makes the children feel special** and has their unique needs recognised. It sends all the right messages – connecting and bonding families through reading.'*

Military Kids Club (MKC) Heroes are ambassadors and young advocates for Service families. Most importantly, they are friends for each other – especially in times of need. Find out more at www.plymouthcurriculum.swgfl.org.uk/hmsheroes

SCHOOL STORY

Solent Infant School, Portsmouth

At Solent Infant School they have a range of Service pupils whose parents can be deployed for up to a year at a time. Laura Peterkin-Aldred, Headteacher, runs an after school club for Service children which parents are also invited to join.

'The after school club and doing Reading Force made us feel a sense of belonging to the community.'

Solent Infant School parent

Every year Laura introduces Reading Force to families by sending the scrapbooks home with a covering letter encouraging them to take part.

'Reading Force is one of the ways we support our Service families and help the children develop their sense of belonging in a service community. They understand that they are not alone, and that there are other children in the school in a similar situation.'

During conversations with parents on Skype the children will often talk about Reading Force, their book and start filling in their scrapbooks which they can then take home.



SCHOOL STORY

The George family, Portsmouth

Eva and Sophie's dad is in the Navy and can be away from home for long periods of time. They were introduced to Reading Force by their infant school and completed scrapbooks while dad was away. It helped them stay close and connected during this long separation.

'We have participated in Reading Force for a few years now. It helps us to feel closer as a family, it means we can share a book with Daddy even if he isn't here. It also means we can read and talk about the book we are reading with grandparents who live a long way away, helping us to connect with them.'

Mrs George, Solent Infant School parent





Diane and her daughter Alice did Reading Force with family members when dad was away

SCHOOL STORY

Carterton Primary School, Oxfordshire

Tess Brooker, Service Families Support Worker at Carterton Primary School, explains how she offers Reading Force to the RAF children she supports:

'I introduce Reading Force to parents at our Service families' coffee mornings and I give a copy of the scrapbook to every Service child in school, with a note for parents explaining the scheme.'

I think it is a brilliant initiative and encourage everyone to take part, not just if a parent is away but also to involve relations and family friends who, due to the nature of postings, often live miles away. For example it is a lovely way for grandparents and their grandchildren to share a reading experience. With e-books being so commonly read now too it makes it very easy for families to quickly, and often more cheaply, buy the same book.'

Diane Munro and her daughter Alice, a pupil at Carterton Primary School, did Reading Force with Alice's nanny and aunts while Alice's dad was away. They read *Harry Potter* and really enjoyed the experience.

'It gave me the chance to spend special time with my oldest daughter. It was nice to have something to share with the rest of the extended family too. When she got the chance to speak, it also gave Alice and her dad something extra to talk about, rather than just a list of things she had done at school. We're hoping to get involved again in January when dad goes away again.'

SCHOOL STORY

Plymstock School, Plymouth

Tracy Wilkins, teacher and Coordinator of Service Child Provision at Plymstock Secondary School, supports children and teens during long periods of separation from parents at sea. For several years Tracy has encouraged them to participate in Reading Force.

AWARENESS

Tracy makes sure all the Service pupils are aware of Reading Force.

'We have posters up all over the school. I introduce Reading Force to Year 7s and I do an assembly on it to encourage the Service children to do it.'

BOOKS

As well as receiving their free books from Reading Force, Plymstock pupils can choose books at school.

'We have a section of books in the library for Service children doing Reading Force and books in the Heroes room.'

Children take turns to borrow a Kindle which Tracy was able to buy with Service Pupil Premium.

TALKING

'Kids have come to me and said they're talking about the book they've received from Reading Force with dad while he's away. Lots of kids tell me they're talking about their books with their dads and family. It's also led to civilian kids and Service kids choosing to read the same books and then talk about them.'



Service children discuss books they've read during their Heroes club at Plymstock School

Schools – author visits

Holding an author visit in school is a great way to launch and promote Reading Force to children and families and many schools use their Service Pupil Premium towards hosting an event. Talk to us if you want help in organising an event.

SCHOOL STORY

John Logie Baird Primary School, Helensburgh, Argyll and Bute



John Logie Baird Primary School launched Reading Force with an afternoon tea for Navy families, and a visit from author Janis Mackay.

'Author Janis Mackay's visit was brilliant, the children thoroughly enjoyed it. We had a termly picnic lunch for the children who were doing Reading Force at home. They'd bring along their scrapbooks and speak about what they were doing in them, at home with their family. They would have a talk through about anything that was worrying them.'

Supporting children to do Reading Force at home had the impact of unifying the Service community in school:

'From the point of view of the Service children, although we've got quite a high percentage of Service children, sometimes the children don't realise who the other Service children are. Reading Force made them aware of other children in the same position, and who they could have a chat with and who would understand the emotional issues they were dealing with.'

Alison Smith, Deputy Headteacher



Author Tom Palmer meeting Service children at Leeming RAF Community Primary School, North Yorkshire, during a Reading Force Roadshow

Early Years

Encouraging families to share picture books and stories early on in a child's life sets them on a positive reading journey, and doing Reading Force has the additional benefit of involving the whole family at home or away.



Children's author Kathryn White launching Reading Force Little Ones at Toye Box Early Years Centre, Aldershot

SCHOOL STORY

RAF Odiham HIVE, Hampshire

RAF Odiham is primarily responsible for providing rapid mobility worldwide for the RAF, Army, and Royal Navy, and has a high level of deployments. The HIVE promotes Reading Force and scrapbooks are freely available to pick up at any time.

The HIVE is located in the Community Welfare Centre, with a play area for children where mums and toddler groups and coffee mornings are regularly held.

Maz Burrridge, HIVE Information Officer, runs a deployment support group:

'Some mums find it challenging to manage their children's behaviour when their dads are away on deployment. Sharing a book and encouraging them to do Reading Force with their child is an effective way of helping to ground children, sooth their complex feelings and channel their feelings into a positive and fun activity.'

**What can go in
a scrapbook?...
...ANYTHING!**

Drawings and mark making
Photographs
Stickers
letters
Glitter glue
Best or worst bits of the book
Drawings

**Every family who enters the
Scrapbook Competition wins
a book prize and certificate.**



Jo Jenkins with children from Jack and Jill's Childcare with items from the separation box

CASE STUDY

Jack and Jill's Childcare, Devon and Cornwall

Seven Jack and Jill settings in Devon and Cornwall provide childcare to predominantly Royal Navy, but also RAF and Army families, many of which often have a parent or both parents deployed on operations. These nurseries recognise the *Emotional Cycle of Deployment* that Service families experience when a loved one goes away, and they reflect this emotional need in policies and practices.

Jo Jenkins, Area Coordinator, puts together 'Separation Boxes' for each Jack and Jill setting, with fun items to support Service families and young children and includes Reading Force scrapbooks and leaflets.

'Families can help themselves to the scrapbooks and do them in their own time. Parents have told us it's a brilliant tool for the weekends and holidays, and that the children love receiving the books in the post. One child said "It's like Christmas!"'

Jo Jenkins, Jack and Jill's Childcare Area Coordinator

FAMILY STORY

Holly and her family

'We've done Reading Force eight times now. The first time was when we were on camp and Holly came home from nursery [Dandelions Nursery, Blandford Camp] with the scrapbook in her bookbag. Her dad is in the army and is quite often away on courses, and I like that it's something we can do while he's away. We really enjoy doing the scrapbooks and sitting down and doing something together.'

Holly's Mum



Colourful Little Ones scrapbooks have been designed with toddlers and infants in mind, with lots of white space for doodles, drawings, stickers and collage. Letters from loved ones can be included too, making the scrapbook a special memento.



Pip runs a toddler group and offers Reading Force to the families

FAMILY STORY

RAF mum promotes Reading Force

Pip Mahoney's daughter, Skylar, received her first scrapbook from her school, RAF Akrotiri School in Cyprus. Pip then went to the Reading Force website and ordered scrapbooks for her two younger children who were not yet at school, and all the siblings took part.

'We have done scrapbooks with you for a couple of years. It was nice to do while we were out in Cyprus, we did Reading Force with my mum and sister. We've done four scrapbooks now. We love doing them and are looking forward to doing them again this year too.'

Overseas Schools

Many Service children living overseas miss their family in the UK. Doing Reading Force helps maintain good contact through shared reading and gives children the added bonus of receiving post from the UK and a sense of connection despite distance.

Overseas schools offering Reading Force to children and families find it helps strengthen home-school links, improves literacy levels, and affirms a positive sense of community and belonging.

SCHOOL STORY

Hornbill School, Brunei

Hornbill School has over 350 children with 90% having a father serving in the British Army Gurkha regiment. The average posting to Brunei is for four years and soldiers are frequently away from home on training exercises or deployment.

Since 2014, at the start of every academic year, the school have been encouraging parents to get involved in Reading Force with their children at home. They hand out scrapbooks with an introduction letter and now over 80% of families take part.

Some parents said they had not realised it would be so much fun to read a book together and talk about it as a family. They enjoyed sharing thoughts and ideas and hearing what their children had to say about the book. Families who did Reading Force during a parent's deployment found being read to over Skype or FaceTime helped both children and parents stay connected while being apart. Parents enjoyed being read to by their children too!

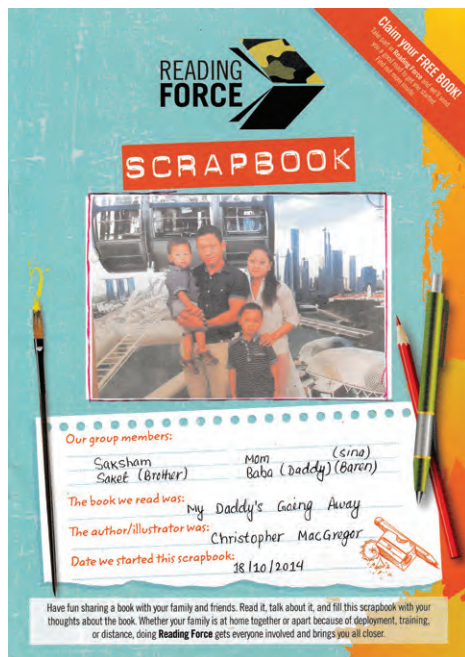
Children aged 3-11 have completed scrapbooks with their immediate and

extended families and many have won prizes and a book and special certificate for entering the Reading Force Scrapbook Competition.

The school recognises these achievements by presenting all the prizes, free books and certificates to everyone who entered in a special school assembly. As well as being a fun and bonding activity, parents report children also benefitted from a boost in reading confidence and increased vocabulary. A high number of families do Reading Force year after year.



Hornbill Reading Force assembly and presentation of certificates and book prizes



FAMILY STORY

Saksham's dad was deployed away from home for six months

'It was so much fun to read the book together. We spent time together, chatted about the pictures, characters, and shared our ideas. We had quality time with our family.'

- Saksham, aged 5, read his book with his mum at home in Brunei, and also with his dad over Skype
- They chatted and messaged about the book, which helped them keep in touch and feel closer during this separation



'Nice story Saksham, I really like it. I love you, you know I am coming home very soon, not too far away.'

Saksham's Dad

FAMILY STORY

The Brysons were posted in Germany and stayed connected with family back in the UK and elsewhere

'My daughter is a very reluctant reader and has found it hard living out in Germany so the scrapbook was a great motivator, thank you. We would love to do it again and have just finished her free book too.'

- Mum set up a Facebook page for family and friends so they could do Reading Force together
- Maintaining contact and communication helped Jasmine to settle in her new home and school
- The family enjoyed receiving their free book and certificate
- Doing Reading Force boosted Jasmine's reading confidence



What can go in a scrapbook?... ...ANYTHING!

Photographs
Thoughts about the book
Maps and Notes
Stickers
Drawings
Letters and emails
Feelings the book inspired

Every family who enters the Scrapbook Competition wins a book prize and certificate.



FAMILY STORY

The Maxwells Skyped, read and chatted with far away cousins, grandparents, and aunts

'There are so many times we say 'Shall we Skype soon?' that never comes to anything, but because we had a project to do, share and discuss, it ensured we all made the effort to find a date and time for speaking to each other.'

- The focus of sharing a book encouraged the Maxwells to connect with family living on different continents
- Family members in California, Chester, and Brunei, bonded over funny poems, overcoming distance and time differences



Why sharing books matters

Reading for pleasure with family and carers has been linked with many benefits for children's educational outcomes and emotional wellbeing. Research shows children who read for pleasure at home with family do better at school and have improved relationships.

Sharing books is one of the best ways to grow a love of reading for pleasure. And reading aloud to children, or children reading to parents, is a great way to boost children's literacy confidence.

The Reading for Pleasure and Empowerment report found 'strong evidence that reading for pleasure can increase empathy, improve relationships with others, reduce the symptoms of depression and the risk of dementia, and improve wellbeing throughout life.'

BOP Consulting, 2015

'We know from our work with parents and children in communities across the UK, that fostering a love of reading at home is crucial to children's future happiness and success.'

Clare Bolton, National Literacy Trust, 2013





Some more facts about shared reading!

Reading Force has given over 7,000 books to Service children, from birth to young adult, since 2012 and continues to give a free book to every child who wants to take part.



Reading Force families are proof of how sharing books together helps

When a parent is away from home on a tour of duty or training:

It makes communication happen and gives common ground to talk about

'Reading Force has really helped, especially for my 7 year old who refused to talk to her daddy when he was away. I found out about Reading Force just before his deployment – they read 'Mr Stink' and talked on the phone about it. Thank you very much.'

Broome family

It helps maintain continuity and structure during separations

'We always do it [Reading Force] when dad is away and it has definitely helped us keep continuity. And it meant he was all set to do bedtime stories when he got back.'

Wilson family

Children find resilience and comfort in story characters

'I find her [story character] very inspiring to power through just like my dad and all the other Service men.'

Taylor family

'Only one in eight dads takes the lead with reading to their children. These findings are a major concern as a father's involvement in their child's early reading is proven to boost academic success, leading to improved social and emotional wellbeing.'

Booktrust, 2013

Encouraging families to enjoy story times even when they are apart

Now, with phone calls, Skype and FaceTime, children and separated loved ones can still be involved in story times no matter how far apart they are. By doing Reading Force families are making reading a fun, memorable and special time.

'We all take turns to read a chapter and it has helped our children's development. It has given them confidence to read out loud and in turn they have been able to use this skill in school.'

Reed family



Academic papers

Reading Force Founder and Director, Associate Professor Dr Alison Baverstock, has published papers about Reading Force. Details at www.readingforce.org.uk

When children become independent readers, parents often think they are best left to read alone. Research shows children love being read to well into their teens.

'Only 17% of parents of kids aged 9–11 read aloud to their children. Yet 83% of kids aged 6–17 say being read to is something they either loved or liked a lot.'

Kids & Family Reading Report, Scholastic, 2015

Useful websites:

www.booktrust.org.uk
www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk
www.storybookwaves.org
www.drumbeat.org.uk
www.rafa.org.uk/what-we-do/storybook-wings

'3 in 10 UK children own no books. Children who don't own books are less likely to have positive experiences of reading, less likely to do well at school and less likely to be engaged in reading in any form.'

Clark, National Literacy Trust, 2011

Joint initiatives with Service charities

Many Service charities and trusts share our aim of supporting Forces families and we are always looking at ways we can work together to enhance the support given.

Here are some examples of our partnerships in action. We are grateful for their generosity which enables us to continue our work.



A joint initiative with **ABF The Soldiers' Charity** to support Army families with young children helps fulfil the charity's aim to reach and support more families, especially at the start of their reading lives.

'As the Army's National Charity, we support Reading Force, a fantastic venture which promotes literacy and maintains family connections during postings and deployments. We work in partnership with Reading Force Little Ones, aimed at pre-school children, where the joy of reading and its benefits can be put in place at the very earliest stage.'

Wendy Searle, Head of Communications, ABF The Soldiers' Charity



Wendy Searle, ABF The Soldiers' Charity, joins the Reading Force team and author Kathryn White for the launch of Reading Force Little Ones at Toye Box Early Years Centre, Aldershot

Storybook Waves

Storybook Waves enables deployed Naval personnel to record a personalised story CD for their child to listen to whilst they are away. Since 2015, as part of the Reading Force and Storybook Waves joint project, a copy of the picture book and a Reading Force scrapbook is given out with the CD. Supported by Aggie Weston's, RNRMC and Annington Trust
storybookwaves.org



'We can share our book with Daddy while he is away. He recorded the story with Storybook Waves so we can hear him read it out loud to us, with all the funny animal sounds.'



The Royal British Legion

With The Royal British Legion's support we reach Forces families through their centres and networks, and encourage families to keep connected to extended family and grandparents.



Other joint projects have been possible with support from organisations including **Grainger Plc, Army Central Fund, Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and Annington Trust.**

If you'd like to work with us...

There are many ways we can work with supporters. If you have a Service connection or are interested in the Forces, you can become part of our legacy offering families the Reading Force experience.

To talk to us about how you can become a supporter...

Email: info@readingforce.org.uk

Phone: **07566 200299**

Thank you

We would like to thank all our supporters since Reading Force started in 2011, whose funding and support has enabled thousands of military families to benefit from sharing books.

A full list and acknowledgment is on our website:

www.readingforce.org.uk

Support from Chelford House Christian Fellowship Trust means every child doing Reading Force can receive a new book in the post.

'We are keen to support Reading Force because of our appreciation for the Armed Forces, love of books and reading, and appreciation for good print! We only contribute to charities that we trust 100%, and that certainly applies to Reading Force.'

Oliver Allmand-Smith, Chelford House Trustee

READING FORCE

Reading Force is a fun shared reading and scrapbook activity that helps bring families closer. Taking part is free for all Armed Forces, Reserves and Ex-Services families—whether at home or away on deployment, training or other reasons.

Every scrapbook has a 'free book' postcard for children to claim a book.

Families can share a book, either together at home or over Skype and FaceTime, and complete their scrapbook.

Families can enter scrapbooks into the bi-annual Competition by posting them to the Reading Force Freepost address. We return scrapbooks to families by registered post and they receive a special certificate for taking part and the prize of a book.

Competition deadlines are April 30th and 31st October every year!

How schools and organisations can get involved

- Early years settings, schools, libraries, welfare offices, HIVEs and clubs, can keep a stock of resources for children and families
- Raise awareness of Reading Force with posters
- Distribute information flyers so Service families know Reading Force is for them and that it's free, fun and easy to get involved
- Give scrapbooks to children and parents. Yellow Little Ones scrapbooks are for babies and children up to the age of seven. Blue scrapbooks are for children aged eight up to young adults
- Your setting may be eligible for a visit from a Reading Force Ambassador, who can tell you more about Reading Force, contact us to request a visit

Request free resources for Service families, register online at: www.readingforce.org.uk



Follow Reading Force on Facebook and Twitter for regular book giveaways and competitions.

www.readingforce.org.uk • info@readingforce.org.uk • 07566 200 299

