

VETERANS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM



INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY JUSTICE PARTNERS

Most veterans transition successfully back into civilian life. However, a small number come into contact with the justice system and may require tailored support. Understanding their experiences - and how best to identify and assist them - is essential to effective, compassionate practice.

KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED IN RECENT RESEARCH

Reluctance to Seek Help - Veterans often avoid reaching out due to pride, self-reliance, or a belief they should “cope” on their own. This can continue even once they’re involved in justice processes.

Understanding of Why We Ask About Service - Many do not know why they are being asked about military history, leading to low disclosure unless the purpose is clearly explained.

A Complex and Hard-to-Navigate Support System - Veterans frequently become aware of available support only after entering the justice system.

Limited Staff Capacity and Knowledge - Justice practitioners report challenges in knowing which services are appropriate or how best to support veterans.

Language Matters - The word veteran is often misunderstood. Many ex-Service personnel do not identify with the term, meaning they may not realise they are eligible for support.

Shame and Stigma - Some veterans feel shame around their offences. While not always a major barrier, it can influence help-seeking and disclosure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCOTTISH VETERANS COMMISSIONER

The Scottish Veterans Commissioner highlights the need for a system that ensures:

- Consistent identification of veterans throughout justice processes, with data used to improve services and future policy.
- Veteran-aware staff who understand indicators of military experience and know what supports exist.

A coordinated, collaborative national approach across statutory and third sector partners, focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and reducing reoffending.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR LOCAL PRACTICE

1. Ask the Right Question

Use clear, inclusive language: ***“Have you served in the Armed Forces or Reserves for a day or more?”***

Not everyone will automatically identify as a veteran.

2. Explain Why You’re Asking

Be transparent about how the information will be used to improve support and outcomes.

3. Record and Use the Data

Accurate local data helps build a clearer picture of need and informs service planning

4. Ensure Staff Training

Provide veteran-informed training covering:

- How to recognise military experience
- Additional support needs common among veterans
- What services are available locally and nationally

5. Signpost to Specialist Support

Make sure veterans—and their families—know about the wide range of services available to them.

SPECIALIST VETERAN SUPPORT SERVICES

NOVA Scotland

Providing support to all veterans and the families of veterans.

Telephone: 0800 917 7299

Email: novascotland@forcesemployment.org.uk

Website: www.forcesemployment.org.uk/programmes/op-nova/

Veterans Firstpoint

A one-stop shop for Veterans and their families.

Telephone: 01294 310400

Email: Clinical_veteransfirstpoint@aapct.scot.nhs.uk

Website: www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk/drop-center/ayrshire-and-arran

Poppy Scotland

Providing support to members of the Armed Forces and their families.

Telephone: 01563 598000

Email: info@britishlegion.org.uk

Website: www.poppyscotland.org.uk/

Sacro's Veterans Mentoring Service

For military veterans who are currently in or are at risk of becoming involved in Scotland's Justice System.

Telephone: 0131 624 7270 or 0141 248 1763

Email: veterans@sacro.org.uk

Website: www.sacro.org.uk/services/justice/mentoring

Skills Development Scotland

For career information, advice and guidance.

Telephone: 0800 917 7800

Email: www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/contact-sds

Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/career-help/armed-forces-leavers-and-veterans-support