

VETERANS HELPING THEMSELVES

Welcome to the 'Breakfast Clubs'.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL ARMS, VETERANS & SERVING

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

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

When men and women leave the Armed Forces, despite the bluster you hear about resettlement from the Government, about the 'Armed Forces Covenant' and all the now vast array of charities that exist, but the reality is, other than family in their home town, if indeed they are headed back there, there really isn't anyone physically there for them; they are alone, and the isolation is something they never really experienced in the forces; they were always part of a team. When leavers are younger, perhaps in the late twenties, it is something they often haven't given much thought to, and because of their 'conditioning', they just try and make the best of it; find a job, find somewhere to live, and are often too proud to ask for help.

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

I founded an organisation in my home town of Hull; it's not a charity or a business; no money is involved at all, yet it is exploding here in the UK and starting to proliferate abroad, and it's what many veterans are saying to me is 'the missing link' between military service and 'civvi street'; there are currently 57 Breakfast Clubs globally, as I write this (go to Facebook & type 'Breakfast Club' as an illustration), and more starting all the time! The Armed Forces trains/'conditions' the individual constantly to be a soldier/sailor/airman/ marine, but does not 'recondition' men and women to be a civilians.

The Breakfast Clubs are groups of Veterans, also often attended by some serving members of all arms of Her Majesties Armed Forces, who, in short, look out for each other; regaining some of what they lost- 'family'.

Almost every day the importance of the Breakfast Clubs is substantiated by the comments I read, messages I receive from members, from organisers of clubs all around the country, and further afield, whose conviction has led them to take up the baton in their own area. The longer it continues, the more convinced I become, that this network is becoming a physical

safety net, which simply did not exist before, to 'catch' those who have left the armed forces; the tangible presence of people who were once servicemen and women, and speak their language; who can advise, help and guide those that are newly out of service, and make them feel like they are not

alone; letting servicemen and women know there is somewhere they can go: not cap-in-hand to some charity, which flies in the face of the values that have had instilled in them, but to people like themselves, who have gone through what they are experiencing; a new circle of comrades, but with a wider experience of civilian life. The Breakfast Clubs are already helping veterans with a myriad of issues, making new friends and reuniting old ones.

There are no subscriptions and no official rules; although we have a webpage and a common Facebook group for the administrators to share ideas and information, but individual Breakfast Clubs encouraged to be autonomous and make their own decisions. Some prefer to have veterans only attend, and involve partners and families at other times; some involve partners and families. Most meet every weekend, some bi-weekly or monthly, Saturday or Sunday mornings, eat breakfast together, share experiences, solve problems, and indulge in some good old military banter, some irreverent talk and some black humour.

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

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

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

To find the nearest Breakfast Club, type in the link below into your web browser, and choose the nearest marker on the map to you. [Map Meetings \(http://veteransbreakfastclubs.co.uk/meetings/\)](http://veteransbreakfastclubs.co.uk/meetings/)

Click the marker and it will give the venue, day and time of the Breakfast Club, as well as a link to their Facebook Page. For those who do not use Facebook – www.veteransbreakfastclubs.co.uk

Breakfast Clubs have apparently already drawn the attention of Prince Harry while he was visiting a development to house homeless veterans in Newcastle, and I am in contact with a researcher from a company called 'TwoFour', who have been commissioned by the BBC to make a two part documentary on the transition of personnel from the Armed Forces back into civilian life, and the difficulties they face; they now want to include the Breakfast Clubs in the program.

More recently we have featured on British Forces Broadcasting Service's, Forces TV <http://videos.forces.tv/detail/videos/british-forces-news/video/4254330338001/british-forces-news-sunday?autoStart=true&linkBaseURL=http%3A%2F%2Fvideos.forces.tv%2Fdetail%2Fvideos%2Fbritish-forces-news%2Fvideo%2F4254330338001%2Fbritish-forces-news-sunday%3FautoStart%3Dtrue>

Also on BBC Radio Humberside on the Dally Fairfax show ...play from '02:39:45'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02vzhps>

And we are also about to be filmed by BBC Look North on 1st August 2015, so gradually the Breakfast Clubs are beginning to make people sit up and realise that something is lacking in the care for those who have served their country.

