

Jobs, health and housing – raising awareness of key concerns for Veterans

VAPCs are responsible for raising awareness about issues facing Veterans: Jim Blake explains how London's committee goes about this work.

During more than 30 years of military service, I was fortunate to be able to work with many civilian and international organisations to gain insight into skills not normally part of everyday military life, including working with the media and marketing agencies.

These skills assist me in the work of raising "Awareness" of Veterans' issues, one of the three pillars of VAPCs along with "Assistance" and "Advocacy". I lead London's "Awareness" group and am helped by an experienced group of colleagues from diverse backgrounds, both civilian and military.

The principal areas of work we have been able to undertake so far are all relevant to the Armed Forces', Community and Corporate Covenants; employment, housing and health. We are also looking in some detail at homelessness. There is much to do and our resources are limited but we will continue to do what we can with the support of our friends.

While there are many agencies, ranging from the Ministry of Defence to charities, supporting the work, it is sometimes surprising to discover that the levels of understanding of issues affecting ex-servicemen and women are far below what we might wish for or, indeed, expect.

Therefore, we aim, for example, to reach out to employers from corporate level down to small and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, we try to make sure that central and local government authorities are also conversant with Veterans' matters.

Since we started our work we have sought support from a wide range of organisations, ranging from industry to academia. While the likes of Marks and Spencer, Barclays and Tesco have helped on the jobs side, Kent University has assisted with our work on housing issues.

Further, we have had encouraging dialogue with both the CBI and Chambers of Commerce and also with the Greater London Authority, with help from the Mayor of London to reach out to the London Boroughs.

We are fortunate to be at the "heart" of the UK with good contacts with many major institutions as well as Government departments. We are always seeking to raise awareness of Veterans' issues and it is particularly good to be supported by capable and energetic colleagues who give so freely of their time for this important work.