



Telephone: 07780 002616

15th December 2013

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<http://www.cais.co.uk/support-community.php?title=Change-Step>

NEWS RELEASE

'CHANGE STEP' GATHERS PACE WITH FUND BOOST FOR MILITARY VETERANS ACROSS WALES

Thousands of armed forces veterans across Wales with mental health and substance misuse problems and the family members who often struggle to look after them will have a helping hand thanks to a more than £1.4 million government grant to an all-Wales service led by Llandudno-based drug and alcohol charity CAIS.

'Change Step', a peer mentoring service delivered by veterans for veterans since early this year, and 'Listen In', a sister service now being launched in North Wales to help family members and carers, have been awarded £995,918 and £434,659 respectively by the UK government's Armed Forces Covenant LIBOR Fund.

Utilising the pan-Wales framework of the Drug and Alcohol Charities Wales (DACW) consortium, 'Change Step' peer mentors will work alongside CAIS in North Wales, Kaleidoscope in Gwent, TEDS in Rhondda Cynon Taf, WCADA in South Wales, Cyswllt Contact in West Wales, and Drugaid in Mid West Wales. 'Listen In' will be delivered by CAIS across North Wales in partnership with mental health charity Mind and the Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham (AVOW). Both services are funded from February 2014 for two years.

CAIS Chief Executive Clive Wolfendale said: "Change Step is already proving its worth in North Wales and we can now engage energetically with partner charities to roll-out the service across the whole of Wales to help those armed forces veterans who have given so much for their country but who now find themselves, for a variety of reasons, in distress."

"Veterans can often feel misunderstood and that is why we take on well-motivated veterans as peer mentors because there is an instant connection between them because of their shared experience. Relatives and carers often feel they have no-one to turn to either, which is why we are delighted to be launching the new Listen In service too," said Mr Wolfendale.

Mr Wolfendale added: "Veterans frequently miss out when it comes to getting the help and services they need, not least because they may have lost confidence in themselves and the society in which they live, and so partnership working between CAIS and other charitable and statutory sector providers will be crucial to the success of this project."

Change Step is a CAIS-led peer mentoring, welfare and advice service for military veterans and others from the blue-light emergency services who want to make positive changes to their lives. It supports those seeking or needing help for mental health and psychosocial problems such as loneliness, anger, anxiety, confusion, distress, poor self-esteem and many other issues arising from trauma or extreme

stress encountered during military or operational duty. The programme offers peer support, training and educational opportunities, as well as counselling and detoxification from drugs or alcohol where required. The programme is modelled on the Welsh Government's ESF funded all Wales peer mentoring service.

Change Step already works collaboratively with the NHS's All Wales Veterans Health and Wellbeing Service and the Royal British Legion to ensure a comprehensive and focused service for armed forces veterans. It will be working with Bangor University's School of Lifelong Learning and the University of Chester's Enablement and Holistic Care Project for veterans.

As Change Step rolls out across Wales during 2014, peer mentor veterans – all trained in peer mentoring to a minimum of BTEC Level 2 – can apply to take up paid posts as team leaders and go on to recruit a wider network of peer mentor volunteers, thus ensuring an increasingly comprehensive level of service delivery. Change Step aims to reach 4,000 veterans between 2014 and 2016.

Its sister service, Listen In, will provide a bespoke Mental Health First Aid Course for family members and carers of veterans, equipping them with the awareness and skills to recognise signs of mental distress in their loved ones and providing access to practical and emotional support.

Change Step programme director Geraint Jones said: "Listen In will provide family members with the knowledge and skills to recognise crisis at an early stage, act effectively to get the support they need, facilitate the recovery of their loved one and his or her integration back into civilian life and, equally importantly, manage their own health and well-being."

Brigadier Gerhard Wheeler CBE, military patron to Change Step, said: "I understand all too well the challenges of life in the military and the problems many veterans encounter when re-entering civilian life. Veterans have pride in having served in the military and many find it difficult to ask for help, which is why Change Step works because veterans are helping their peers. I am delighted to be supporting this extremely worthwhile and necessary venture as it expands across Wales."

Veterans wanting to access the service or wishing to apply to become peer mentors can contact Change Step on 0845 06 121 12.

Peer mentor volunteers are now being actively sought across Wales and further information can be obtained on: <http://www.cais.co.uk/support-community.php?title=Change-Step>

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Change Step was launched at Hightown Barracks, Wrexham on 31 May 2013.
- Its patron is Brigadier Gerhard Wheeler CBE, a serving Brigade commander in the Army and late of The Royal Welch Fusiliers (now The Royal Welsh) whose 1st Battalion he commanded on operational deployment to Iraq. He was later deputy commander Task Force Helmand in Afghanistan.
- Change Step was chosen as a name for being not only a parade ground command recognised by military personnel but also for reflecting the principle of helping veterans to make positive changes to their lives.
- The NHS and the Ministry of Defence estimate there to be between 220,000 and 250,000 military veterans in Wales, of whom some 4% – perhaps 10,000 – are likely to be presenting with some form of trauma, often as a result of operational service in a combat zone.
- Higher percentages are known to experience wider mental health problems, alcohol and substance misuse problems, homelessness and crime.
- Mental health issues arising from service in from Northern Ireland and the Falklands campaign, among other operational theatres, are still presenting now, years later, and thousands more military personnel have served since in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Peer mentoring is a form of mentorship between the peer mentor who has lived through a specific experience – in this case military service – and the peer mentee who

is encouraged and motivated to make positive health and lifestyle changes where necessary.

- Peer mentoring provides individuals who have suffered from a specific life experience the chance to learn from those who have recovered or rehabilitated following just such an experience.
- Peer mentors provide support, information, recreation and education opportunities, encourage self awareness and confidence in their peer mentees, and will frequently challenge the mentee to think afresh and step out of the rut.