

Kent & Medway Service Children's Conference 2017

On 19 June 2017, 75 service children aged between 7 and 14 from nine different schools attended this conference at the Duke of York's Royal Military Academy, who also provided 15 sixth form facilitators.

The purpose was to give the young people an enjoyable experience and a chance to meet other service children and discuss what it meant to be a "service child".

Accompanying adults (one parent, the rest were from the schools attended by the children) also had the chance to share information on how best to support service children.

Feedback from both children and adults was extremely positive in terms of both enjoyment and knowledge, and they valued being able to have these discussions with others going through similar experiences.

I attach a note of the key issues raised by the adults (Annex 1).

For the children, their top "asks" of schools would be:

- A 'Calm Room' that service children (and others?) could go to if they needed time out because they were having a difficult time, where they could perhaps do colouring or reading
- A Phone Room to phone parents who are away on duty
- A private space to talk to adults
- A nominated adult they could go to for support when their parents were deployed
- Family days that bring together military and civilian families



For more information, please visit:

<http://www.kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/military/servicechildren/>



ANNEX 1: Key messages from the Adults

Service Children's Voice Conference 2017: Issues raised during discussions amongst the supporting adults

The adults who accompanied the children to the conference had a range of roles, from Headteachers to Teaching Assistants to Family Liaison Officers. Some had specific responsibilities for the welfare of service children, and a number were also army spouses and parents of service children.

Susan Murray, wife of Lt Col Jamie Murray, Commanding Officer of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, kindly led a discussion about the issues facing service families, and how schools can better support service children. The discussion highlighted the following challenges and suggestions for how schools can be supported:

Challenges faced by service families, which schools need to be aware of:

- Service families can feel 'different', and that others don't understand what it's like to be a service family
- Moving house is really stressful anyway
- When children have to move schools, not only are their friendships disrupted, but they can end up repeating parts of the curriculum they have already covered, while missing out on other parts
- When parents are deployed, this has all sorts of impact on children, including:
 - The child obviously misses the parent, but this can be particularly stark when the parent is absent for both big (eg birthdays) and little (eg scoring a goal/getting a good mark for a project) events
 - Trying to keep in regular contact to keep the relationship going – but Facetime/Skype can be boring and disruptive
 - Children being worried that the absent parent is in danger
- Anxiety when moving (a stressful experience for anyone) is exacerbated by the additional service factors, and need to establish a new life in a new place.

What can school staff do to help?

- Showing an understanding of service family issues without being 'in your face'
- Be inclusive, but understand what is normal for the individual child
- Be prepared to be flexible
- Going the extra mile – explaining how to do things/make things happen
- Have someone who is there for service children and parents, who they can ask for advice or help
- Being aware that e.g. service children might find lessons to do with war/battles, or remembrance events, difficult if their parents are on deployment. An example was given of a teacher checking out with a child whether it would be ok for a photo of her father to be used in assembly on Remembrance Day
- A weekly Military Kids Club benefits all children, not just service children
- Commemoration days and fun events (eg Camo Day) can really help service children feel proud of their families within the civilian context