



VETERANS OUTDOORS

Veterans Outdoors Impact Report to the Nineveh Charitable Trust

Veterans Outdoors report on grant of £2,000 to support British Veterans on their rural nature recovery pathways over the course of a year. Your grant for core funding was applied to our costs in financial year 2021-2022.

Your donation towards our core activities in 2022 helped to support the mental and physical health and well-being of 173 beneficiaries (of which 140 are veterans) through therapeutic programmes and activities delivered outdoors and in the countryside.

Throughout the year, veterans were given courses in horticulture – our flagship 10-week course called ‘Soil to Supper’, access to our weekly drop-in sessions at Pentillie Walled Garden, as well as community projects, outdoor craft making, bee-keeping, walks in nature and much more. Through these courses our beneficiaries have gained a better understanding and appreciation of nature and the countryside. At all times during these activities, our welfare team are on hand to deliver wrap-around welfare support and mentoring.

We supported:

- 173 in total beneficiaries over the year of which 140 were military veterans and 19 spouses or family members.
- 62 veterans received support over 6 months+. 21% were male and 79% female.
- Around 7 of these veterans received intensive support and attended weekly activities. They depended on stable support especially during these difficult times.

Alongside participating in regular/ weekly programmes and experience days, our beneficiaries received ongoing welfare support from 1-2-1 sessions with our welfare team, either face to face or over the phone. Beneficiaries also took part in group talk and support groups. Some of these are detailed below to show the different activities and support our veterans received.

Veterans who come to us present with a variety of backgrounds, issues and needs which also stem back to pre-military service and include: Anxiety and stress, depression, autism, schizophrenia, loneliness and social isolation, social anxieties, physical abuse and trauma, military PTSD and CPTSD, low self-esteem and confidence, suicidal ideation amongst others and wide ranging physical issues. Some of these veterans receive other specialist support through NHS (TILS), project Nova, GPs and other services. We work symbiotically with these organisations, receiving referrals of new beneficiaries and referring on those who we think might benefit from the support of these outside services.

Every veteran is different, and some require different levels and lengths of support. The impacts on some having been with us for several months has been substantial. Our welfare team check in regularly with beneficiaries during activities and via our three monthly welfare questionnaires which help us to track our beneficiaries progress and highlights any beneficiaries who might require a greater level of support.





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IMPACT & OUTCOMES

We measure success through tracking mental health indicators using a 16- point questionnaire with scale 1-10, recording a baseline at assessment and measure at 3, 6 months, end of support. We also collect qualitative feedback/quotes and case studies. Over the last year we measured significant improvements for those most in need across key outcomes:

1. 63% improvement in mental health and well-being: metrics include: feeling healthier and more active, looking after themselves better, thinking more clearly, feeling better about themselves, less reliant on drugs/substances,
2. 93% overall improvement in personal and independent skills: feeling more confident and good about themselves, purposeful, able to deal better with problems, learning new and useful skills
3. 68% improvement in socialisation: feeling more sociable and able to mix with others

OUR PROGRAMME

We have built on our therapeutic program that we offer to veterans that we detailed in our last report to the Nineveh Trust. In 2022 we continued our regular programme of horticulture and gardening as well as nature-based activities and equine therapy.

We continue to deliver a programme of weekly, open-to-everyone, sessions currently held every Wednesday in the walled garden at Pentillie Castle near Saltash in Cornwall. Beneficiaries have helped to restore some of the walled garden at the castle which was completely overgrown. The programme of work is developed by a horticulturalist who is always on site to support the veterans alongside one of our welfare team. Our veterans have learned a lot about horticulture, developed allotment style growing plots, built fruit cages, grown their own seedlings and drunk an awful lot of tea whilst meeting their friends in a safe, peaceful space.



Pentillie Walled Garden

Our 10-week Soil-to-Supper horticulture course continues to be a big draw for our beneficiaries and we are currently running the first of our two planned 10-week courses at the moment. We are excited to see the outcomes from running this course again. Our last two courses were very successful and lead to some wonderful outcomes, including the formation of new friendship groups and WhatsApp chats to share recipes and ideas. As one beneficiary said ***“This course has helped me open up again and has made me want to mix again and make friends and we all have something in common having been in the forces. It also helps me with my depression”.***



‘Soil to Supper’

We are currently expanding our portfolio of community based activities and we are always looking for opportunities to connect our beneficiaries with their local communities via investment in the local surroundings. We have been working on a project developing Beaumont Park in Plymouth to help regenerate community and wildlife spaces and gardens. Whilst undertaking these, veterans learn new skills and knowledge such as forestry/woodland skills, gardening, and knowledge about wildlife.



Beaumont Park



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We work with several external companies to deliver organised events such as organised walks, beekeeping, yoga, mindfulness days, forest bathing, Mountain Bike Riding to name a few. We are working with our beneficiaries to ensure our programmes are guided by our veteran's needs and our welfare team ensure that every activity is an opportunity to improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and develop skills.

CASE STUDY – KAT – ARTEMIS

Kat is a Royal Navy Veteran in her thirties. She is a single mother of a 7-year-old boy. Kat joined Veterans Outdoors in May 2022, after seeing our Women's Only group ARTEMIS advertised on Facebook. Kat spoke with our welfare lead and explained how she had become riddled with anxiety which had become worse as 'Covid' continued. As a result of the anxiety, Kat had become more and more socially isolated to the point where she was only leaving the house to go to work and take her son to school/outings etc,

Kat found it difficult to focus on her own self-care and was stuck in a rut.

Her mood was deteriorating to the point of despair, but she assumed everyone was in a similar position due to what was going on in the world, so continued to struggle independently.

After discussion with the VO team, it became apparent that Kat had lost her identity and confidence which led her to feel hopeless and worthless, Kat was desperate to get her spark for life back for the benefit of her son. With thanks to RNRMC and the funding they gave to Veterans Outdoors, we were able to work with Kat to discover her needs and offer her a programme of events to 'find herself again'.

Kat's first event was an equine course (funded by a different charity) which acted as a catalyst to change her mind set and realise, she was worth the effort, and this kick started the beginning of change for Kat. Over the summer she continued with the programme we discussed and engaged in the variety of events offered to her. This included:

- Evening Canoe and BBQ
- Overnight Canoe and Camping
- Yoga
- Breathwork and Cold water swimming
- Photography and mindfulness.

The programme of events identified and addressed a lot for Kat. It helped her acknowledge her isolation and made her realise that spending time with others relieved her sense of loneliness and having to cope alone, which evoked a feeling of empowerment and motivation. Having the variety of activities enabled Kat to experience new things and learn new skills; from practical things like yoga poses and tying knots to keep a raft afloat to having more confidence and self-belief to chase her dreams and make new friends.





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As a result of engaging with VO events Kat was able to highlight her personal values and strengths and started to use them to her advantage. As the summer passed Kat joined another women's group and went sailing for a few days where she was part of the working crew, she took her son up on the moors and camped with him to show what she had learned- (fire lighting, putting up tents, and even cooking over a campfire).

Kat now has a new job and used her newfound hobbies, skills and interests to bolster up her CV to secure an interview. Kat talks very highly of Artemis (VO) and feels like it "saved her from the darkest depths".

Here are some other quotes from Kat about some of the events she attended.

"[Veterans Outdoors] has helped me to put perspective on current situations in my life, I have been grateful for the opportunity and would recommend to anyone requiring help!"

"Wonderful day, meeting great people, making friends".

"Veterans outdoors and Artemis has honestly given me a new outlook on life. I have definitely been more positive on a daily basis; things are looking good."

"I have learned ways to manage my anxiety by using the techniques taught in some of the groups I have been to."



OTHER QUOTES & FEEDBACK

Here are a few other comments our beneficiaries have made over the last year:

"This course has helped me open up again and has made me want to mix again and make friends and we all have something in common having been in the forces. It also helps me with my depression".

"Beautiful setting, great atmosphere, lovely new friends."

"The banter cheers me up and I forgot about my depression for a few hours. I am not so lonely now".

"Each time I came I felt much calmer. It gave me some time to pause and think whilst doing something physical."

