

FEMALE VETERANS TOOLKIT SUMMARY



**Female
Veterans**
TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAMME



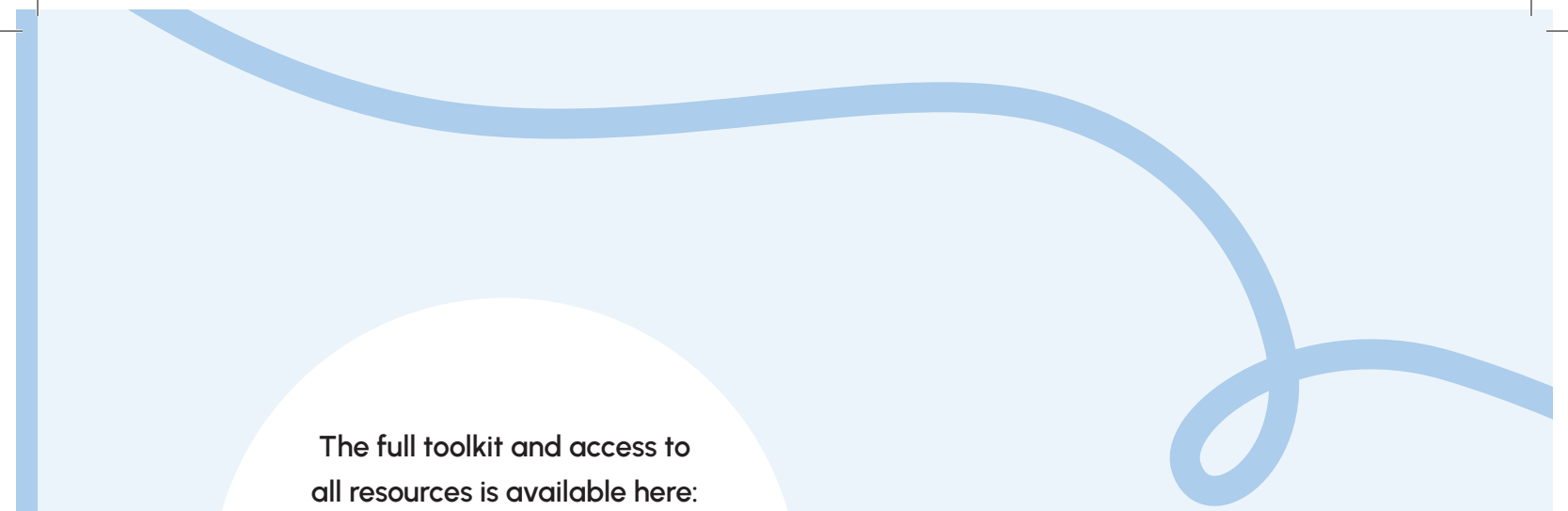
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 **THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**
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**Office for
Veterans' Affairs**


**VETERANS'
FOUNDATION**





The full toolkit and access to
all resources is available here:

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/female-veterans-toolkit/>

The toolkit is split into specific sections;
below is an overview of what resources
are available to help raise awareness and
provide better support.

WELCOME TO THE FEMALE VETERANS TOOLKIT SUMMARY

The toolkit has been developed over two years (2023-2025),
and builds on research, lived experience and engagement with
female veterans and the input of sector stakeholders who have
all collaborated on its development.



WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR?

The toolkit is for all organisations, charities, statutory organisations and employers.

WHAT IS THE TOOLKIT?

The toolkit provides information and resources to help organisations understand and know how to better support female veterans. This includes the following:

- 1 Quick reference guides/infographics.
- 2 A quality improvement self-assessment tool.
- 3 Case studies and examples of good practice.
- 4 Signposting and links to helpful sources of information, including additional training and education.

Ask everyone,
regardless of gender,
**'Have you ever served in
the UK Armed Forces?'**

- 5 Specific information for each of the Devolved Administrations.
- 6 Communication resources all organisations can use.

The toolkit also provides resources that help to better recognise the positive contribution women have made to the UK Armed Forces, and how all services need to ask everyone, regardless of gender 'Have you ever served in the UK Armed Forces'.

'Most women who have served do not identify as 'female veterans' and therefore might not be accessing services and support that they are entitled to. If the toolkit can encourage an organisation to ask the question, 'Have you ever served in the UK Armed Forces?' and have an appropriate response if the answer is 'yes' then, not only could it make the world of difference to an individual's life, what's more, it can contribute to making the organisation a better employer with a more motivated and committed workforce.'

DR HANNAH WEST,
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW, CENTRE
FOR MILITARY WOMENS RESEARCH
ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY



KEY BENEFITS OF USING THE TOOLKIT INCLUDE:

- ✓ Recognition of the skills and talents female veterans have, that can benefit a range of employers.
- ✓ Better outcomes for the female veterans you directly support – understanding their needs, how to engage with them and working smarter to get things right the first time.
- ✓ Providing better support for your workforce by understanding who your workforce is and the skills they bring.
- ✓ Better reputation of your organisation – increasing your profile as able to employ, support and engage with female veterans in a way that matters to them.
- ✓ Improved partnership and collaboration – Working better together to collaboratively support female veterans more effectively.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CALL TO ACTION!

Don't make
assumptions

Ensure accessibility
and flexibility

Allow
autonomy

Identify and
use the experts

1

ASK EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF GENDER 'HAVE YOU EVER SERVED IN THE UK ARMED FORCES'

Less than 31% of women identify with the term 'veteran', which often means they may not be accessing the best possible support. Regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, everyone should be asked the question to identify if they are a veteran, have that information recorded and then decide what, if any, specific support can be offered. For example, as part of the recruitment process, staff surveys, registering with services, such as a GP, as well as when supporting women through your organisation, i.e. assessment forms/application forms.

2

UNDERSTAND THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF FEMALE VETERANS

The Statement of Need is an easily accessible infographic to help you understand this at a glance.

Most female veterans transition into civilian life well, but for some, additional support is needed. No one veteran is the same and for many women they face intersectionality of a multitude of issues, including very different experiences of the military. However, there are some key issues that many women face, and all organisations should recognise what these are, for example specific physical and/or mental health issues, resulting from service, including those relating to bullying, discrimination and sexual assault and abuse.

3

BE AN ALLY TO FEMALE VETERANS

The Allyship infographic gives you an easy guide on what this means and what you can do.

Everyone can be an ally – male, female, organisations and the general public. Allyship means you advocate, celebrate and ensure that female veterans are seen, heard and given the recognition and support they deserve.

4

ENSURE YOU COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE WELL WITH FEMALE VETERANS

The Communication Checklist provides a quick overview of the things to think about.

You don't always need dedicated communication materials just for female veterans, but in the relevant materials you produce, women should 'see themselves' and understand what is available for them to access. This also relates to the language that you use and the places you promote your services.

5

HAVE A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

The Person Centred infographic gives you ideas and tips of how to achieve this.

Intersectionality means that all female veterans will have different experiences and different support needs. By having

a person centred approach and a 'What matters to you?' conversation, you can identify the right support that will be delivered in a way that ensures the most positive outcomes are achieved.

6

CODESIGN AND COLLABORATE WITH FEMALE VETERANS

Ensure female veterans are involved in the design and delivery and review of initiatives where possible, i.e. creating a staff network, a new service or group or their own support plans. Do not be tokenistic and make sure engagement is done in a meaningful and actionable way. As one female veteran said, "Nothing about us, without us!"

7

CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR FEMALE VETERANS

Safe spaces are dependent on the needs of the individual; sometimes that is the provision of female only spaces or female support workers and sometimes it is about ensuring generic spaces are welcoming to everyone, including female veterans. It may also be about the times service is available/ opening hours and the type environments you provide, i.e. the ability to bring children or offer childcare. The toolkit gives you information on how you might achieve this.

8

COLLABORATE AND WORK IN PARTNERSHIP, BOTH AT A LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL TO PROVIDE THE BEST POSSIBLE SUPPORT FOR FEMALE VETERANS

Organisations need to work better together to provide the right support; this includes statutory organisations, charities (military and civilian), and employers. Creating multi-disciplinary environments and ways of working, means you can truly offer a person-centred service, understanding that no-one can be the expert in everything or be the right organisation for every female veteran. To achieve this think about;

- Where are your local and national armed forces experts and how can you build relationships – i.e. Armed Forces Champions. The toolkit may help you with links and information to get you started.

- How can you signpost or refer quickly if appropriate?
- Identifying community and peer support options – including setting up staff networks where possible and appropriate. A sense of community and belonging is very important for many veterans – including female veterans. Peer support groups often provide safe spaces for women, particularly if they are designed and led by women with lived experience.

9

CARRY OUT THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

The toolkit provides organisations with the opportunity to conduct a quality improvement exercise by completing the relevant elements of the self-assessment tool. This exercise will help organisations identify where they are now and what they need to put into action to create positive change for the female veterans they support, engage with and employ.



RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ALL

IDENTITY AND ACCESS

The research tells us that many women do not identify as veterans and in turn do not access relevant services – often stating that they are male dominated with a lack of communication to and awareness of female veterans. The consultation and codesign phase of this programme, highlighted that Awareness, Diversity and Recognition are the key improvements services need to make to ensure female veterans see themselves in the service offer and in turn are able to access what they need, when they need it.

To improve issues of identity and access we have therefore created a range of quick reference resources for EVERYONE to look at how we can all improve our services, and/or better understand the needs of female veterans.

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/female-veterans-toolkit/>

Statement of Need – Our Statement of Need provides a succinct and visual representation of female veterans' needs, such as support for employment and finance, access to services, bullying and discrimination.

What Good Looks Like – Taken from the views of female veterans, we have created a checklist. The infographic shows what services need to do to provide the best support for female veterans.

Communications – Our consultation and co-design phase showed that one of the most significant issues for female veterans was the lack of communication from service providers. This checklist covers the pertinent points to make your communication more inclusive and inviting for female veterans.

Allyship – Everyone can be an ally (someone who actively supports a marginalised group – in this case female veterans – to advocate and promote their voices and challenge the barriers they face). Our infographic gives hints and tips on ways you can do this in your organisation.

Statement of Need
What the evidence tells us are the needs of female veterans

IDENTITY
Women often do not identify with the term 'veteran' and face specific, complex and multi-layered issues as a result of their service.

ACCESS TO SERVICES
Women often don't access services being services as they are seen to be male dominated and not able to meet their needs.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?
• Recognition of the specific needs of female veterans
• Employment for women to define their military service in their own terms
• Services should include military service including other than using regular terms like 'veteran'
• Special attention to the impact of far more basic things like employment and pay issues
• Provision of support for those negatively affected especially for civilian partners

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?
• Services need to be more inclusive and accessible to all women
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TRANSITION, EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCE
44% of women feel they have little support or preparation for 'life post'.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?
• Women need better and more targeted support during transition to find opportunities and workplace environment taking into account caring responsibilities

AREAS OF LITTLE EVIDENCE
There are very few areas that all are engaged on targeted and inclusive support across it.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?
• More research and evidence is needed to better understand the needs of female veterans in the personal safety system, care and health, care services, digital skills and employment

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH
Women in the British Army have been found to be 30% more likely than men to suffer from musculoskeletal injuries. They are 10 times more likely than men to suffer from hip and pelvic stress fractures.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?
• Women's specific health needs to be understood and addressed
• Women need to have a better understanding of the personal safety system
• Women need to feel confident to disclose their military service and be supported into specific Armed Forces pathways where appropriate and wanted

What Good Looks Like for Female Veterans

A checklist for services and organisations
We have heard from over 800 female veterans and they have told us their good looks like the following.

Understanding the needs of ALL women veterans and ensuring they 'see themselves' in the service provision

RECOGNITION
• We are aware and recognise that women serve/ have served in the British Armed Forces
• We ask the question 'Have you ever served?'

DIVERSITY
• We are aware that female veterans may have different needs to men
• We recognise that female veterans are a diverse group and includes:
• All ages
• All ranks
• All lengths of service
• Ethnic minorities
• LGBTQ+ veterans

AWARENESS & COMMUNICATION
• We ensure we promote our services to female veterans in a way that makes them feel welcome
• We ensure branding, imagery and language is appropriate to female veterans

SUPPORT
• We offer support in a person-centred way, based on what matters to the person
• We work collaboratively with other services/ organisations to provide the right support for the person (we don't have to be the only one)

ENVIRONMENT
• We provide our services to female veterans in a safe and appropriate environment

EDUCATION
• We provide access to additional training for staff where needed to better support female veterans

SAFE SPACES

When looking at safe spaces, we need to account for all of the above aspects and ensure that not only are we providing support in the right way, but also that we are not re-traumatizing people by offering support in any way that feels unsafe to the individual (i.e. do not create situations in which women have experiences similar to their original trauma – environments, staff (i.e. not having the choice of female staff/ imagery etc). Other working in a trauma-informed approach can be beneficial, but always be aware of your scope of practice and what is and is not appropriate for you to provide.

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND PUT IN PLACE

- Do you have a distress protocol in place when potential for harm is disclosed?
- Do you have safeguarding children included in your risk assessments?
- What training and supervision are you providing to support and when your response is safeguarding? Do you have processes in place to learn from incidents and safeguarding has been on issue?

WHAT FEMALE VETERANS SAY

What we heard in the consultation and codesign was that 'safe spaces' were a high priority when providing support to female veterans. Some may have found issues such as sexually inappropriate behaviour, including rape and sexual assault and safe spaces were vital given the way in which their experiences made them feel now in male dominated environments and services. Two notable themes emerged:

- Better supported access to voluntary and non-voluntary services are needed across the whole of the UK, both face to face and online. When appropriate these should include children/ child friendly environments. Currently many women are both unaware and do not feel like they are able/ feel welcomed to access services.
- All voluntary and non-voluntary services need to be delivered in a person-centred way, noting that this can mean very different things. For example:
 - some women don't want separate gendered services, they just want to be welcome in services that exist already but for some times and some women, female only services are essential such as for those that have experienced sexually inappropriate behaviours
 - including rape and sexual assault

Being an Ally
Empathise · Advocate · Stand Up

What is an Ally?
An ally is someone who champions inclusion and underrepresented groups whilst not being a member of the group that they are defending. Whilst this is predominantly aimed at male veterans supporting female veterans, it can be applied to any marginalised community. Could this be you?

Who can be an Ally?
Anyone. Men, women, veterans, civilians. Even within the same group, like women supporting other women, allyship matters.

There's no fixed formula, but here are 10 real ways to show up:

- 1 Listen and Believe**
Take someone's experience seriously. Don't dismiss or try to fix it – just be present and empathetic.
- 2 Challenge Sexism**
Call out sexist/sexist jokes or behaviour. Don't silence – educate, especially in private spaces like WhatsApp groups.
- 3 Understand the Differences**
Female veterans face distinct issues. Listen about them without expecting women to teach you.
- 4 Support Leadership**
Encourage women's leadership in meetings, events and boards. Don't just make them feel like they have to.
- 5 Mentor and Sponsor**
Offer support with opportunities and advice. Help them see their future.
- 6 Foster Safe Spaces**
Help make all veteran spaces welcoming, safe, support groups, and events.
- 7 Modernise Traditions**
Challenge outdated norms, use inclusive language and respect women's service and needs.
- 8 Support All Women**
Recognise cultural challenges for veterans from different backgrounds. Be inclusive, diverse, or even a mix of all three.
- 9 Check Yourself**
Ask: Am I making space for others? Am I allyship in my work, social, support groups, and events?
- 10 Remember**
Women can (and should) be allies to other women from marginalised communities!

Communications checklist

When asking women how services could be improved, communication was one of the most significant issues. This checklist provides some ideas of things you can think about or action to better communicate and engage with female veterans.

1 Decide what you want to communicate to female veterans
• Do you have a communication campaign to include what you want to communicate to, which groups and how you are going to do this?
• Do you have a communication campaign to include what you want to communicate to, which groups and how you are going to do this?

2 Use inclusive and welcoming imagery
• Use images of women in both military and civilian settings
• Consider using a mix of images to show the diversity of the female veteran experience or otherwise use animation or graphics if you need to protect diversity
• Use images of real women that represent diversity of the female veteran by age, rank, service, rank, sexuality, religion, disability, or any other characteristics or traits that make them who they are (e.g. mothers, carers etc)
• Use the use of female soldiers that challenge stereotypes and occupations and therefore increase awareness that women also served

3 Think about your colour scheme
• What do you want to be noticed by your own branding, we recommend using the service's branding, or if you are not associated with the military, use a mix of colours
• Avoid excessive use of pink, and also think about whether they and their communities are in strong association with the Army

4 Decide what communications channels to use to reach out
• Imagine that many female veterans use social media to identify suitable and safe spaces
• Consider digital literacy especially amongst older female veterans
• Consider individuals outside of the veteran sector to reach 'hidden' female veteran communities (e.g. sports, arts, faith groups)

5 Review your effectiveness – what works and what doesn't?
• Ask female veterans to take a look at your staff communications material and provide feedback

The best communications strategy and materials cannot substitute for a welcoming and inclusive environment, especially in that first interaction with a female veteran.

For more information and links to training and resources to support your planning and spend your best follow the link to our website www.fvtp.org.uk

APPROACH

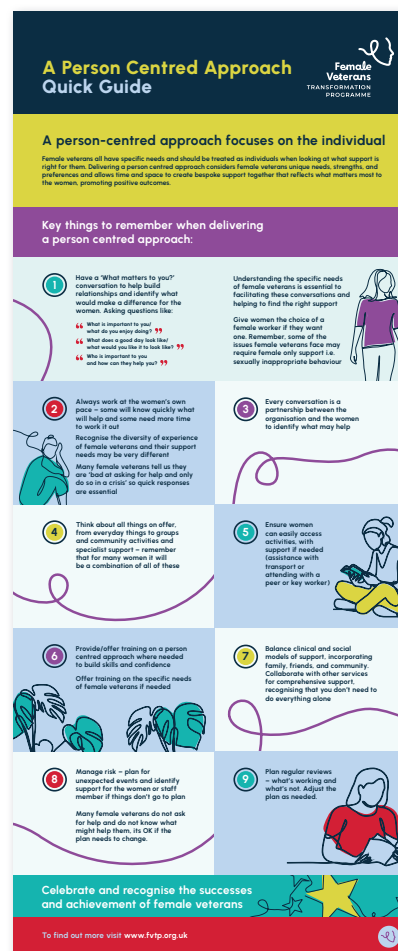
This section is for those services that come into direct contact with veterans and want to improve and enhance the way they support female veterans by thinking about some of the practical improvements they can make to encourage more women to ask for help, support or get involved.

This section should be read in conjunction with the previous one and contains more quick reference infographics.

Person Centred Approaches – Female veterans have unique needs (which are described in detail in the full toolkit) and should be treated as individuals when determining the right support. A person-centred approach considers their specific needs, strengths and preferences, allowing for tailored support focusing on what matters most to them.

Safe spaces – Creating more awareness and tools on how to create safe spaces for female veterans.

Community and Peer Support – This section highlights the activities, groups, and organisations (both military and civilian) that can help female veterans build connections, reduce isolation, and foster a sense of purpose and belonging. It also includes information on staff networks for any employer.



SPECIFIC SECTIONS

The third section of the toolkit provides further information for organisations to consider. It contains case studies and good practice examples alongside links to organisations, services or further resources that can support both you and the female veterans you may encounter.

The sections are

Physical Health

Physical health issues experienced by veterans can be directly related to military service. It is important to remember that for female veterans, their physiology can be affected differently to their male counterparts. Females are significantly more likely to leave the armed forces due to ill-health than males; particularly with musculoskeletal injuries, and hip and pelvic stress fractures.

Mental Health

Whilst most female veterans experience good mental health, some face unique issues as a result of their service in the Armed Forces.

Bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexually inappropriate behaviors including sexual assault and rape

Female veterans are more likely to have experienced bullying, harassment, discrimination, and sexually inappropriate behaviour, including sexual assault and rape, whilst they were serving than their male counterparts.

Addiction

Addiction can be an issue for some female veterans including alcohol abuse, substance abuse and gambling harms.

Employment and finance

Childcare and caring responsibilities often mean that female veterans require different employment and finance options; as a result women may need more flexible or part time options across a broader range of employment opportunities.

Housing and homelessness

Female veterans' housing and homelessness needs are under researched and current dedicated support is minimal e.g. provision of housing that is women-only, or accommodates women and children.

LGBT+

Homosexuality was decriminalised in UK Law in 1967 but remained a military offence until January 2000. Victims of this policy endured bullying, blackmail, invasive investigations, and even conversion therapy, resulting in long-term emotional and financial hardships. Acknowledging this painful history is crucial for supporting LGBT+ veterans, as their struggles continue to affect them today.

Ethnic diversity

There is a significant lack of research into the specific needs and lived experiences of female veterans from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Although individuals from these backgrounds comprise just over 10% of the UK's serving Armed Forces personnel, sex-disaggregated data is not currently available.

Family Life

Many female veterans will have families and caring responsibilities. They may have serving partners, children or caring for other family members, all of which should be considered when offering support, also a high proportion of women veterans will have been in dual serving relationships. This section covers issues of bereavement and what support exists or is needed for female veterans who may be facing the loss of a partner, especially if they were serving at the time of their death.

Justice and the law

The veteran status of women in the justice system often goes unrecognised and their specific needs missed. The research has repeated the importance of striving for visibility for female veterans in the justice system to mobilise the resources and support, tailored to address their needs.





RESOURCES FOR EVERYONE TO USE

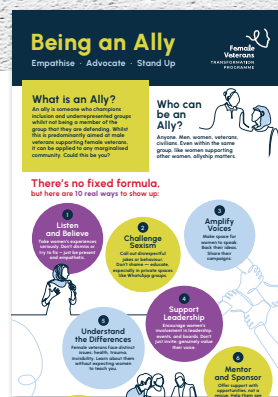
We recognise that everyone is busy, so we have created a suite of quick reference tools within the toolkit, to help you understand and navigate the information.

We also want to make sure women get their due and deserved recognition of service and are celebrated alongside all veterans for the contributions they have made.

These resources are now available for organisations to download and use within the toolkit.

INFOGRAPHICS

One-page infographics where you can access the information you need quickly and easily and download for reference or awareness raising across your organisation.



SHORT FILMS

We have a small library of short films that raise awareness of the specific needs of female veterans and how services can look to better support them.

SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

To support quality improvement, we have created a downloadable tool to help you assess and plan actions to improve your provision, support and recognition of female veterans.



IMAGES

We have created a range of posters highlighting that women also served to raise awareness of their service and diversity. These can be downloaded for organisations to use in their communications.



EDUCATIVE FILM

An impactful short film, telling the story of female veterans through multiple perspectives and exploring intersectionality. This film will support organisations to identify how they can improve and forms part of a short 'training session' that anyone can access.



The programme was delivered by a small team, hosted by the WRAC Association and supported by a wide range of partners and critical friends. It has utilised many experts to provide a robust response and relevant tools to improve the awareness of female veterans, their needs and how to provide better support if appropriate.

We could not have achieved everything without the collaboration and engagement of key partners across the UK, including:

OUR FUNDERS:

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, the Office of Veterans' Affairs and The Veterans Foundation.

SUPPORTERS

NHS England Armed Forces Health Team.

WIDE STAKEHOLDERS

We have worked with many stakeholders in this programme across the charity, statutory and commercial sector and want to extend a massive thank you to everyone who has taken time to get involved and help shape this much needed work.

LASTLY, OUR BIGGEST THANKS GO
TO ALL **THE FEMALE VETERANS**
WHO GOT INVOLVED, GAVE US
THEIR VIEWS AND OPINIONS AND
HELPED SHAPE SOMETHING TRULY
TRANSFORMATIONAL FOR THE FUTURE.



Thanks also go to the WRAC Association for hosting the programme.



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AND SUPPORTING
RESOURCES.



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