



**The
Charity
Spark**

Military Coworking Network 2024 to 2026

Final Evaluation Report



 **THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**
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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation, conducted by The Charity Spark on behalf of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT), of a two-year continuation grant (April 2024 to March 2026) awarded to the Military Coworking Network (MCN). MCN provides coworking spaces (Hubs) and an online community (MCN Online) for military partners and spouses, supporting their professional lives and reducing isolation. The grant aimed to open new Hubs, increase membership, improve marketing and outreach, and explore long-term sustainability with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and other partners. The evaluation drew on a mixed-methods approach across the full grant period, including surveys of military partners and serving personnel, member interviews and group discussions, Hub observational visits, and discussions with the MCN team, MOD, and tri-Services Families Federations.

Reach and membership

By March 2026, MCN operated eight UK Hubs and one overseas Hub. It also promotes seven affiliate Hubs that it does not run directly. Active Hub membership grew by 75% over the grant period, from 103 to 180 users, although this fell short of the grant target of 200. MCN Online exceeded its target of 2,240, growing to 2,267 registered members. The evaluation found that demand for Hubs exceeds current supply: 59% of non-member survey respondents said they would use a Hub if one were nearby, and a lack of awareness, rather than a lack of interest, is the main barrier to wider uptake.

Operational impact

The grant enabled two new Hubs to open, at Hereford and Marham, and one to expand significantly and relocate, from Bulford to the Salisbury Plain Hub at Tidworth. It also funded two staff appointments that drove measurable improvements in membership and online engagement, and conferred institutional credibility that supported conversations with base commanders. The main constraints on further growth are securing base support and accommodation, and the absence of formal MOD policy on Hubs, rather than resources or member demand.

Impact on MCN members

Reduced loneliness is the most consistent impact-related finding across the evaluation. Among Hub users, 86% reported reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation, 70% an improved sense of community, and 65% improved mental health and wellbeing. MCN's primary employment benefit is career maintenance: Hubs help employed partners meet employers' in-office working requirements and provide professional working conditions that Service Family Accommodation does not, while the online community has supported self-employed members in building businesses through peer support and shared professional resources. Significantly, MCN is widely reported to be the only military partner support provision that is aligned to modern family life, being accessible to partners who work, do not have children, or have blended families.

Impact on the Armed Forces

71% of serving personnel rate their partner's career satisfaction as important or very important to their retention decision. Of those with direct experience of MCN in their household, 62% report being more likely to stay in the military and 69% report worrying less about their partner. Evidence across every source group describes the same causal chain: MCN supports the partner's career and social life, which reduces isolation and pressure on the serving person, thus supporting retention of Service personnel.

Influencing factors

Location is the strongest determinant of Hub success. Hubs outside a base's secure area (outside the wire) are strongly preferred, and the minimum functional specification is reliable Wi-Fi, dual screens, a private meeting room, a kitchen, and a printer. The single factor that most reliably turns a well-equipped Hub into an active community is a regular, welcoming anchor member. For MCN Online, the structured Tuesday coworking session and the shared, unspoken understanding among members about military partner life are the features that members value most, though both currently depend on the skill of a single facilitator.

Sustainability and value for money

MCN generates substantial value relative to its cost. At £30 per year, Hub membership saves members an estimated £1,170 each compared with commercial

coworking alternatives, a collective saving of approximately £210,600 per year across current Hub membership. Applying HM Treasury's Green Book wellbeing methodology to the 65% of Hub members reporting improved wellbeing produces an estimated national economic benefit of £1,521,000 per year, representing an annual return of £7.60 for every pound of the £200,000 grant. The primary sustainability risk is MCN's absence from formal MOD policy: without it, Hubs exist at the discretion of individual base commanders, and continuity is at risk whenever those individuals move on.

Conclusion

MCN works, and the evidence for this is consistent across every source group in the evaluation. It is the only current provision that directly addresses loneliness among working military partners, while also compensating for a gap in housing policy and generating measurable retention and economic benefits. The grant has delivered what a project of this size realistically can, but grant funding alone cannot secure MCN's long-term future. That requires formal policy recognition and structural embedding within MOD and Service systems, rather than continued dependence on local decision-making and goodwill.

Recommendations

The evaluation recommends that MCN continues, and identifies ten actions for MCN, its partners, and its funders. The highest-priority actions are to:

- Secure formal policy status for MCN within MOD's welfare offering, so that Hubs are not dependent on the goodwill of individual base role-holders.
- Add Hub availability to Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) posting information, so families can factor it into posting decisions.
- Activate the partnership with the Service Family Accommodation housing provider, whose 150 housing officers could promote MCN to families at the point of move-in.

Further recommendations cover expanding the Hub network strategically, replacing the current booking system to produce reliable usage data, protecting and resourcing the MCN Online community as a standalone offering, documenting online facilitation practice, reviewing the Hub membership fee, improving local information on individual Hub web pages, and requiring any successor funding bid to define a genuine next stage of development, rather than a continuation of current activity.



Introduction

The Military Coworking Network (MCN) provides coworking spaces (Hubs) and an online community for military partners and spouses. It aims to support their professional lives and combat isolation. Membership is also open to veterans, partners of veterans, and reservists.

Volunteer military partners opened the first MCN Hub in 2017, with five more following by 2019. A two-year Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) pilot grant awarded to the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) funded MCN from 2020. In 2023, a further AFCFT grant of almost £200,000 funded a two-year continuation project (April 2024 to March 2026) with the aims of opening new Hubs, increasing membership, improving marketing and outreach, and exploring long-term sustainability with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the single Services.

AFCFT commissioned The Charity Spark to evaluate the continuation project. This final report covers the entire project. It builds on an [interim report submitted in June 2025](#) and a report submitted in October 2025 to inform MOD planning and investment decisions.

About MCN

MCN is run by a three-person team employed by RAFA. The team manages Hub relationships, online provision, and marketing. By March 2026, eight UK Hubs and one overseas Hub were operating, comprising six at Army bases (Blandford, Bovington, Hereford, Leuchars, Sandhurst, and Tidworth), one at Clyde (Navy), one at Marham (joint Royal Air Force (RAF) and Navy), and one at Akrotiri (RAF). In the past, Hubs were opened at Valley (RAF) and Chivenor (Royal Marines); however, both these Hubs later closed. In most cases, the name of the Hub reflects the base it serves, with one notable exception: the Hub at Tidworth serves various bases across the Salisbury Plain and has been named the Salisbury Plain Hub to reflect this.

Hub annual membership fees are £30 per year for up to 900 hours of use. All Hubs provide desks, Wi-Fi, printing, and hot-drink facilities, and most have private rooms. Seven affiliate Hubs, not operated by MCN, are listed on the [MCN website](#). They cover three UK and four overseas locations.



MCN Online membership is free. The online offering includes structured coworking sessions, social and professional events delivered by volunteer speakers, a members-only resource library, a business directory, and a social media community.

About the evaluation

The Charity Spark conducted a mixed-methods impact assessment and process evaluation across the full grant period. Data sources (see appendix) comprised 181 responses to a survey for military partners; 28 responses to a survey for serving personnel; 40 member interviews and 2 member group discussions across 9 Hubs and online; 3 sessions with a members' Co-creation Group assembled for this evaluation; 8 base or unit staff interviews; 6 Families Federation interviews; 7 Hub observational visits; 6 MCN team interviews and 2 team group discussions; observation of 4 steering board meetings and 2 online events; and discussions with interested parties, such as the MCN Founder, MOD and AFCFT. A theory of change (see p. 21) was co-developed and tested with the Co-creation Group. A value-for-investment exercise was completed for MOD in autumn 2025, when it was also shared with AFCFT.

About this report

The findings start with the reach of MCN and are followed by five further sections organised around 14 evaluation questions that AFCFT specified (see the appendix). These sections cover operational impact, impact on MCN members, impact on the Armed Forces, influencing factors, and additional impacts and sustainability considerations. Each of the topics aligned with the evaluation questions is introduced with a key finding, followed by the supporting evidence. The findings are followed by conclusions and recommendations.

Findings: MCN Reach and Member Profile

MCN awareness and engagement

The partner survey received 181 responses. Of these respondents, 65 (36%) are current or former members of MCN. Overall, 20% of all respondents have used a Hub, including 8% who have also engaged with MCN Online. Most past Hub users who responded are no longer able to access a Hub because they have moved to a new posting without one nearby.

Partner Survey Respondent Category	% of Total Responses	% of Member Responses
Hub and Online member	8%	22%
Hub-only member	13%	35%
Online-only member	15%	43%
Not a member of MCN	64%	N/A

An internal MCN key performance indicator (KPI) report for March 2026 recorded 180 current active Hub members and 2,267 registered Online members. While MCN Online met its grant target of 2,240 members, the grant target figure for Hub members of 200 was not achieved. This was despite membership numbers increasing by 75% from the start of the grant period (April 2024), when the number of active users was 103.

Of the 116 non-members in the partner survey, 40% are not aware of any part of the MCN offering. Among the 113 who answered the question about future use, 60% would use a Hub if one were nearby.





The dominant reason for not using a Hub is not having one locally, not reluctance or lack of interest. These two findings together indicate that demand exceeds current supply and that awareness, not need, is the main barrier to greater uptake.

Connection to the Armed Forces

The vast majority of MCN members are partners of currently serving personnel. In the partner survey, this applies to 100% of those who have used both Hubs and Online, 91% of Hub-only users, and 93% of Online-only members. Among non-members, 92% are partners of current serving personnel, confirming that the survey reached MCN's primary target population.

Other respondents included veterans, partners of veterans, and reservists. Interviews and co-creation sessions occasionally discussed serving personnel using Hubs. The Co-creation Group was open to this in principle but emphasised the need for clear guidelines, civilian clothing only, and limited booking slots to ensure partners remain the priority. One respondent stopped using a Hub when serving personnel began using the space as it no longer felt like a partner-focused environment.

Army connections dominated across all responses. Overall, 59% of the partner survey respondents are associated with the British Army and 28% with the RAF, reflecting the location of current Hubs at Army and RAF bases. Royal Navy and Royal Marines account for 13% of respondents combined. Among members, the Army is most represented in Hub use (57% of Hub users) and the RAF is most represented in Online-only membership (43% of Online-only users), which is consistent with RAF bases having fewer nearby Hubs but stronger engagement with the online offering.

Across all member types, 70% of respondents' serving partners hold an officer rank. This skew is most pronounced among Online-only members, where 88% are partners of officers, compared with 57% among Hub users. Non-members show a more even split (51% officers, 49% other ranks), suggesting that other ranks' partners are underrepresented in current MCN membership relative to the wider military family population.

Demographic and employment profile

All 37 Hub users in the partner survey are female. Among Online-only members, 96% are female (27 of 28). This is consistent with the wider military partner population, in which approximately 90% of partners are female, as reported in the [Families Continuous Attitude Survey \(FAMCAS\)](#). No meaningful difference in demographic profile was found between UK and overseas members.

The most common age range for Hub users is 35 to 40, which accounts for 49% of Hub-using respondents. Online-only members are older on average, as their most common age range (at 29%) is 45 to 49, with a further 25% aged 41 to 44. The younger profile of Hub users reflects the association between Hub locations and family postings.

In total, 91% of all members are in some form of paid work, with 34% working full time, 20% part time, and 37% self-employed or freelance. Among non-members the employed proportion is similar, at 90%, but the distribution differs as 56% are in full-time employment and only 16% are self-employed. This matters for the MCN Online offering, which is currently weighted towards self-employment and business ownership at a time when the majority of both members and potential members are in employment. Hub users show a mixed employment profile (43% full time, 22% part time, 24% self-employed), while Online-only members are more likely to be self-employed or freelance (54%).

Across all types of members, 89% hold a degree, postgraduate qualification or professional qualification. This applies equally to Hub users (89%) and Online-only members (89%). The high qualification profile is indicative of a community of professionally active adults whose careers are at risk of disruption by posting cycles, and not a population seeking basic employment support.

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of all members are working full time

20%
of all members are working part time

37%
of all members are self-employed or freelance



How MCN Hubs are used

All nine current Hubs and the two former Hubs at Valley and Chivenor are represented in partner survey feedback. Work is the primary reason Hub users give for attending, selected by 95% of Hub-using respondents. Social interaction is the second most common reason, cited by 46%, followed by study (16%) and professional networking (14%). The fact that nearly half of Hub users list social interaction alongside work confirms that the Hubs' role in reducing isolation is inseparable from their professional function.

Hub occupancy is monitored monthly and Clyde, Akrotiri, and Salisbury Plain, in this order, consistently report the highest occupancy rates. Among current Hub users, the most common visit frequency is one day per week (36%), followed by two to three days per week (28%). A further 24% use a Hub less than one day per week on average, and 12% use it four to five days per week. Typical visit length is split: 38% of Hub users report visits of six hours or more, while 62% visit for fewer than six hours. This pattern indicates that many members use a Hub over a full working day, not just for occasional drop-ins. It is worth noting that the MCN booking system uses three-hour slots, so a full working day requires three bookings; this inflates the booking count and means occupancy data should be treated with caution.

Almost all Hub users (97%) visit during regular daytime working hours. A small number also use Hubs at evenings or weekends, where security arrangements permit. Not every Hub can offer access outside standard hours. However, where this is possible, members have repeatedly reported that it matters particularly for those who have international roles or employers in different time zones, and for those who study or work in the evenings. A majority (73%) of active Hub users visit during both term time and the school holidays, showing that having school-aged children does not prevent regular use. Some seasonal variation has been described, as bookings at the air-conditioned Akrotiri Hub increase in summer and UK Hub usage often increases in winter as members seek to reduce fuel costs at home.

Findings: Operational Impact

Grant impact on operational effectiveness, Hub usage, and expansion of the Hub network

Key Finding: The grant enabled two new Hubs to open and one to expand, conferred credibility that supported conversations with base commanders, and funded two staff changes that drove measurable improvements in membership and online engagement. Increases in Hub member numbers equalled the targets set out in the grant. The main constraint on growth is awareness, not demand, as over half of non-member partner survey respondents said they would use a Hub if one were nearby.

The grant funded the opening of two Hubs in 2024, at Hereford and Marham, and funded the expansion of Bulford into the larger Salisbury Plain Hub at Tidworth in 2025. Seven affiliate Hubs have been added to the MCN website. The team described the grant's most important non-financial contribution as institutional credibility. Without this, bases could perceive MCN as an informal request from military partners, rather than a supported, meaningful offering.

“ *"It's given it some legitimacy that the MOD in some way, shape or form are backing it. Because unfortunately, otherwise, we are just the wife of X, and a bunch of kicking, screaming wives is a base commander's worst nightmare."* (MCN team)

Two mid-grant staff appointments had a clear, measurable impact. A new Marketing and Membership Lead produced a visible uplift in Online attendance and a broader, more inclusive events programme. A new Hub Coordination Support role revived at least one Hub community through a consistent in-person presence and direct relationship-building with welfare staff and prospective members. Both appointments addressed a structural gap, namely the challenge that a remote

“ *"The only way any significant growth in users is going to happen is for people to know about [the Hub]. That's the bit [the MCN] always need to fix."* (Base staff)

three-person team cannot sustain the local presence that Hub communities require. Of the 116 non-member partner survey respondents, 59% would use a Hub if one were nearby, and the dominant reason for non-use was geographical absence of a Hub, not lack of interest.

Grant impact on marketing and outreach

Key Finding: Lack of awareness is a structural failure, not an accidental one. In the first half of the grant, marketing was generic and not locally relevant. The new marketing lead improved engagement and membership in the final year. The most effective promotional mechanisms remain word-of-mouth and in-person presence, which cannot be scaled without additional staff.

Near-universal feedback from Hub users, Online members, Families Federations, and base staff identified awareness as MCN's primary challenge. Early marketing was criticised as too formal, too focused on self-employed business owners, and not locally specific enough to make individual Hubs feel relevant to prospective members.

“ *"I didn't know about MCN or the Hub, and I haven't heard about it from anything military. If I hadn't looked myself, I don't know if I would have thought to find out."* (Hub member)

Of the 116 non-member partner survey respondents,
59%
would use a Hub if one were nearby

The new marketing lead introduced more diverse event formats, cross-promoted the Hub and Online offerings, and brought their own network of military partner contacts. Membership growth in the final months of the grant reflected these changes. However, a persistent gap remains as members who find a Hub typically do so independently; those arriving at a new base, when they are actively seeking local information, are unlikely to encounter MCN through any formal channel. Hub-specific pages on the MCN website need to reflect local geography, access arrangements, and nearby facilities, not generic template content.

“I discovered MCN Online through a Facebook group after a push by the central team last summer. I had been looking for a Hub at two previous postings and found nothing. I also found nothing about MCN Online until last year.” (Online member)

Expansion and reallocation of resources

Key Finding: Two Hubs opened and one expanded. The team introduced qualifying criteria and a stage-gate process to select sites for new Hubs. Other than resources, the primary constraint on further expansion is not demand but base-level bureaucracy and the absence of a formal MOD policy. Bases with available space and a motivated local champion can establish Hubs quickly. Without one or both of these, even selected sites can stall indefinitely.

Where local ownership existed, in the form of a welfare officer or community support lead prepared to navigate Defence Infrastructure Organisation processes and maintain the relationship with MCN, Hubs opened.

Where it did not, even bases meeting all qualifying criteria made no progress, despite the MCN team's best efforts.

Practical barriers ranged from minor, such as a base refusing to fund Wi-Fi, to significant, mainly revolving around competing demands for suitable buildings, with this second issue also blocking existing Hubs from moving into larger premises to meet growing demand.



“A formal [MOD] policy would give faith that a Hub will remain in place. Without it, the Hub's existence at any base depends entirely on the continuation of individual goodwill.” (Base staff)

The new marketing lead drove Online expansion by introducing evening events and a more community-focused programme, widening the audience. Both surveys show that demand for expansion is distributed across tri-service communities and all life stages, and not concentrated in any single population group. There is demand for new locations, such as London and Portugal, where it may be difficult to establish a new Hub. Such locations could be targets for the Online offering, in particular to extend reach without a physical Hub.

Operational lessons in Hub implementation and administration

Key Finding: Hub success depends on a visible local presence, not facilities alone. The booking system overstates occupancy and masks actual usage. Lone-working safety standards are applied inconsistently. Shared-building arrangements need a distinct MCN identity. KPI targets based on aspirational rather than baseline data have been structurally unachievable throughout the grant.

The revival of Hub communities after a new team member began regular in-person visits shows what a consistent presence can achieve. Direct outreach and relationship-building with welfare staff produced results that remote management had not achieved over months. Any Hub that depends on one individual's continued goodwill is fragile. The evidence from all data sources points to embedding MCN in formal welfare policy so that Hub continuity does not depend on who currently holds a base role.

The central team uses a Register of Interest to assess demand at prospective Hub locations. It contains information collected through a form on the MCN website, so it only reaches people who visit the website and find the form. This means the main tool for estimating Hub demand is likely to understate it. Embedding



the register in MOD and Families Federation outreach activities and communications would produce a more realistic picture of where Hubs are needed.

The Hub annual membership fee of £30 is heavily subsidised relative to commercial alternatives. The minimum commercial coworking rate is around £100 per month, whereas a basic Regus membership costs £139 per month for five days of access. Even doubling the MCN fee would leave it well below any comparable market offering. There is an argument for reviewing the fee level, provided the Hubs remain accessible to families on a military income, because a modest increase would be likely to generate revenue that could reduce MCN's dependence on grant funding without deterring members.

The three-hour booking block generates data that misrepresents actual usage. A member working a full day books three consecutive slots, which is recorded as three visits. Members also cannot see existing (anonymised) bookings in advance, which removes a social incentive to attend when others are present. The booking system should be replaced, and future KPI targets should be set against verified baseline attendance data from the first quarter of any new funding period rather than aspirational projections. On safety, a minimum standard for lone-working policy and access management needs to be applied consistently across all Hubs. In shared buildings, the MCN area should be visually and physically distinct from the rest of the space. Where this has been achieved, members report a sense of ownership that drives regular use.

The shift away from a corporate brand towards a community-driven identity (through evening social events), a less formal communications tone, and a more diverse Online programme produced measurable increases in membership and attendance in the final year. Maintaining this direction will be essential to sustain that growth.

Learning points and opportunities to strengthen MCN operations emerged throughout the evaluation and were shared with the MCN team and RAFA. Reassuringly, the team responded positively and proactively, and introduced new approaches based on the evaluation findings.

Findings: Impact on MCN Members

Impact on reducing loneliness among MCN members

Key Finding: Reduced loneliness is the most consistent impact-related finding across the entire evaluation. Every source group identifies isolation, and not employment support, as the primary need addressed by MCN and the primary reason members value its offerings. The most significant unmet need is geographical reach, as non-member partner survey respondents describe exactly the loneliness that MCN tackles.

All data sources emphasise that military partner loneliness is not simply being alone. It is compounded by repeated moves, managing a deployment and other domestic issues simultaneously, career gaps no civilian employer understands, and the absence of any provision designed for working adults rather than dependent partners with children. Every source group – welfare staff, serving personnel, Families Federations, the MCN team, and members – independently identified loneliness as the primary issue that MCN solves and named it ahead of employment support.

“*They [military partners] go to the Hub when they're sick of being on their own. That is, I think, the core thing.*” (MCN team)

The growth of hybrid and remote working since COVID has added a new dimension for MCN. Military partners who previously went to an office now spend entire working days alone in a quarter. There is evidence that MCN addresses this issue, with members describing the coworking community as a "sanctuary" and saying that "it gives me the sense that you're not a plus one, but a person too". One Online member reported working six additional hours per week after joining MCN, attributing this gain to reduced feelings of isolation that were affecting



“ *"I am so much more motivated and my [health] condition is less draining. Before [joining MCN] I was working 15, 20 hours a week and [was] constantly drained. Now I regularly do two or three more hours extra every afternoon. It got my mojo working."* (Online member)

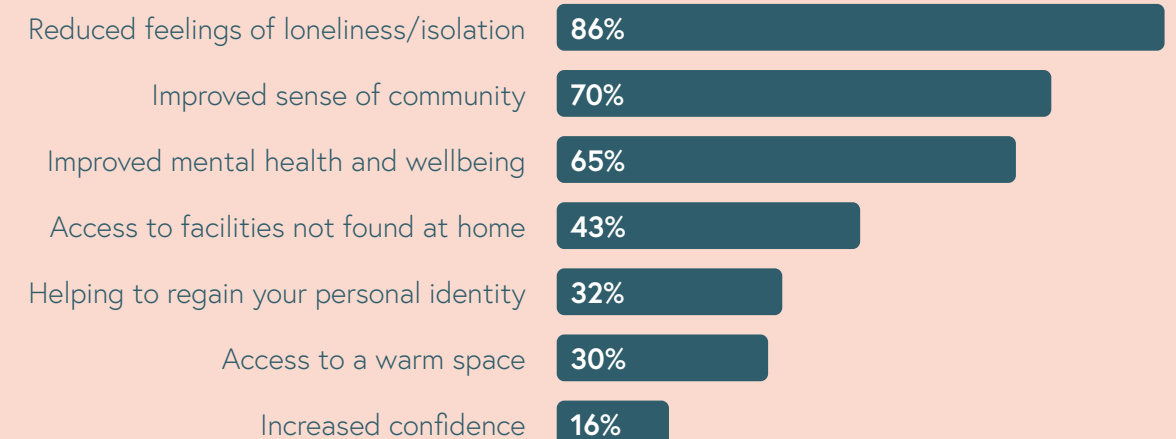
their wellbeing and motivation. Among the 13 serving personnel survey respondents with household experience of MCN (i.e. someone in their household has used a Hub), 9 reported worrying less about their partner's wellbeing.

Evening social events introduced during the grant, such as book clubs, craft nights, and games evenings, have reached members who cannot attend daytime provision. These members

include solo parents during deployments, overseas families, and people with limiting health conditions. Families Federation interviewees noted that their organisations now include these events in its standard overseas signposting as there is little else to offer in their place. Non-member partner survey respondents described isolation that intensifies when partners are on exercise or deployed, confirming that the primary constraint on MCN is reach, not the nature of the offering.

According to the partner survey, the most commonly reported personal benefits of Hub use are reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation (86% of Hub users), improved sense of community (70%), and improved mental health and wellbeing (65%). Access to facilities not available at home was cited by 43%, and access to a warm space by 30%. The latter is a practical indicator of the cost-of-living value the Hubs provide for military families.

MCN Hubs – personal benefits



Top benefits reported among MCN Online members



Among MCN Online members, the top benefits reported were also personal; improved sense of community (57%), opportunities to learn from other members (48%), and reduced isolation (45%).

Impact on member employment and career prospects

Key Finding: MCN's primary employment benefit is career maintenance across postings. Hubs allow employed professionals to keep their jobs by meeting in-office attendance requirements, providing reliable Wi-Fi connectivity, and filling a workspace gap that MOD housing policy creates. The online community enables self-employed members to build businesses, with documented peer-to-peer savings through shared professional resources.

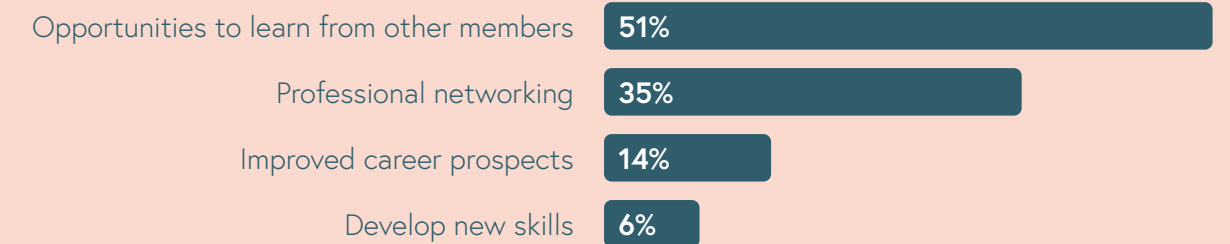
The MCN team, Families Federations, and members agree that MCN is not a jobs board. Its career impact is about keeping employment, not finding it. Service Family Accommodation (SFA) allocation does not account for remote workers. For example, a couple with one child gets two bedrooms and no office space. Members across multiple Hubs described using the Hub to resolve this gap directly. Hubs

can not only meet employer in-office requirements but also provide space for handling confidential calls and maintain professional conditions that SFA cannot provide. The Future Accommodation Model, as originally proposed, would have worsened this. For many members, Hubs are the practical compensation for a housing policy gap.

“ *"Being remote, and then having the Hubs, means I can [think], well, okay, we're off to wherever that has a Hub. That's fine, rather than [thinking I need to be] within 40 minutes of a particular office."* (Hub member)

Some members have negotiated formal employer recognition of Hub attendance as in-office time, with the Hub directly addressing their employer's concern about remote-working isolation. In at least one case, an employer visited before approving continued remote working. The partner survey confirmed career maintenance as the dominant professional benefit; opportunities to learn from other Hub members (51%) and professional networking (35%) are the top professional benefits of Hub membership.

MCN Hubs – professional benefits



Beyond career maintenance, the online community has supported career transitions, as members have discovered new paths through MCN webinars, built businesses with peer support, and made professional connections that led to client referrals and headhunting. One member saved £900 in professional service costs through knowledge shared through MCN Online.

“ *"There is absolutely no way in hell I would have taken the step of setting up a business without that community support. It quite literally has changed my life."* (Online member)



Meeting new and emerging needs among members and potential members

Key Finding: MCN's most significant audience is employed, remote-working military partners: among the partner survey respondents, 54% are in full-time or part-time employment, compared to 37% who are self-employed. The military's welfare systems are regarded to be not designed for working partners. MCN is widely thought to be the only provision that starts from the premise that partners are professionals with their own needs.

All sources report that military housing allocation assumes there is a dependent partner at home. Similarly, community provision assumes that children and childcare are the primary focus. Welfare communication flows via the serving person and routinely fails to reach the partner at all. MCN operates outside these assumptions, which is why it reaches groups that formal welfare cannot. Excluded groups include those without children, for whom almost all military community provision is irrelevant; unaccompanied and unmarried partners who have no formal welfare status; new-to-Services families who have not yet built peer networks; and Commonwealth and internationally mobile families navigating employment rules and different qualification recognition systems, often accompanied by cultural isolation.

“*[The Hub is] set up for modern life – it doesn't expect you to have children to be able to make those connections.*”
(Hub member)

Those experiencing overseas postings are an under-served population. The compounding of remote-working isolation with geographical separation creates a more acute version of the loneliness UK-based partners face. MCN's contribution to mitigating overseas loneliness includes MCN Online as a standard feature in every

overseas signposting package. The tri-Service Families Federations' [Valuing Forces Families Overseas](#) portal, which is currently in development, will feature MCN and will reach families before deployment, which is a more effective intervention point than after arrival.

Evening social events have expanded audience inclusion. The membership growth seen in the final year of the grant is evidence that broader, more inclusive provision attracts members that the previous, daytime-only programming and more corporate messaging did not.

Findings: Impact on Armed Forces

Strengthening partnerships with MOD and the Services

“*If it's not a part of the offer, it's a nice-to-have because somebody's wife spoke to the captain's wife and they made it happen. That's not a good business model.*” (Hub member)

Key Finding: MCN has partnerships at every level of the military ecosystem, but none has been activated to its potential. Most rely on specific individuals being in post. At a base level, promotion currently operates through ad hoc mentions, not as a structured part of deployment briefings and information packs.

MCN has MOD recognition. It appears on the MOD Families Hub, and a MOD representative sits on its steering board. The team credits MOD recognition as transforming conversations with base commanders. But the steering board meets only twice a year and receives updates rather than providing strategic input. As a consequence, significant decisions have to be taken without board engagement.

The three Families Federations interviews identify the same issue: that MCN must be included in the formal posting offer, in People Teams, in MOD guidance, and in Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) information. That way, awareness will be less dependent on local personalities. At base level, the new Hub coordination role has demonstrated what physical presence can achieve, as welfare teams and HIVE officers who had no previous knowledge of MCN were reached directly. Without structural embedding, the two-year commanding officer and welfare posting cycle means relationships and awareness must be rebuilt at regular intervals. However, this turnover is not always negative; new opportunities can arise when an individual who is open to a Hub replaces someone who was less positive.

“Welfare could literally walk people through the Hub – they never have. MCN should be in every moving-in pack”
(Hub member)

The housing provider relationship presents an unrealised opportunity. A structured briefing for all 150 housing officers, with a card or QR code for every family at move-in, would cost MCN almost nothing and reach its target population at the moment they are most open to new connections. The partnership is currently passive: housing staff mention MCN when it comes up, rather than actively promoting it.

Contribution of MCN to the operational effectiveness of UK defence

Key Finding: 71% of serving personnel rate their partner's career satisfaction as important or very important to their retention decision. Of those with direct MCN household experience, 62% report being more likely to stay in the military, 69% report worrying less about their partner, and 46% report being better able to enjoy their career. Data from the Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) shows that approximately 51% of personnel say they would leave if their spouse were unhappy. MCN addresses this issue directly.

Every group in the evaluation consistently described the same causal chain without prompting. MCN supports the partner's career and social life → the partner is less isolated and professionally stable → the serving person worries less and is less pressured to leave → the serving person can focus more on their role → they are more likely to stay in service. Serving personnel rated their partner's career satisfaction as 3.96 out of 5 in retention importance, in the same tier as pay and promotion. Not one serving person rated partner career satisfaction as irrelevant.

Of those with direct MCN household experience,

62%

report being more likely to stay in the military,

69%

report worrying less about their partner, and

46%

report being better able to enjoy their career.

“My partner is better able to further their career. I worry less. Family life has improved. I can enjoy my career better. I can focus more on my career. I am more likely to stay in the military.” (Serving partner)

Members described the retention mechanism with similar directness. One had made Hub access a condition of accepting a posting; another stated that without MCN funding renewal she would tell her husband to leave the military. The Co-creation Group's 'most significant change for the Armed Forces' (see the appendix) was improved retention of Service personnel. The economic dimension reinforces this. The non-serving partner may be the higher earner in many military households, and dual income is a financial necessity. Serving personnel survey responses and member interviews repeatedly described how a Hub's professional workspace enables the partner to work, which reduces pressure on the serving person to leave at the earliest pension point.

Beyond retention, 9 of 13 serving personnel survey respondents with MCN household experience reported worrying less about their partner. A preoccupied

“Having a settled workspace means my husband will stay in the RAF longer. I can pursue my career [and] work longer hours in a peaceful environment – meaning I pressure him less to leave at 22 years.”
(Hub member)

MCN supports the partner's career and social life



the partner is less isolated and professionally stable



the serving person worries less and is less pressured to leave



the serving person can focus more on their role



they are more likely to stay in service.



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serving person is a less effective one, and MCN reduces this type of preoccupation. Among the same group, 6 reported feeling more valued by the military as a result of MCN, which is relevant to retention. MCN's existence signals that the military recognises the family, not just the Service person. Population-level proof of the retention mechanism does not exist and cannot be extracted from the current

data. What the evaluation provides is evidence from multiple documented cases where serving people changed their intention because their partner's situation improved through MCN.

“The Army talks about belonging. This is OUR belonging – a space where we are acknowledged as professionals, within a community that understands the pressures military life places on families. That community support plays a big role in retention.” (Hub member)

Findings: Influencing Factors

Amenities that contribute to Hub success

Key Finding: Location determines Hub viability more than anything else. Outside the wire (i.e. outside a base secure area) is a strong preference. The minimum functional specification is reliable Wi-Fi, dual screens at every desk, a private meeting room, a kitchen, and a printer. The single factor that most reliably transforms a well-equipped Hub into an active community is a regular, welcoming anchor user or group of users.

Every data source that addressed Hub success named location first. If using a Hub requires more effort than staying at home, members stay at home. The clearest evidence is an accessible Hub with free parking immediately outside and a shop next door, described as "the gold standard". Outside-the-wire Hubs are not just more convenient. Members describe them as spaces where they feel like professionals going to work, rather than dependants accessing a welfare service. Behind-the-wire locations require identity checks and sign-in processes that deter spontaneous use. For families living in civilian areas rather than SFA, they can be inaccessible, regardless of the facilities inside. Location relative to existing movement patterns matters. Proximity to a nursery or school allows Hub use to be integrated with the school run, whereas placement away from where people already go contributes to consistent underuse.

A private meeting room was the most frequently identified non-negotiable internal feature of a Hub. Members cannot use an open-plan room for confidential calls or confidential document reviews. On busy days at well-functioning Hubs, the meeting room is in continuous use and overdemand has become a positive problem. Dual screens are cited as essential for members whose roles involve document comparison, complex data or high-volume typing.

“If it becomes a faff, people think: I might as well stay at home.” (Families Federation representative)



Single-screen working is professionally limiting for these uses. Reliable Wi-Fi is the baseline without which a Hub is not a coworking space. A printer is valued by all members, and individuals who handle legal, policy, or financial documents describe it as essential. The cost-of-living benefits of heating, broadband connectivity and printing are not incidental.

“The ideal Hub is outside the wire, either an old SFA or other space, [with] a fully kitted kitchen, multiple breakout spaces, [its] own bathrooms and a minimum of a meeting room.” (MCN team)

Beyond equipment, the physical character of the space matters. Hubs in former SFA properties, or in spaces that members have personalised, are deemed far more inclusive and appealing than institutional rooms. One Hub increased attendance after members rearranged the furniture from rows facing walls, which signalled isolation, to clusters around a central social area, which signals

community. A key safe enabling spontaneous access without advance booking is now standard at several Hubs and has meaningfully addressed an issue that previously deterred casual use.

“If someone's in there all the time, [it] might be more appealing for people to go in.” (Base staff)

The factor that most reliably creates an active community in a well-located, well-equipped Hub is a regular, welcoming anchor user, who is consistently present, known to members, and introduces newcomers. The MCN team calls such a person a 'seed member'. Hubs with good facilities and adequate locations that have not built active communities share one feature: they lack a consistent human presence, which cannot be substituted by equipment or design features.

Features that influence the success of MCN Online

Key Finding: A structured Tuesday coworking session recreates an office half-day for people working alone. An irreplaceable aspect of the online community is that members understand military partner life without it needing to be explained. The primary operational risks are the concentration of facilitation in one person, a return to content skewed towards self-employed users, and less inclusive events and timings.

The online offering serves populations the Hub network cannot reach. They include members at bases without Hubs, those overseas, those in full-time employment who cannot attend Hubs, and those with limiting health conditions. For many of these members, MCN is not a supplement to the Hubs; it is the only MCN offering that they can access.

The Tuesday morning coworking session format is consistently credited with recreating the rhythm of an office half-day. Members attribute enhanced productivity to this format and to the accountability and concentration that come from seeing other people working. Average attendance at coworking sessions almost doubled after changes made by the new community lead. This improvement is directly attributed to facilitation quality and the creation of a more inclusive environment. However, the sessions work because of one specific individual's skill, which also represents a risk. A facilitation guide documenting what makes sessions effective should be produced as a sustainability action as mitigation, should the current individual leave.



“*"The structured format recreates an office situation – a working half-day, really. I always feel like I've achieved something because I'm focused for those few hours and not distracted by the washing needing to be done."* (Online member)

A unique quality of MCN Online is the shared context, meaning members understand each other's lives without explanation. They do not have to justify a CV gap, a cancelled plan or a career interrupted by a posting. Members repeatedly described this as "the sense of talking to people who get it". No platform change, content redesign or new session format can provide this ingredient. It should be named directly in how the online offering is described to potential members as "being with a community of people who understand your life".

“*"There is a shared experience that is unspoken. We automatically can meet each other where we're at because we're all in the same boat. It's a come-as-you-are vibe."* (Online member)

The Online content calendar needs continuous review and balancing to match the member profile. The previous webinar and workshop programme was predominantly oriented towards building a business, which members in employment described as not relevant to them. Content has now been introduced on negotiating flexible working with employers, maintaining career

continuity across postings, and managing professional identity in a mobile household. However, business development content serves an important minority and should remain.

“*"Online coworking is a really good fit – you don't feel as though you're on your own, you have that motivation and the skill set between all those people. That needs to be more visible. It's such a lovely offer."* (Online member)

Findings: Additional Impacts and Sustainability Considerations

Other short-, medium- and long-term impacts of MCN

Key Finding: MCN's short-term impacts are immediate and observable: the psychological shift of going somewhere to work, the formation of friendships, and a serving person who worries less. Medium-term impacts build across postings, including career continuity, peer referrals, and employer relationships built on Hub attendance. The long-term goals stated consistently by every evaluation source are embedding MCN in formal policy and its inclusion in posting information.

The most consistently described short-term impact is not measurable by any quantitative metric. It is the psychological shift that occurs when a military partner becomes part of the MCN community. Welfare staff described seeing members with social anxiety make friends. In the serving personnel survey, most respondents with MCN household experience reported worrying less about their partners, which constitutes an immediate operational benefit for the serving person. In one example, an Online member reported an immediate impact on retention:

“*"Before MCN, I genuinely don't know if I could have said yes to another six years. Since I found it, I'm like: yeah, I can do this. I have the company."* (Online member)

Naturally, for medium-term impacts to materialise, there must be sustained MCN membership. Career continuity across postings, keeping employment intact, is the most important medium-term professional outcome. Members described several examples of outcomes that took time to develop: a career change enabled by an Online webinar, a business built with peer



support during a posting that would otherwise have prevented the partner from working, and a degree completed with a study partner met at a Hub. Peer networking has delivered outcomes that include being headhunted through MCN contacts. For some business-owning and freelance members, it has brokered connections with new clients among fellow members. Similar examples exist relating to employer relationships, including use of a Hub as evidence in a job application.

With marked consistency, all source groups expressed a long-term ambition to achieve policy recognition and JPA integration. This was described in terms of making the Hub and Online offers visible in posting information, so a family considering a move can see them in the same system that shows pay, housing, and promotion prospects. This goal was summarised as MCN becoming "part of the lexicon", meaning that units would tell arriving personnel about MCN as a matter of course, not as an afterthought.

“It's not just about finding something new – it's about not losing what you've already got when you have to move.” (Hub member)

“If there was a Hub at every base above a certain size, the MOD could say: we can't give you a bigger house, but we can give you this. We care. We're listening.” (Hub member)

Sustainability considerations

Key Finding: The primary sustainability risk is the absence of MCN from formal policy. Without this recognition, Hubs exist at the discretion of whoever holds the relevant base role, and those role-holders change. The reported membership numbers that funders and the steering board will see (approximately 180 Hub users and 2,267 Online members) understate the potential impact. The case for continued investment should be framed around the 59% of non-members who would use a Hub if one were nearby.

There is compelling evidence across all sources that MCN must be included in the formal posting offer (such as MOD guidance and JPA information), not dependent on local goodwill and knowledge. Without this, every staff change and every shift in political attention is a threat. At any Hub where the 'seed member' changes and no institutional protection exists, closure is likely. The funding landscape is uncertain, and funders expect to see a 'next offer', not continued support for the same activity. The MCN team of three part-time staff is at or near capacity; the Wix website constrains membership management and digital growth. Both issues are solvable with modest additional resource, but not without it.

“Without embedding MCN in the MOD's offer rather than [treating it] as a grant-funded project, it will always be vulnerable to personality changes, [commanding officer] turnover, and budget pressures.” (Families Federation representative)

The current MCN membership numbers do not reflect actual potential. Of the non-members surveyed, 59% said they would use a Hub if one existed nearby. In addition, 61% of all partners (members and non-members) rated Service family life as negative or very negative for their career. The sustainability case is strongest when framed around this structural feature of military life that MCN addresses and that no other provision does. Throughout the evaluation, the total





number of military partners was repeatedly estimated as 50,000. Calculations using published research for the evaluation's October 2025 MOD report found the prospective membership pool to be at least 69,000. This new figure excludes partners who are studying or join MCN solely for its community benefits.

The evaluation found clear evidence for three specific sustainability actions. First, activate the housing provider partnership via a one-page briefing for housing staff and a card or QR code for every family at move-in; this would reach the target audience at the moment they are most receptive. Second, invest in the online community, which is the lowest-cost, highest-reach element of MCN; this offering is resilient to Hub closures, is already embedded in Families Federation information, and is capable of supporting tri-service families and overseas postings, which the Hub network cannot reach. Third, define a 'next offer' to funders; this could include JPA integration, a systematic employer engagement programme and a formal affiliate Hub framework. These are all developments that are supported by the evaluation evidence and that would give funders a reason to invest beyond the continuation project.

Other benefits and issues that have emerged

Key Findings:

- It is important that MCN is a professional community in which partner rank is irrelevant.
- Documented employer benefits extend MCN's economic value beyond individual members.
- Using HM Treasury's Green Book methodology, the wellbeing economic benefit attributable to MCN is £1,521,000 per year against a grant cost of £200,000, an annual return on the current grant of £7.60 for every pound invested.
- Comparison with FAMCAS 2025 data shows that MCN members report substantially more positive attitudes than non-members on three measures that mirror FAMCAS questions around community belonging, career impact, and household income impact.
- The name 'Military Coworking Network' is a potential marketing barrier for those who are primarily seeking a community.
- Information flowing via the serving person, not directly to the partner, sits behind almost every awareness failure in the evaluation.



The wellbeing economic benefit attributable to MCN is

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The Hub's cross-rank community has emerged from the organising principle of a professional coworking space that carries no rank identifiers. Members are all identified by their own work rather than their partner's badge. One other rank serving person noted that their partner "is there on equal terms, as she is at work".

“ *"I have literally no idea what rank their partner is. There is no sense of officers and sergeants. It just doesn't come up. It is what community should be."* (Online member)

The employer dimension extends MCN's value into the wider economy. MCN has not yet promoted this employer-facing benefit systematically, but the evidence for it is in the dataset. Hubs have also functioned as emergency infrastructure in undocumented ways; members have used them as their primary workspace during SFA allocation delays and posting transition breakdowns.

MCN also generates quantifiable economic value for the public purse. Using [HM Treasury's Green Book methodology for wellbeing appraisal](#), every one-point improvement on a ten-point wellbeing scale produces an economic benefit of £13,000 per person per year. In the partner survey, 65% of Hub users reported improvements to their mental health and wellbeing. Applied to a total active Hub membership of 180, that is approximately 117 individuals. If each improves their wellbeing by only one point, the wellbeing economic benefit attributable to MCN is £1,521,000 per year. This is a conservative figure as it uses the minimum improvement threshold, applies only to Hub users, and excludes the 2,267 Online members entirely. It also does not attempt to quantify downstream effects on NHS demand or working days lost to poor mental health. Set against this wellbeing benefit, the £200,000 grant cost represents an annual return of 7.6 to one on this measure alone.

The Hub also delivers a direct and calculable saving to Service families. The minimum commercial coworking rate is approximately £100 per month, or £1,200 per year. MCN Hub membership costs £30 per year. For a member who would otherwise use commercial provision, the saving is £1,170 per year. For families managing household budgets, this is not a marginal consideration. With 180 active Hub users, the collective saving against commercial alternatives is approximately £210,600 per year.

The evaluation's partner survey posed three questions that mirrored some of the questions in FAMCAS as part of understanding any impact MCN has on partner attitudes towards military life. Findings from these questions include the following:

- On **community belonging**, 68% of Hub users and 61% of Online-only members agree or strongly agree that they feel part of the wider Service community, compared with 27% of non-members in the partner survey. The gap between MCN members and non-members is consistent with MCN membership having a direct positive effect on community belonging.

- On **career impact**, 19% of Hub users rate Service life as positive or very positive for their career, compared with 5% of non-members. Meanwhile, 54% of Hub users rate it as negative or very negative, compared with 62% of non-members. This is the strongest signal in the data. It shows that Hub membership is associated with a more positive view of Service life's effect on career, which aligns with the career maintenance findings elsewhere in this evaluation (see p. 11).
- On the **effect of service life on household income**, Hub users are again more positive (37% positive, 40% negative) than non-members (21% positive, 53% negative), although the relationship is less clear-cut and household income is influenced by many factors outside MCN's reach. Across all three measures, Online-only members sit between Hub users and non-members, consistent with a graduated effect of MCN engagement on partner attitudes.

Sources across the evaluation identified the name 'Military Coworking Network' as a barrier. There are concerns that it implies the network is for military personnel rather than their partners, that it implies coworking is the primary benefit rather than community, and that it deters students, social members, and those who do not identify as coworkers.

Information channels are the final structural issue. Over half of serving personnel who knew about MCN had discovered it through their partner being a member, not through official communication channels. Military family support information flows via the serving person, who may fail to pass it on. Social media and word of mouth reach those already in the network. Reaching the unserved population requires information to be integrated into move-in packs, posting orders, and JPA and housing information.

“Comms are often via the serving person – that doesn't always make it to the spouses. Pushing it out on posting orders would change that.” (Hub member)

Conclusions

Conclusions against the grant aims

Aim 1: Enhance operational effectiveness, increase Hub usage, expand the Hub network, improve marketing and outreach, and evaluate impact

Operational effectiveness improved in the second half of the grant, most directly through two new staff appointments made in mid-2025. The resulting improvements are attributable to specific individuals rather than to systemic change, which means they are at risk when those individuals move on. Active Hub membership did not meet the target of 200. The evaluation found that the constraints are awareness and geographical coverage, not demand. The marketing and outreach offering improved materially in the final year, but there was no resolution of the structural problem that information about MCN often fails to reach partners. The impact of the grant was evaluated through The Charity Spark's independent assessment, as required.

Aim 2: Open three new Hubs and add seven affiliate Hubs

Two new Hubs opened (Hereford and Marham) and one Hub expanded and relocated (Bulford became the Salisbury Plain Hub at Tidworth). The target of opening three new Hubs was not met. Seven affiliate Hubs were added to the MCN website, meeting that element of the aim; these are not operated by MCN and their quality and continuity are outside MCN's control. The third new Hub did not open because no base both met the qualifying criteria and was able to allocate suitable space to complete the process within the funding period. This is not a failure of the qualifying framework but reflects the absence of formal policy, which means that every Hub proposal depends on individual goodwill at a base.

Aim 3: Increase the number of Hub users to the grant target of 200

Although the target was not met by March 2026, the number of active Hub members increased by 75% during the grant period. The most significant challenge to achieving the target of 200 relates to an awareness gap, which is the dominant reason non-members give for not using a Hub. This means the target population is not being reached when they move in and are most likely to act. Related to

this, the target of 200 users was set against aspirational projections rather than baseline data; the evaluation recommends that future targets are grounded in verified attendance figures from a replacement booking system.

Aim 4: Increase Hub usage and bookings

Hub usage increased at Hubs where the new Hub Coordination Support role was active and at Hubs where the marketing lead's promotion reached new audiences. Overall network usage did not increase uniformly: some Hubs remained underused and two closed. A separate challenge relates to the booking data itself. The booking system records three-hour blocks rather than individual visits, potentially inflating occupancy figures and masking actual usage trends. As such, the genuine usage growth may be greater than the data shows, but the evaluation cannot quantify it precisely from the current records.

Aim 5: Embed and drive relationships with Service and civil service personnel at all locations

Relationships with base personnel vary from strong and mutually productive to non-existent or even obstructive, and the determining variable is almost always personality. The aim of embedding relationships across all locations has therefore not been fully achieved; at most locations, relationships are either person-dependent or limited.

Aim 6: Explore sustainability and future planning with MOD and the single Services

Sustainability has been explored through the evaluation process, through the October 2025 report submitted to inform MOD planning decisions, and through the value-for-investment exercise shared with AFCFT. The Families Federations and steering board have engaged with sustainability questions during the grant period. However, this exploration has not produced structural outcomes: there is no formal MOD policy on the Hubs and no commitment to include MCN in JPA posting information. Funding has been secured until March 2027 to allow the MCN team to identify and develop a sustainable long-term offering. The aim of exploring sustainability has been met; the aim of securing it has not.

General conclusions

MCN works, and the evidence on this point is consistent, cross-source, and often striking. Isolation and loneliness among military partners is not a secondary concern or an indirect consequence of military life; it is the primary welfare issue that the evaluation found, and MCN is the only provision to address it directly for working partners. Members describe MCN as a sanctuary, a life source, the reason they can keep working and the reason their partner has stayed in the military. Serving personnel with MCN household experience are worrying less about their partner and are more likely to stay in service. These are clear indicators of MCN's retention benefits.

MCN also addresses a housing policy gap. For many military households where both partners work, MCN Hubs provide practical compensation for an accommodation policy that does not recognise that those households need workspace.

MCN also represents meaningful value for money. At £30 per year, Hub membership costs a fraction of any commercial alternative. Members who would otherwise pay commercial coworking rates each save around £1,170 per year. Across the current membership, that collective saving is approximately £210,600 per year. Beyond this direct saving, applying HM Treasury's Green Book methodology to the 65% of Hub members who reported improved mental health and wellbeing produces a wellbeing economic benefit of over £1.52 million per year against a total grant cost of £200,000. The case for continued public investment in MCN is grounded in both welfare and economics.

MCN is fragile in proportion to how well it works. The same personality dependency that makes Hubs thrive when a committed individual is present puts them at risk when that person moves on. This would be mitigated by embedding MCN in formal policy.

The online community is undervalued relative to the physical Hubs in how MCN has historically been funded and described. For members posted to bases without Hubs, posted overseas, working full time or living with health conditions, the online offering is not a supplement. MCN Online is low cost, scalable, already integrated into Families Federation overseas signposting, and resilient to base bureaucracy and politics that challenge physical Hubs. It should be properly resourced and protected.



The grant has delivered what a grant of this size can realistically deliver. Two Hubs opened, one expanded, the online offering improved materially, and a body of operational knowledge has been accumulated about what makes the Hubs and MCN Online work. The evidence also makes it clear that grant funding alone cannot secure what MCN needs to be sustained. Grants cannot provide formal policy status, integration into JPA, or a structured relationship with bases, welfare, and the housing provider. MCN has reached a stage where all these possibilities can be explored with the backing of convincing evidence of impact and value for investment.



Recommendations

MCN should continue. The evaluation evidence is consistent across every source group: MCN addresses a genuine and largely unmet welfare need, delivers measurable benefits to serving personnel and their families, and generates economic value that significantly exceeds its cost. The recommendations below identify what MCN, its partners, and its funders should do next.

1. Secure formal policy status for MCN

A policy statement recognising MCN Hubs as part of the welfare offering would require bases to accommodate and actively promote them, without placing the cost of running them on MOD. Such a statement would also protect Hubs from being closed when a commanding officer or welfare officer moves on. The Families Federations, base staff, the MCN team, and members all identify this as the single change that would most improve MCN's resilience.

2. Explore strategic opportunities to expand the current MCN Hub network

Evidence from the MCN Hub Register of Interest and feedback from the MCN team and members indicates that there is a demand for Hubs at locations where one does not currently exist. There is potential to align the distribution of UK Hubs more closely with Armed Forces populations, informed by location statistics that were analysed in this evaluation's October 2025 report for MOD.

3. Add Hub availability to JPA posting information

Families currently have no formal way to find out whether their destination posting has a Hub without searching independently. Adding Hub availability to JPA information would require an administrative decision, not capital expenditure. It would mean families for whom Hub access is a condition of accepting a posting can factor it in before, not after, the posting is confirmed.

4. Activate the housing provider partnership

The company that manages SFA employs 150 housing officers who visit every family at move-in and hold contact details for approximately 49,000 households. A one-page briefing for housing officers and a printed card or QR code included with every welcome pack would reach MCN's target audience when they are most open to new connections.

5. Review the booking system and KPI targets

The current three-hour booking block records a full working day as multiple visits, inflating occupancy figures and making it difficult to assess genuine usage accurately. A replacement system should record actual hours, allow members to see anonymised bookings in advance, and produce clean data for reporting. Once a replacement system is in place, future KPI targets should be set against verified baseline attendance.

6. Invest in and protect the online community as a standalone offering

The online community serves members the Hub network cannot reach, including families posted overseas, those without a Hub nearby, those in full-time employment, and those with health conditions. It is low cost, scalable, and already embedded in Families Federation overseas signposting. It would retain long-term value even if the provision of physical Hubs contracted. Content development, a dedicated budget line for facilitation, and an additional coworking session slot for those who cannot attend on Tuesday mornings would protect it from being deprioritised if Hub pressures absorb team capacity.

7. Document the online facilitation approach

Online attendance nearly doubled after a new community lead joined, and multiple evaluation sources attribute this directly to the quality of facilitation. The sessions work because of how they are run, not just because of their structure. A facilitation guide covering the event formats would ensure the structure is sustainable. Without it, sustaining the improvement achieved in the final year of the grant will be contingent on the current person remaining in post.

8. Consider a modest increase to the Hub membership fee

The current fee of £30 per year is heavily subsidised relative to any commercial alternative. Doubling the MCN fee to £60 per year would still represent an exceptional saving for members and would generate additional revenue that reduces dependence on grant funding. Any fee review should confirm that the Hubs remain accessible.

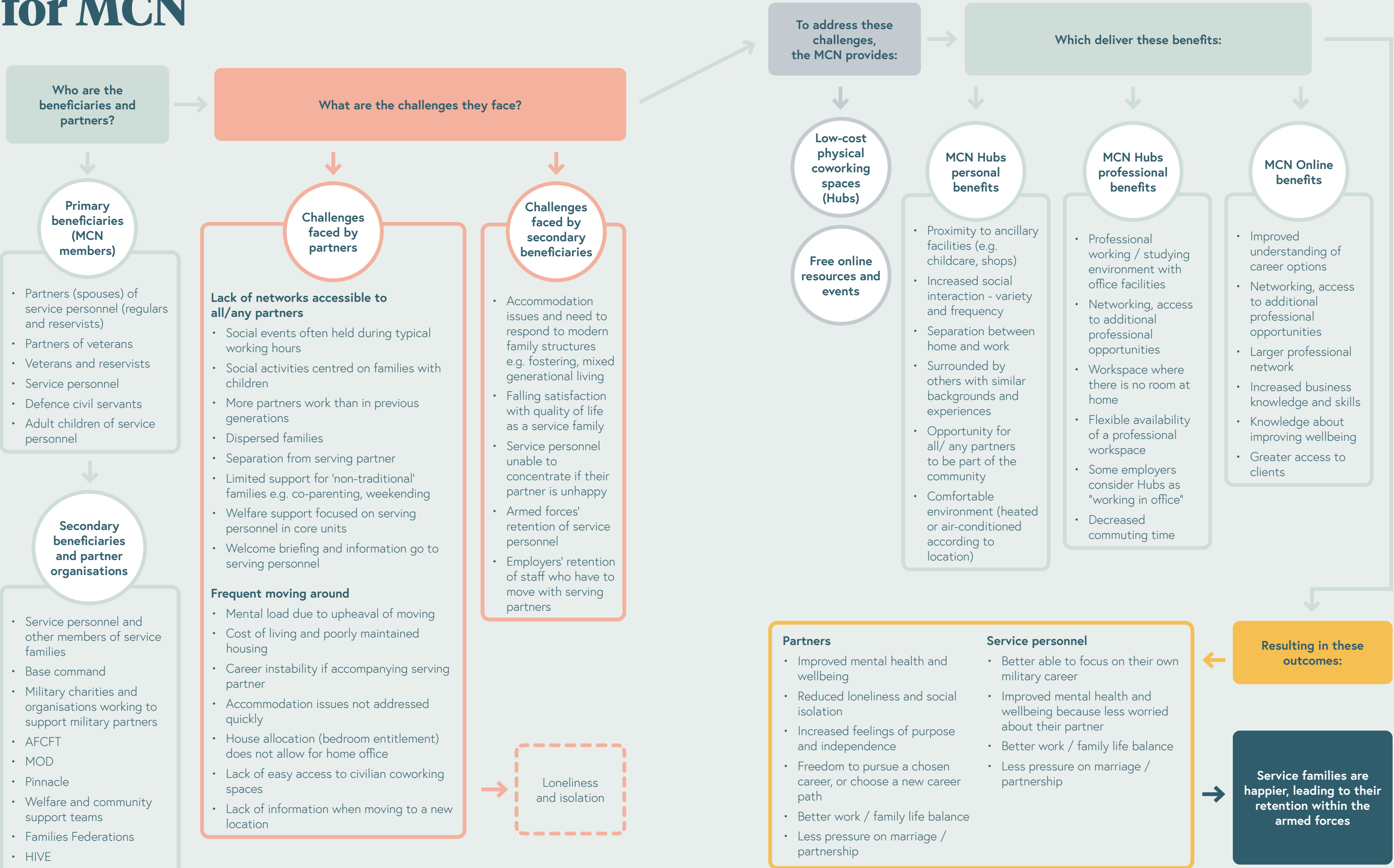
9. Update individual Hub pages on the MCN website with more local, specific information

Prospective members want to know whether a Hub is walkable from their home, what parking is available, whether there is a nursery or school nearby, and how to get access. Each Hub page should include walking distance from SFA, parking details, nearby childcare facilities, and access arrangements. This is a one-off task that would have a lasting impact on new member conversion.

10. For successor funding: require MCN to define a next stage of development, not just a continuation

Funders expect to see development, not a repeat of what has already been funded. Any successor plan should set out what MCN will do differently or at greater scale. The evaluation evidence identifies four specific development opportunities: JPA integration, activation of the housing provider partnership, a formal affiliate Hub framework, and a systematic employer engagement programme. MCN should identify which development opportunities it will pursue and how it will measure progress.

Theory of Change for MCN



Appendix

Data Collection Methods

Method	Metrics and Description
Desk research	Review of relevant published research, Government publications and statistics, previous evaluation reports on MCN, and internal monitoring data.
Co-creation Group of MCN members	- Three sessions with tri-service representation from a total of nine members (five participants per session). - Shaping of evaluation methods and theory of change. - Review of draft findings and complete Most Significant Change exercise.
Surveys	181 responses to military partners survey (36% MCN members and 64% non-members). 28 responses to serving personnel survey.
Observations	- Seven observational visits to Hubs (Blandford, Bovington, Bulford, Clyde, Hereford, Leuchars and Sandhurst). - Observations at 2 online events.
Interviews and discussions with MCN members	40 interviews (35 formal, 5 informal) and 2 group discussions (10 participants). - Representation from nine MCN Hubs and Online members.
Interviews, discussions and observations with other groups	- Eight interviews with base and unit staff representing six Hubs, mostly community support officers or welfare staff. - Six interviews with tri-service Families Federations. - Six interviews and two group discussions with members of the MCN team. - Discussions with the MCN Founder, MOD, AFCFT, and MCN management. - Observation of four MCN steering board meetings and two Online events.



Evaluation Questions

- a) To what extent has the current Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) grant allowed more work to be undertaken by the MCN to enhance operational effectiveness, increase Hub usage and expand the network of Hubs?
- b) How has the grant enabled the MCN to improve its marketing capacity and capabilities, and its outreach work to the target audience of military partners?
- c) To what extent has the extension to the MCN pilot project, funded by the current grant, helped to further reduce loneliness among military partners who are members of the network?
- d) What impact has the MCN project had on improving the employment and careers prospects of the members of the network?
- e) To what extent have the MCN's plans for expansion and reallocation of resources succeeded within the extension?
- f) How is the MCN meeting new and emerging needs among its members and potential members within the Armed Forces community?
- g) To what extent has the MCN strengthened partnerships with the MOD and the services to ensure the project is meeting the needs of the communities it serves?
- h) To what extent has the MCN and its associated Hubs and online offer contributed to the operational effectiveness of the UK's Defence capabilities?
- i) Have there been any operational lessons learnt in the implementation and administration of the MCN?
- j) What are other short-, medium- and long-term impacts of the MCN?
- k) What are the sustainability issues likely to be as the current grant funds are expended?
- l) Are there any other benefits or issues that have emerged within the MCN or as a result of its services?
- m) What amenities, internal and external to a Hub, contribute to greatest success in achieving Hub aims?
- n) What features influence the success and impact of MCN Online?



Who are The Charity Spark?

The Charity Spark (trading name for R Denny Consulting Limited) is an evaluation and research agency established in 2019.

We are an agile team of five staff, including three specialist evaluator researchers. Our expertise lies in supporting charities and non-profits with independent evaluations, impact frameworks and insight-led strategic development. We take a tailored approach to every evaluation, considering the needs of the project and ensuring that the voice of the beneficiary is elevated throughout our work.

Our UK non-profit sector expertise is broad. We have particular experience and interest in partnering with health and social welfare charities, particularly those involved in community engagement.

The team working on this evaluation are:

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