
2020/2021 Impact Report



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Registered Charity 226686 (England & Wales).
SC037673 (Scotland).

Introduction

The Royal Air Forces Association has supported the RAF community for over 90 years, providing practical, emotional and financial assistance. Like most organisations, we faced significant challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which we are still feeling today. Despite those challenges, with the help of our members, branches, volunteers and supporters we have been able to continue delivering life-changing support to people in our RAF community.

From their involvement with peacetime operations such as the COVID-19 emergency response, to overseas deployments where they are separated from family and friends, the contribution of the RAF community to our society is significant. Together, we can help them and their families to lead the lives they deserve.

Our community

We offer support to an RAF community of one million people.

Every year we help more than **80,000 people** to overcome difficulties ranging from physical and mental wellbeing issues to financial struggles.

We have a global network of **70,000 members** spanning 90 countries and 270 branches.

Over the past two years, we have made over **250,000 friendship calls** to help isolated and vulnerable individuals within the RAF community.

In 2020 and 2021 we spent over **£27million** providing critical services to support people in the RAF community.

87 pence of every pound we raise is spent on our vital welfare work. **£**

Making a difference

As the UK entered its first lockdown in 2020, we swiftly transformed our operations, revolutionising our services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work became more vital than ever as the effects of isolation and social distancing became apparent and we began supporting members of the RAF community who never imagined they would need our help.

Within days of the start of lockdown, we mobilised our network of employees, volunteers, members and branches, together with over 800 new volunteers to help them.

Together, we phoned 35,000 potentially vulnerable members of our RAF community to check on their welfare, and offer them practical, tangible support if they needed it. Some were in dire need – running out of food and basic hygiene products. Nationwide, we organised hundreds of emergency doorstep drops.



"Knowing the RAF Association's Storybook Wings is there gives us, as parents, some comfort. It's certainly made my time away a little easier. I can't rate it highly enough."

The Rundle family

Our rapidly established online entertainment service was viewed more than 1.5 million times across the world. It delivered a daily, wide-ranging schedule of interactive sessions, everything from low-impact fitness, tap dancing and drill tuition to concerts, sing-alongs and guest interviews. It kept spirits high in dark times and it brought our RAF community – serving and veteran – closer together.

Many more people were experiencing acute loneliness and isolation and so we created a permanent RAF Association Connections for Life service. By the end of 2021, we had made over 250,000 friendship calls, supporting over 2,000 people on a weekly basis. Whether it's a veteran struggling to adapt to life after service, or a family member facing difficulties alone, our RAF Association Connections for Life volunteers are there to provide ongoing friendship.



"My husband's death shortly after we had relocated was a real shock. Not having any local friends, I could have easily ended up alone if I hadn't heard about Connections for Life."

Marie

"The RAF Association is amazing. They have lifted my world."

Liz



We were also proud to play a leading role in supporting the welfare casework needs of the RAF community, empowering individuals by giving them much-needed help for needs such as mobility, daily living costs, home adaptations or unexpected costs such as repairs or white goods.

We adapted our mental wellbeing and resilience training, launching a virtual version of our *Finding it Tough?* courses to continue to deliver this service despite COVID-19 restrictions. The first of its kind, our FIT training is designed specifically for non-serving members of the RAF community. We recognise that the unique nature of RAF service can sometimes place an additional strain on everyday life - these courses help people to improve their own wellbeing as well as supporting their friends, family members and colleagues.

"It's really opened my eyes to the realities of mental health and taught me how to spot the symptoms and signs that someone may be going through tough times. A member of my own family is experiencing anxiety at the moment and the course has shown me the best way I can offer them support. It has given me the confidence to ask the right questions and, importantly, how best to listen."

Our Navigating Dementia service was introduced after research we commissioned discovered that a high number of serving personnel have distance caring responsibilities. Our dedicated resource hub provides information, resources and signposting for members of the RAF community who are caring for someone living with dementia.

We also supported serving families to stay resilient, understanding that the nature of service life can place family connections under pressure. Storybook Wings (bedtime stories), Doodle Boxes (memory boxes), free Wi-Fi and our three RAFA Kidz nurseries at RAF Cranwell, Digby and Odiham provided a vital lifeline for serving families. The RAF Families Federation played a key role capturing evidence on issues which concern serving RAF personnel and their families – and in sharing this with military and Government decision-makers.



"It made me realise I wasn't alone in feeling overwhelmed by the demands of being a carer."

Flight Lieutenant Rosie Brooks

Our work in numbers

Here are just some of the ways we made a real and lasting difference to the lives of thousands of members of our RAF community in 2020 and 2021.

We gave people the strength to overcome challenges



We looked after **100,000** enquiries through our dedicated helpline.



Our website was visited over **1,500,000** times, helping people to access services and support.

We provided specialist guidance to **10,000** people struggling to care for someone with dementia, through our new 'Navigating Dementia' advice and support online hub.



17,000 nights were spent in our **82** contact houses, providing serving RAF personnel with a welcoming place to spend time with separated family members.

We provided more than **700** RAF families with high quality childcare at our **three** on-station RAFA Kidz nurseries.



850 people improved their own resilience by completing our specialist mental wellbeing 'Finding it Tough' training.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we have made over **250,000** friendship calls to help isolated and vulnerable individuals within the RAF community.



We helped **120** individuals to successfully access **£1,240,000** through the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.



We kept our community connected



We provided a vital link between **540** deployed personnel and their children through our Storybook Wings and Doodle Box initiatives.

Our free on station Wi-Fi was used by serving personnel more than **300,000** times, helping them to maintain important relationships with friends and family.



We helped over **400** people to enjoy quality time with their families at one of our affordable holiday homes.



We empowered people to live happily and independently

Our caseworkers assisted over **7,000 individuals and families** who were in need, working with military and charity partners to provide **£6.5 million** of financial support to them.



Our **four** retirement accommodation complexes in the UK allowed **150 people** to retain their independence - with a helping hand available should they need it.

John and Tina Wren



RAF veteran Tina Wren turned to the Association after her husband John suffered a near-fatal heart attack.

Former ex-pat Tina served in the RAF as an aircraftwoman during her 20s. She and her husband John became beneficiaries of the RAF Association after John suffered a severe heart attack whilst on a visit back to the UK, turning their lives upside down.

"John died for six minutes," Tina said, "If it wasn't for a group of people who performed CPR on him, I'd have lost him. I was told he needed a triple heart-bypass and realised we'd need to move back to the UK permanently.

Tina said:

"Our lives were turned upside down that summer, but thanks to George and the RAF Association we're now back on track and looking to the future. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to live through, and I don't know what I'd have done without their help."

"We'd been staying in temporary accommodation, but John was to be discharged within a few weeks and needed a suitable place to recover. I didn't know where to turn."

Due to their personal circumstances, the couple could not find any suitable temporary accommodation or financial support. It was then that Tina contacted the RAF Association and was immediately referred to one of our caseworkers, George.

Tina said: *"This wonderful gentleman from the RAF Association turned up at the hospital, and things quickly started settling down.*

"He took me to a local café, where I was able to tell him everything that had happened. He understood our situation and how urgently we needed help."

George helped the couple to find a new place to live in Stirling and applied on their behalf for funding from other military charities.

Flight Sergeant Jonathan Clark

Flight Sergeant Jonathan Clark was due to be deployed and was concerned about the impact his being away would have on his children. Using the RAF Association's Storybook Wings service, which provides a vital link between serving personnel working away from home and their children, he recorded a bedtime story for them so they could still hear his voice.

When FS Clark was to be deployed overseas, he and his wife noticed their two young children were becoming nervous about him going away. A colleague mentioned our Storybook Wings project, so he made an appointment and made two recordings of his children's favourite bedtime stories.

FS Clark said: *"I read both books as I would have done in person, with lots of different voices. The best part was that they didn't know I'd done it and it was a nice surprise when the disks arrived in the post, addressed to them.*

"While not the same as having me at home, I believe hearing my voice reading to them helped them feel a little more settled at bedtime."

The Williams family

May and Julian Williams were devastated when at just 14 months old their daughter Molly was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). The RAF Association has been with the family every step of the way to try and make Molly's life as easy and comfortable as it can be.

SMA is a form of motor neurone disease, that causes muscle weakness and progressive loss of movement. It is caused by a deterioration in the nerve cells connecting the brain and spinal cord to the body's muscles and means Molly will never walk or sit up and can struggle with swallowing and breathing.

The diagnosis had a significant impact on the family's finances. They were also struggling to move house to somewhere they could adapt to meet their family's new needs. That was when a friend of Julian's suggested they contact some military charities to see what help could be provided. The RAF Association sent a volunteer welfare officer to see the family; Stuart made several visits to assess their needs and see how the charity could support them. He applied for funds to help, and a support package was put in place.



"The RAF Association really recognises that it's a family they help."

May

May believes the help from the Royal Air Forces Association has had a huge impact on the entire family.

"We didn't expect very much as we needed help for Molly, not Julian. We were astounded when we received a grant to pay the deposit for a new car that we could get Molly's motorised wheelchair into." May

The support didn't stop there. The couple's new house was remodelled to give Molly a bedroom and bathroom downstairs and access to the kitchen. This included her 'flying bath', which raises up to allow

her to be bathed without May or Julian having to bend down. It also lifts her out of the draining water, keeping her warm after bath time. This all means less pain for Molly, as water eases her discomfort.

The RAF Association has continued to support the family over the years. Most recently this has included a bed that allows Molly to raise and lower herself. Previously, if no-one else in the house was awake, Molly would have to lie flat on her mattress staring at the ceiling and wait for the household to wake up. The Association has also secured funding for a tablet computer that allows Molly to write stories, learn the piano and even take part in some 'virtual' horse riding. And, as she has grown, her wheelchair and the family car have also been upgraded.

Julian, says: *"I never expected to be asking for help. So I've been blown away by the support we have been given, to be honest. I just want to pay something back."*



"I never expected to be asking for help. So I've been blown away by the support we have been given, to be honest."

Julian

Your support in numbers

For many in our community, the past two years have been a time of great difficulty. Some continue to struggle with feelings of isolation and other hardships. None of our work over the last two years would be possible without your support. Thank you.

Our field force of over 2,000 volunteers

generously gave up their time to provide expert support to the RAF community, assisted by **high quality, nationally-accredited training.**



Two Gulf War veterans, Wing Commander Mal Craghill and former Flight Lieutenant Martin Wintermeyer spent

51 hours cycling 675 miles

during their Tornado Tribute Tour of England fundraising challenge.



1,200 people from **six** continents took part in RAFA Rides, our global cycling event, raising over **£200,000.**



"Being a small unit based in Nevada, we often feel a bit isolated but RAFA Rides brought us into the fold, gave us a united purpose with units all over the world, and made us feel part of something special."

Wg Cdr Fred Wigglesworth

Our members, branches, trusts and corporate supporters donated

£320,000

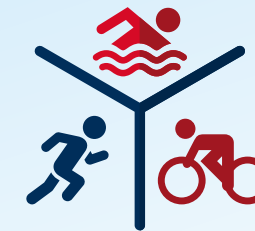
to our **'Building Futures Appeal'**, enabling us to convert Rothbury House into supported living accommodation.



Five-year-old fundraiser Jack completed a **100km walking challenge.**



RAF veteran Paul Chinery walked **80 laps** of his town square to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and raise money.



500 fundraisers took part in our challenge to walk, run, row or cycle 50 miles in a week.

Legacy donations of

£5,000,000

played a vital role in helping us plan for the long-term.

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The past two years have been a time like no other.
More than ever, they have shown us that our
strength is in our community. Thank you to
everyone who has encouraged, supported and
contributed to our work.

rafa.org.uk

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 RAF Association

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