



PEN PICTURE: Teen Talks: Royal Caledonian Education Trust

RCET is Scotland's Armed Forces Children's Charity, supporting the education and wellbeing of children and young people from Armed Forces families. At the RCET we are committed to listening to the voices of young people and keeping them at the heart of everything we do.

In Autumn 2017 thanks to funding from the Armed Forces Covenant RCET ran 3 *Teen Talks* conferences in Edinburgh, Helensburgh and Inverness to give young people from Armed Forces families the opportunity to come together and discuss issues important to them. Why do we need to create such opportunities? Well, young people themselves tell us that adults – professionals and in the home and community – need to be better at listening to and understanding the life of an Armed Forces child, from their point of view. At the *Teen Talks* conferences young people told us that it can be difficult when a parent is on deployment, this can happen with little notice and the young person understands they may be in danger. When a parent is away they miss important family events and experiences. Then of course, many Armed Forces children move regularly and have to cope with changes in school, losing friends and engaging with new learning environments where the adults do not always understand their circumstances or learning needs. As with all young people our Teens also told us that they want a level of understanding, but respect for their privacy too.

"We are proud to be part of an Armed Forces Family".

"Listen to us and don't assume you know what we are going through".

There is a general perception, confirmed by young people themselves, that if you are from an Armed Forces family you are expected to be resilient and just get on and deal with any issues. While this is possible for many young people, for others it may not be so, or there may be times where support or understanding is needed. Working with Armed Forces families tells us that many young people live, at times, with worry and heightened anxiety. We know that unaddressed high levels of anxiety over long or repeated periods can affect mental wellbeing. At RCET then we want both adults and young people to understand that there are times when we must stop and listen to what this sometimes over-looked and potentially vulnerable group of young people have to say. What better time to do this than in the Year of Young People?

As a result of the *Teen Talks* events an information leaflet has been produced summarising the issues raised and offering some Top Tips on what families, schools and communities can do to improve the experiences of Armed Forces children. The leaflet is being distributed to all secondary schools to help raise awareness of the issues faced by some learners. There will also be a film showcasing the issues raised and what can be done to address them.

RCET strongly supports the Rights of the Child and is committed to keeping children and young at the heart of all our work. We offer opportunities to be listened to, resources and training and through the Grants Programme offer financial support to help with school uniform, after school clubs, equipment and tuition, school trips, living expenses for higher and further education or advice and signposting to other support agencies.

More about *Teen Talks* here: <https://www.rcet.org.uk/education-pupil-participation/>