

Economy Committee – Poppy Factory site visit on 4 December 2018

Purpose

As its part of its inquiry into ‘tackling the disability employment gap’, the Economy Committee visited the Poppy Factory in Richmond to discuss with the employability team the work they do to support disabled servicemen and women back into work. This visit was an opportunity for Members to hear first-hand from disabled people and front-line organisations the work they do and suggestions on how they might be better supported.

Agenda

Round table 10.00 – 11.15am	The round table enabled Members to hear from veterans with physical and mental health challenges about their experiences seeking for employment.
Site visit 11.15 – 11.30am	This part of the visit gave Members the opportunity to have a tour of the Poppy Factory.

Round table guests

- **Sarah Casemore**, Director of Operations (Service Delivery), The Poppy Factory
- **Tom Adam**, Team manager for London, The Poppy Factory
- **Tanya Moore**, Insights Manager, The Poppy Factory
- **Sue Ferrier**, Lead Clinical Psychologist, Veterans’ Mental Health TIL Service
- **Susan Hall**, Chairman, Assembly Member
- **Jennette Arnold OBE**, Assembly Member
- **Nabeel Sheraz**, Economy Researcher, GLA Conservatives
- **Yvonne Kay**, Senior Researcher, City Hall Labour
- **Pauline Niessleron**, Assistant Scrutiny Manager
- **Tanya Lightfoot-Taylor**, Project Officer
- **Giles Broadband**, External Communications Officer

Write-up of the roundtable discussion

The Poppy Factory

- Is a nationwide community-based team.
- Works with veterans who have health barriers and want to work .
- Currently works with hundreds of veterans with disabilities and their employers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland .
- advocates for individuals who may have difficulties advocating for their own needs, including veterans who have disclosure issues with employers.

Since 2010, the Poppy Factory has run an employability service with veterans that have left service for 2 years and have physical and mental health problems. The Poppy Factory works with veterans to see what they would like to do and support them to make the opportunities happen. Since 2010, they have supported over 1,000 veterans into work in England and Wales.

The Poppy Factory talks to employers to encourage them to make small adjustments in the work place to make it more accessible to veterans e.g. flexible working. They have produced an employer tool kit with top tips for employers to consider on their website.

The Poppy Factory also helps veterans apply for 'military funding' to help the veterans pay for equipment they need to go to work e.g. tyres for car to go to work. They also encourage employees to contact Access to Work to see what adjustments are available.¹

In recent years, the Poppy Factory has seen an increase in referrals from a wide number of sources, including from housing associations and social media platforms.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that once a veteran is in employment, veterans mental health improves – however support is still needed to support veterans through employment.

More generally, employment is a public health issue and not just economic as it helps people lead longer lives, in better health mentally and physically. This in turn benefits spouses and children as unemployment can double the risk of divorce. Children appear far less likely to live in poverty, more likely to finish secondary school, go to university, achieve better results and have fewer behavioural issues as research has shown clearly that unemployment has the very opposite effect.

The Poppy Factory's approach to employment - Individual Placement and Support

The Poppy Factory's employability team provide highly-personalised employability support based on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) method. A new report commissioned by the Poppy Factory found that ex-Service personnel with a serious mental health condition are nearly three times more likely to find and stay in work if they are supported through 'Individual Placement and Support' than by other methods of employment support.²

IPS model encourages veterans to be independent and is based on 8 core principles outlined below:³

1. Support individual into competitive employment.
2. Open to all who want to work.
3. Focuses on work consistent with the veteran's preferences.
4. Rapid job search.
5. Employment Consultant (EC) embedded into clinical teams.
6. EC develops relationships with potential employers based on the veteran's work preferences.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

² https://www.poppyfactory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/MH_report_2016.pdf

³ <https://www.poppyfactory.org/ips-report-for-veterans-with-mh/>

7. Time-unlimited, individualised support for the veteran and their employer.
8. Benefits counselling included.

The Poppy Factory adopted the IPS model 2.5 years ago. Early results indicate that IPS achieves on average twice as many employment prospects. In 2017/18 they supported 270 veterans back to work and 70 per cent are still in employment 12 months later. This year the service will support 310 veterans into work.

Mental health and veterans:

- 79 per cent of Poppy Factory's casework involve mental health issues.
- Veterans with mental health issues do not always access NHS mental health services.
- The Poppy Factory works very closely with NHS TILS to be the bridge for veterans accessing mental health services.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) support is still needed even when veterans find employment.
- Employers understanding of mental health plays an important role.
- People with mental health issues are not more likely to take time off work – but there is a stigma that they are the ones who take more time off from work

Employment/Working culture

The employability team works on a 1-to-1 basis in the community close to the veteran not in a group setting – using a tailored approach.

The team takes the time needed to find a job that is fulfilling for the veterans and that fits to their personal requirements in terms of job conditions (for example if it needs to be a job that can be done from home; role; location (do they want to use public transport or not); and work ethic. The employability team do not rely on a particular company or organisation to provide employment opportunities for veterans. The roles are secured through competitive application with the support of the Poppy Factory employability consultant.

Some veterans work at the factory and use it as a stepping-stone to future employment – it builds their confidence. On the contrary, some people in the factory have been working there for 43 years.

Good examples:

Many veterans go to work for Amazon. The company offers flexible working, e.g. working at home, that is valued by veterans. Amazon has a thriving veterans network that started in the US and is now being replicated in Europe.

BT Open Reach have a buddy and mentor scheme – if a veteran is thinking of applying they can find a mentor/buddy to assist them through the process of applying.

TFL – has good schemes for disabled people and many veterans went on working for TFL.

Collaborative working

There is a lot of collaboration between organisations in the military sector – some of the larger organisations award grants to smaller organisations.

The Poppy Factory's work is niche, and results show they are good at what they do. There are few organisations that offer support to veterans with physical and/or mental health challenges to employment – they do not have the expertise in dealing with the clients that Poppy Factory deal with.

The factory contributes to the Veterans gateway – a single point of access for veterans.⁴ A 'Map of need' is being developed and will allow veterans to put in their post code and see what mental health support and housing support is available to them in their area.⁵

Fundraising challenges

Fundraising is one of the main challenge for the organisation. The organisation is small so applying for funding can be difficult. European Social Fund require bidding organisations to find 50 per cent of the funding themselves. The Poppy Factory usually must partner-up to meet the requirements.

A regularly source of funding would help the Poppy Factory support the set of veterans they meet. Some of the Poppy's Factory estates are rented out (office and house) which helps to provide a regular income.

The factory is doing work to try and support veterans with criminal convictions into employment. They have won a successful bid from the Ministry of Justice which will help them support veterans with criminal convictions find work on the run up to leaving prison.

They wanted to apply for 'Forces for Good' GLA funding but aspects of the applications were inappropriate for veterans e.g. asking them to volunteer in order to receive funding.

Key points for the Mayoral/GLA

The Poppy Factory said they would like the Mayor to speak up about the disability employment gap and the benefits of hiring disabled people. People in positions of authority should take the opportunity to talk about it in a normal and respectful way.

The language used matters. Veterans won't necessarily identify with having a 'disability'. The language used needs to be that which veterans themselves identify with e.g. physical or mental health challenge. There needs to be more focus on the positives of employing disabled people, and not just seeing it as the morally correct thing to do.

⁴ <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/research-impact-at-northumbria/health-impact/mapping-the-needs-of-veterans-across-the-uk/>