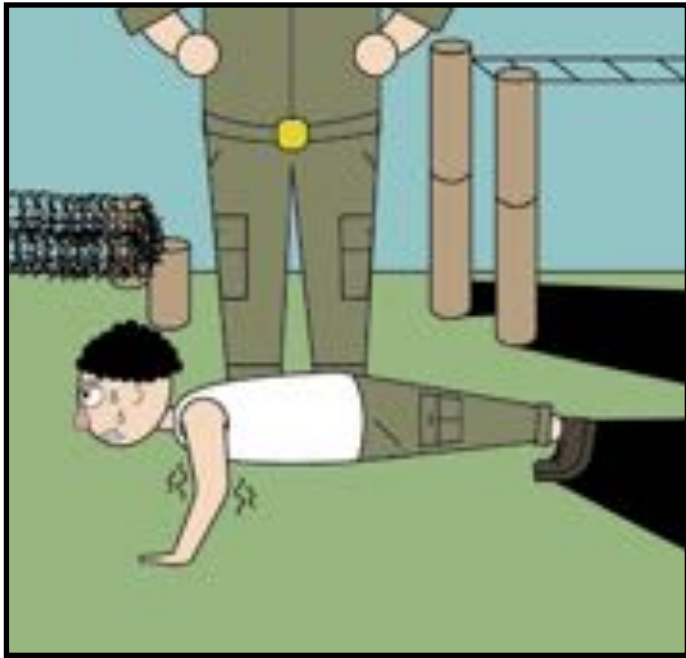


NAVIGATING A DIFFERENT MINEFIELD



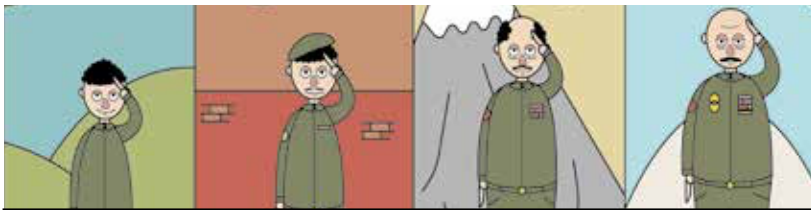
Isabel Dane, Dylan Worthington,
Lisa Scullion, Katy Jones,
Philip Martin

June 2019

Stories based on research undertaken by Lisa Scullion, Peter Dwyer, Katy Jones, Philip Martin and Celia Hynes for the 'Sanctions, Support & Service Leavers' project. The project report is available on the FiMT website:
<https://www.fim-trust.org/reports>

For further information about the research, please contact Lisa Scullion: l.scullion@salford.ac.uk

The Stories



Ralph 2



Dave 16



Chris 24



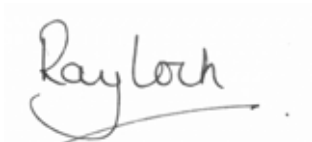
Garry 38

Foreword

Funding research is relatively easy. Conducting research is quite hard. Turning that research into something that makes a real difference, that has a positive impact on the lives of those we wish to help, is incredibly difficult. There is no single solution, no silver bullet.

Peering into the lives of others, 'walking a mile in their shoes', is not simply writing a narrative. We're thrilled that the work of Isabel and Dylan will allow many more people to understand what it is to be a Service Leaver navigating our benefits system. I hope that these graphic novels, created at the start of these artists' careers, seen through the untainted and unfaded vision of the young, will encourage those who set policies to do so ever mindful of those who need our collective support.

Let us be as innovative and determined in solving these issues as these wonderful graphic novelists have been in producing this extraordinary collection.



**Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE,
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust**



We chose to engage with this project because the subject matter was something that was close to home for us. Dylan has family members who have served in the Armed Forces and Isabel spent a lot of her life growing up next to a barracks. We are also both close to people who have at one point or another been reliant on the social security system. Although the subject matter seemed somewhat mundane when the research team first approached us with the brief, it has been rather eye opening to learn of the difficulties Service leavers face when trying to transition back into civilian life. We hope this will open other people's eyes too.

Isabel Dane and Dylan Worthington

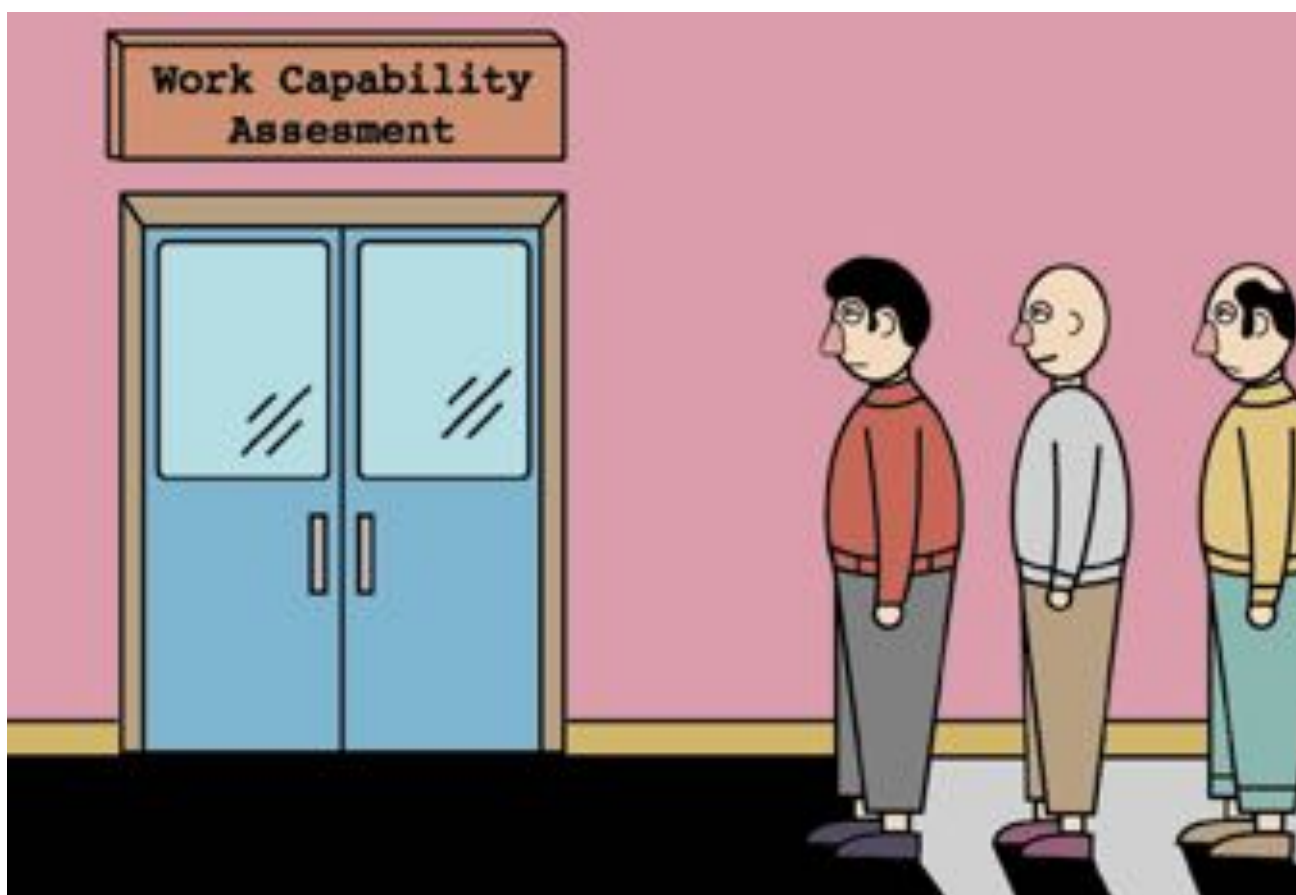
Introduction

Funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, the Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers project represents the first substantive qualitative research in the UK to focus specifically on the experiences of veterans within the social security benefits system. Central to our project was the desire to establish an original evidence base to inform current and future policy and practice in relation to those veterans and their families trying to navigate a system undergoing significant reform.

The stories we collected from our interviews with veterans represent an incredibly rich and diverse chronicle of life after service and deserve to be heard as widely as possible. To maximise their impact, the research team approached The School of Arts and Media at the University of Salford, with a brief to develop a creative resource based on the interviews. Two Graphic Design students, Isabel Dane and Dylan Worthington, were commissioned to produce this graphic novel to visually communicate the powerful testimony of the veterans we spoke to.

This graphic novel contains four separate 'stories'. To protect the anonymity of our research participants, each story is not based on the experiences of one individual; rather, 'Chris', 'Dave', 'Ralph' and 'Garry' are vignettes constructed from the narratives of a number of participants across the project. As such, they represent Isabel and Dylan's artistic interpretations of a range of anonymised interview excerpts that were provided to them.

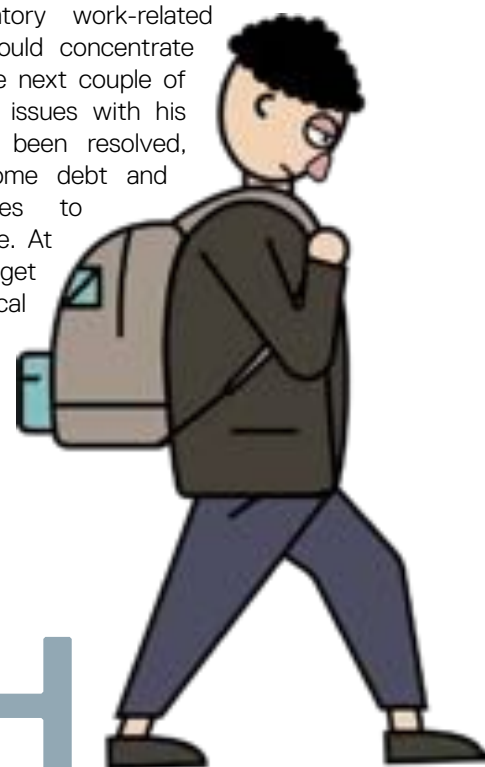
The aim of this resource is to provide an engaging way of understanding some of the key issues emerging from the research. More specifically, the stories of 'Chris', 'Dave', 'Ralph' and 'Garry' help illustrate the complex interplay of both personal and Service-related issues that veterans and their families can experience in the transitions to civilian life. A consequence of this must be the recognition that for some veterans and those around them, support is needed beyond any initial post-Service transition period.



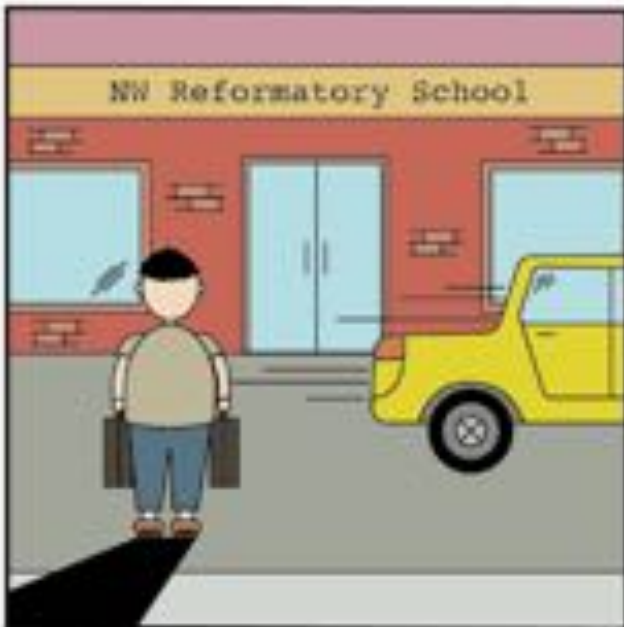
Ralph joined the Armed Forces a couple of years after leaving care. He served in the Armed Forces for 16 years but left as he wanted to try something new. On returning to his home town, he quickly found work through friends who had also previously served in the Armed Forces. However, as time went on, he was struggling to sustain work as he had problems controlling his anger. He was diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety and depression, which were attributed to his time in the Armed Forces. However, by this time he had lost his job as well. Initially he did not want to claim benefits and survived for a while on a small amount of savings. However, as his money ran out he was advised to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and underwent a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) in order to determine his eligibility. He found the WCA quite stressful but was also concerned that it appeared to focus on his physical abilities. Following the WCA, he was placed in the ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), which meant that he had to undertake mandatory steps to prepare for

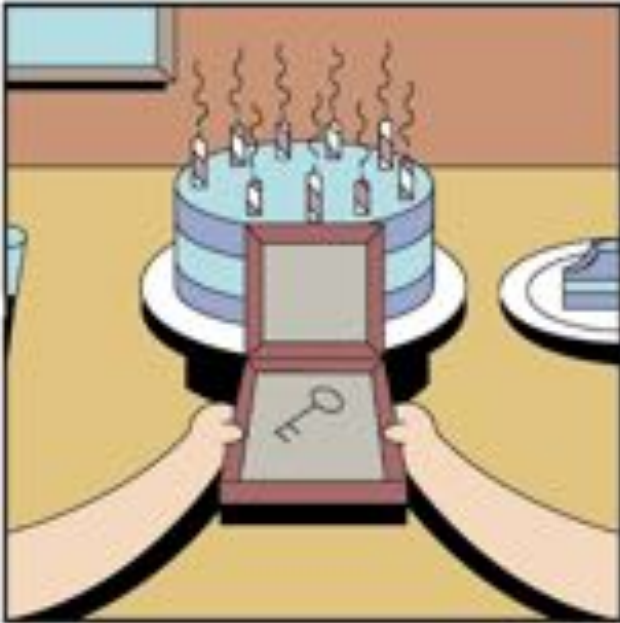
work. Because of his mental health issues, Ralph struggled with the WRAG requirements, which further affected his mental health. However, with the support and intervention of an Armed Forces charity he decided to appeal against the decision and was subsequently placed in the ESA Support Group. This meant that Ralph no longer had mandatory work-related requirements and could concentrate on his health for the next couple of years. Although the issues with his benefit claim have been resolved, he has incurred some debt and sometimes struggles to live on a low income. At times, he has had to get support from his local food bank, which he feels highly embarrassed about.

RALPH

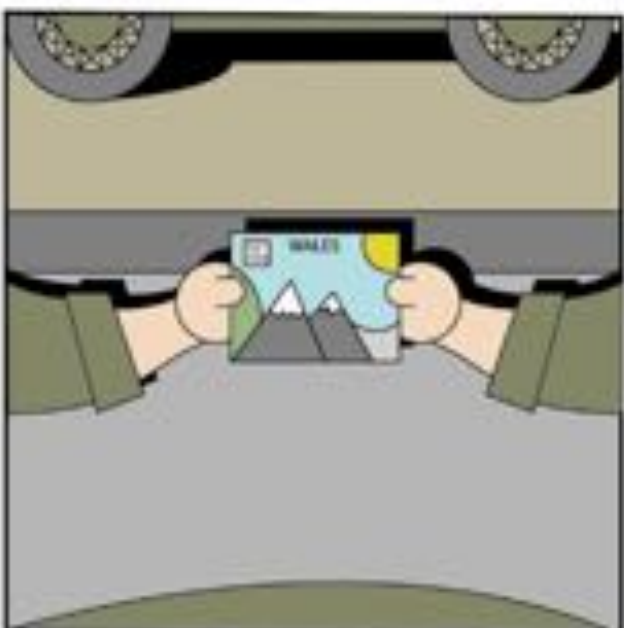
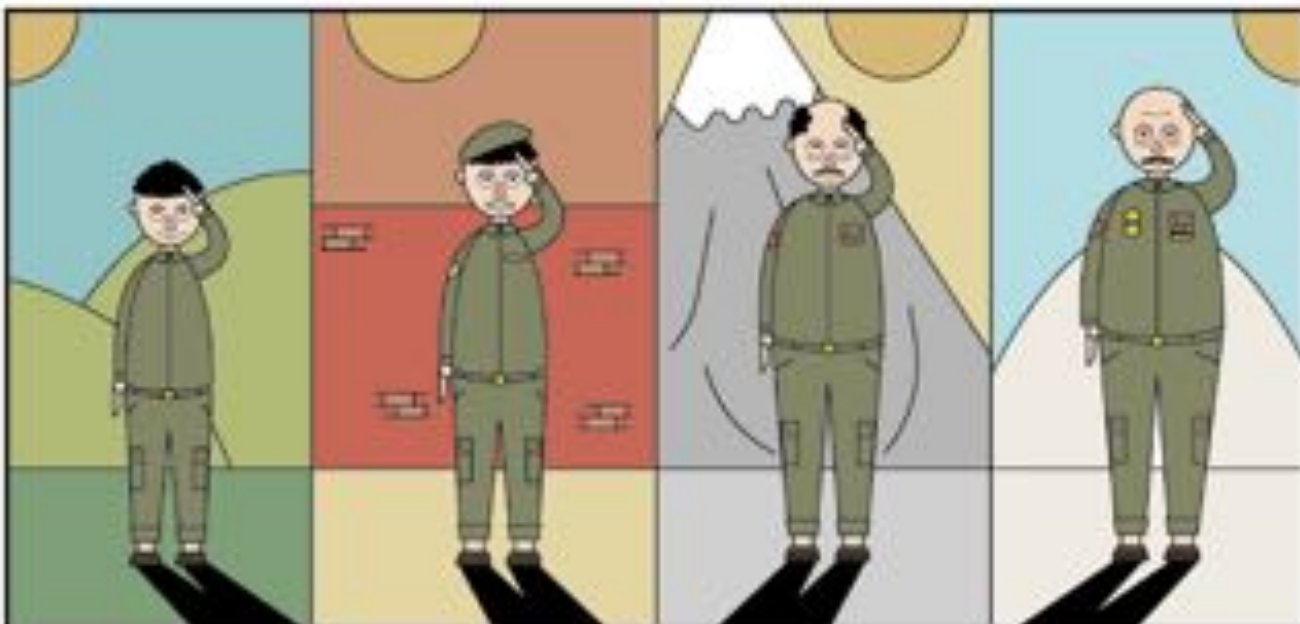
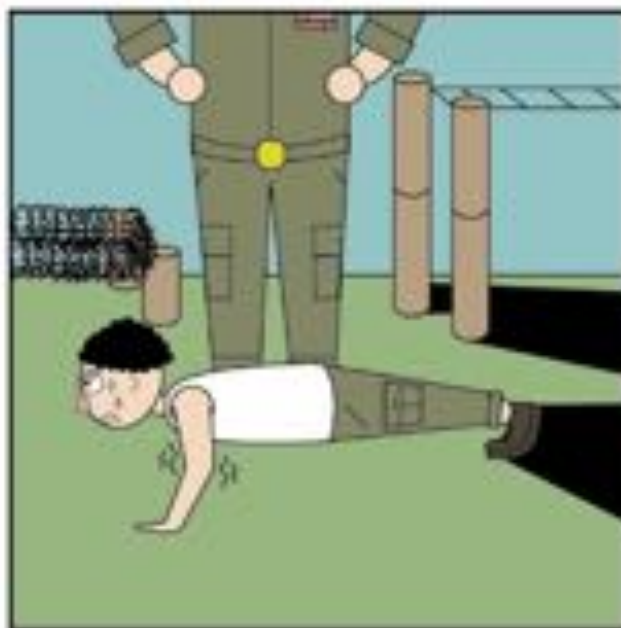


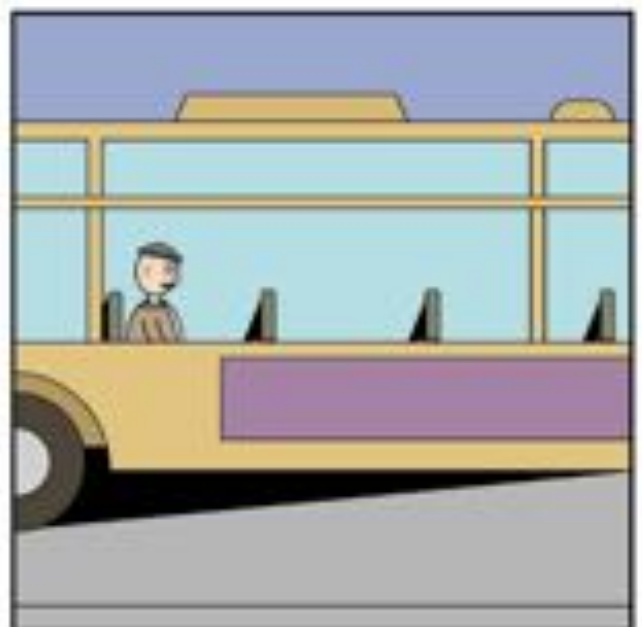
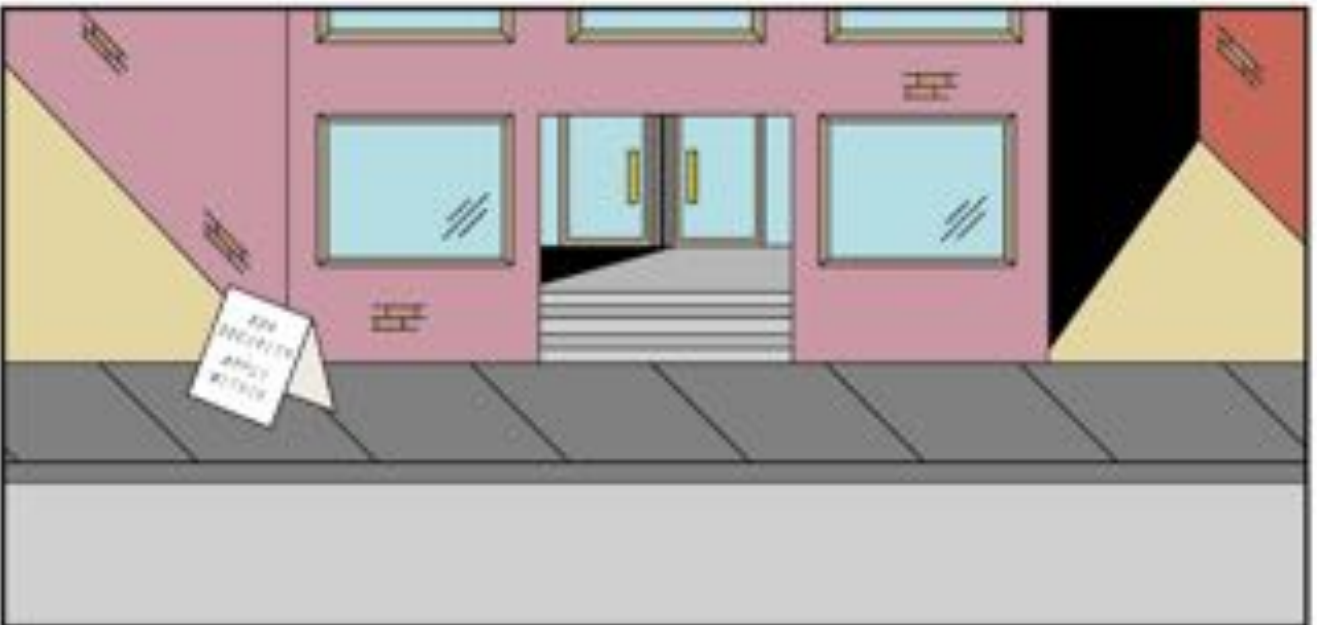










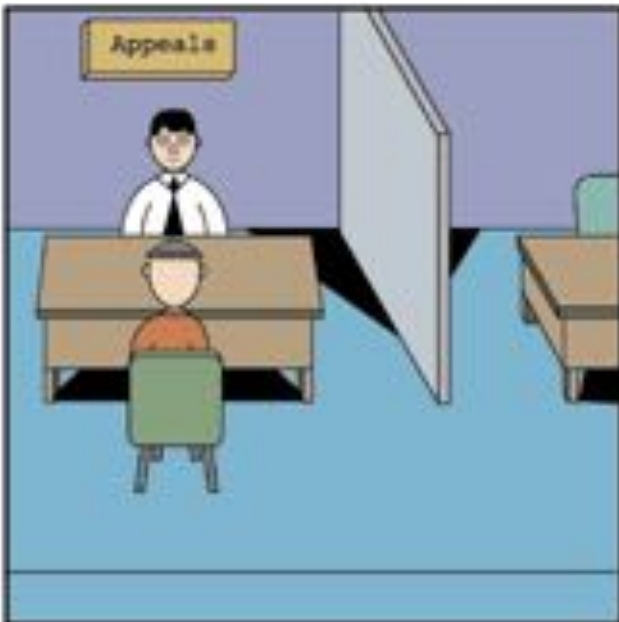


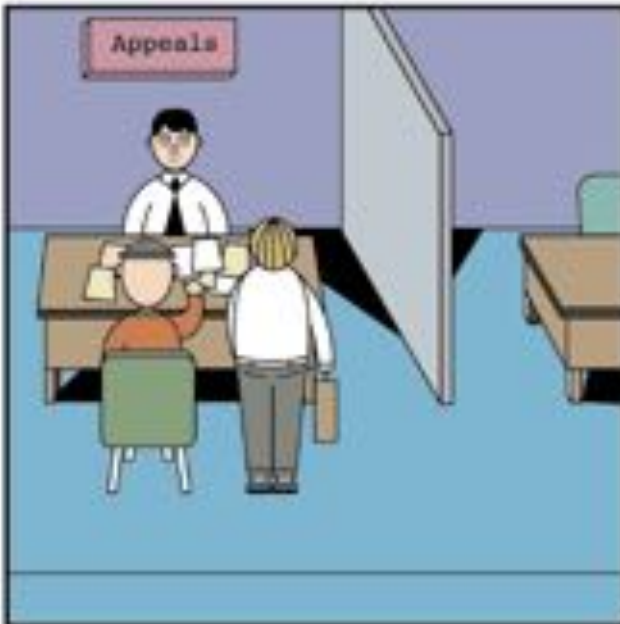














Dave served in the Armed Forces for eight years before deciding he wanted to leave to spend more time with his wife and children. When he first left the Armed Forces, he had found a job straight away through some of his former colleagues in the Forces and worked in that profession for a number of years. However, Dave had begun to experience mental health issues, and his wife grew increasingly concerned about the impact this was having on Dave and also on their family. Following an ultimatum from his wife to get help or their relationship would be over, Dave sought professional help. He was diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety and depression, which were

attributed to his time in the Armed Forces. At the same time, he also sought support from an Armed Forces charity, which told him about the different support available for veterans and advised him to make a claim for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because he was experiencing difficulties in sustaining work.

In order to access ESA, Dave had a Work Capability Assessment (WCA). He found the WCA incredibly uncomfortable and was also frustrated that the assessor appeared to focus on his physical capabilities rather than his mental health issues. The WCA deemed him 'fit for work', and he was told that he could not claim ESA but would be put on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) instead. He struggled to comply with the demands of his JSA claim and was warned that he could be sanctioned if he failed to demonstrate he was doing enough to look for work. This put a considerable amount of stress on Dave and his family, and he decided to seek advice from a third-sector organisation, who suggested that he should appeal against the outcome of the WCA, particularly as his health was deteriorating. With support from the third-sector organisation, he successfully appealed against the decision and was placed in the ESA Support Group, meaning that he could concentrate on his health rather than immediately being required to find work. He is now regularly attending counselling, which is helping him to make progress, and with the support of an Armed Forces charity he has undertaken a number of training courses. Although Dave feels that he still has a long way to go in his recovery, he is hopeful that he will return to work in the future with the right support and training.

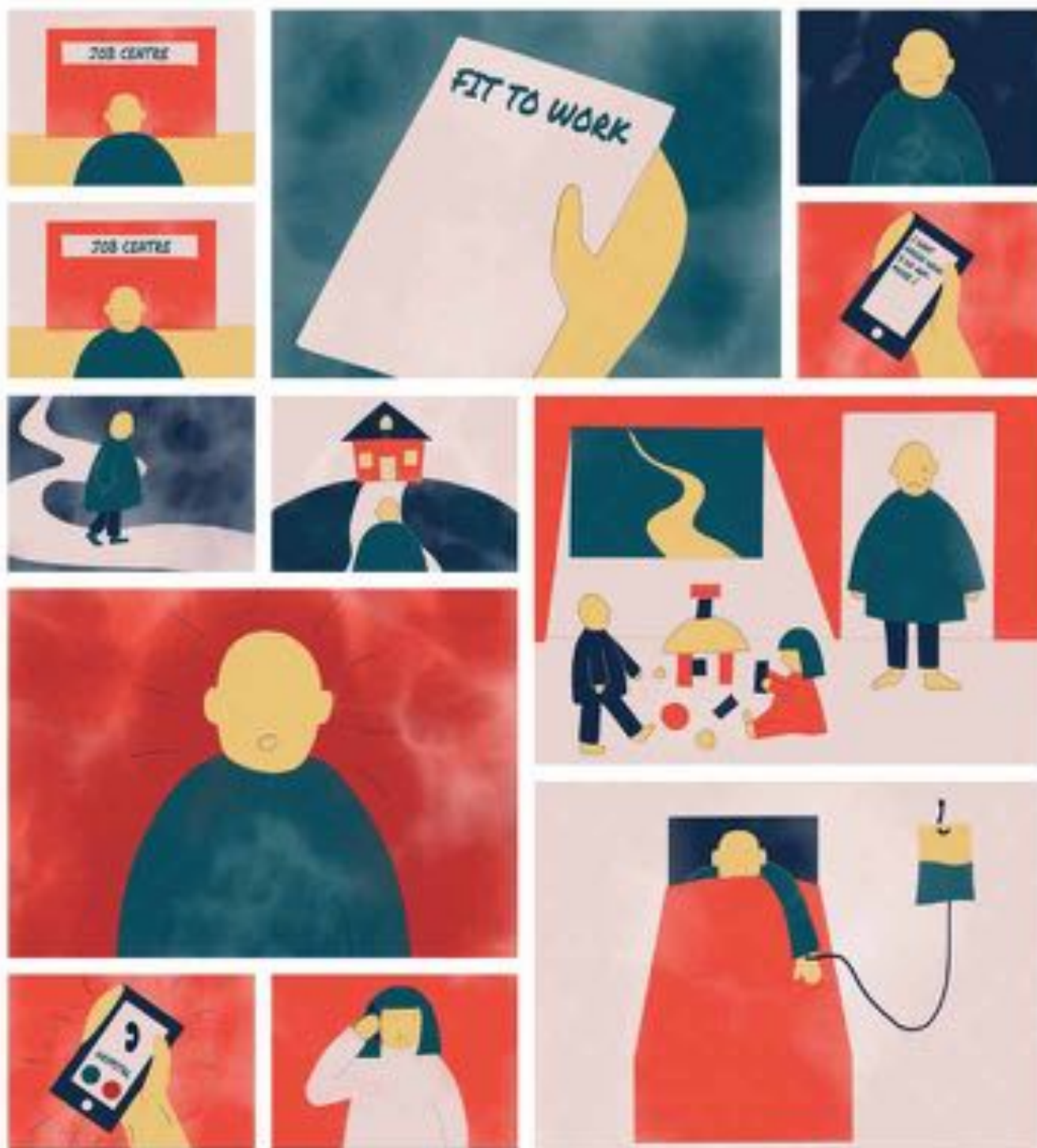


DAVE







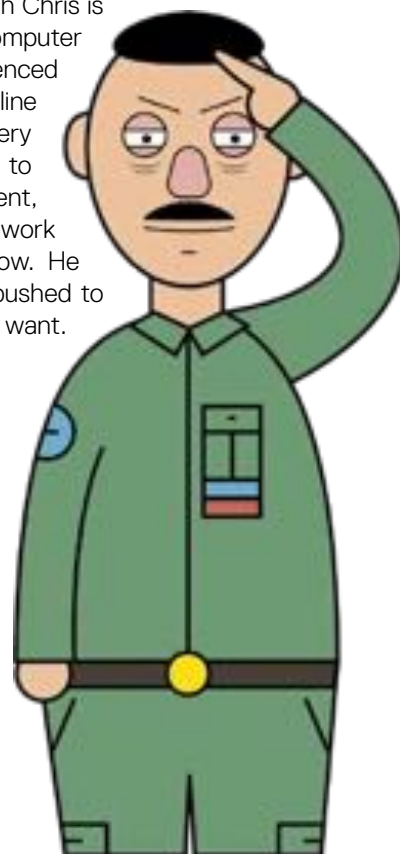




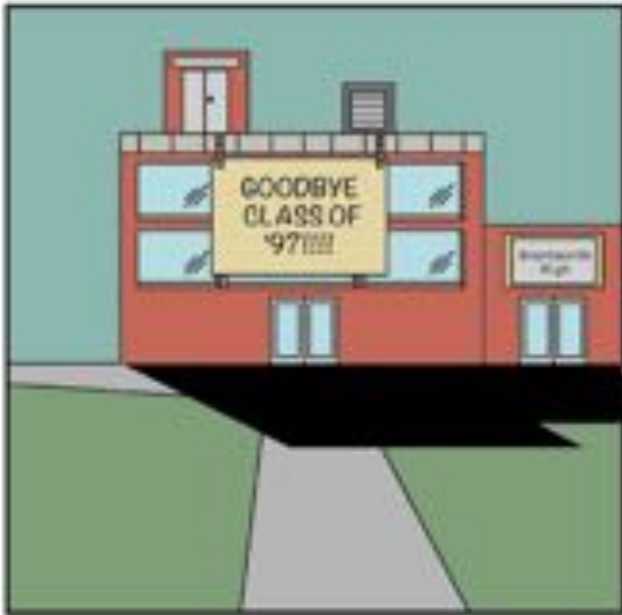


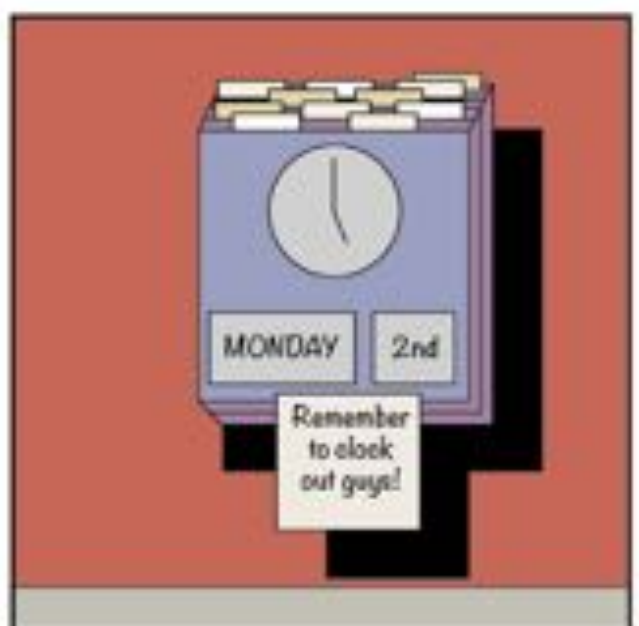
Chris left school at 16. After leaving school he had taken up an apprenticeship but shortly after had decided to join the Armed Forces instead. He served for a number of years, at which point he met his future wife on a home visit, and they subsequently married and had two children. Chris began to miss his family more and more and after serving for 15 years decided to leave the Armed Forces. He found a job very quickly and was initially happy to be home on a permanent basis. However, Chris began to struggle with adjusting to civilian life. Chris and his wife argued regularly and eventually decided to separate, with Chris leaving the family home and moving into a flat on his own. At the same time, his job came to an end when the company said there was no more work for him. At that point, he went to 'sign on' at Jobcentre Plus and is currently claiming Universal Credit. Chris had a significant sense of pride in

his Service in the Armed Forces and felt very 'degraded' when he first approached the Jobcentre to claim social security benefits. In line with his Universal Credit Claimant Commitment, Chris currently spends 35 hours per week looking for work. His search for work is mainly done online, although Chris is not very proficient in his computer skills and has never experienced applying for work online before. He doesn't feel very confident about his ability to find permanent employment, as he sees that a lot of the work out there is temporary now. He worries that he might be pushed to take a job that he doesn't want.



CHRIS

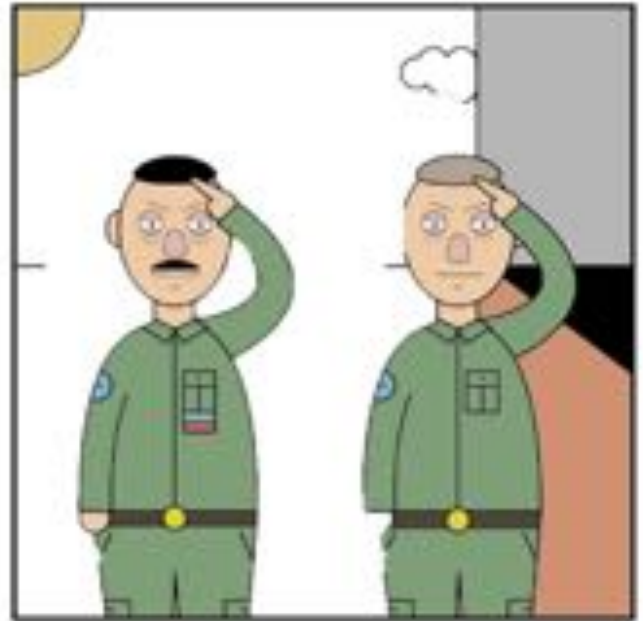




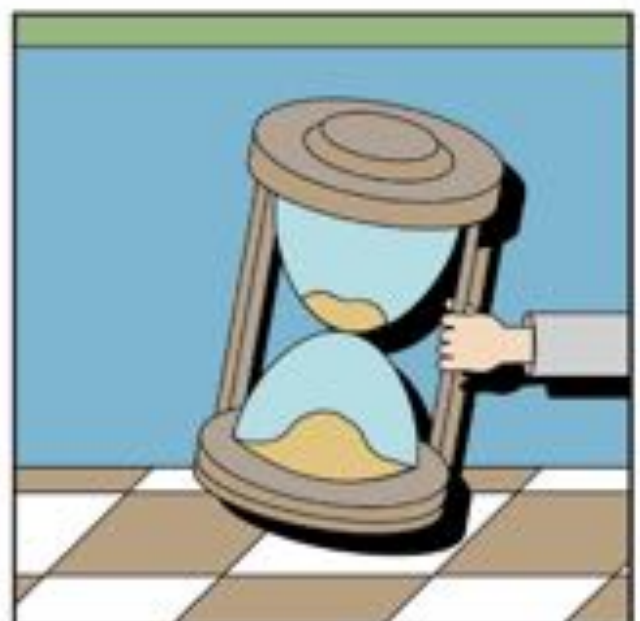


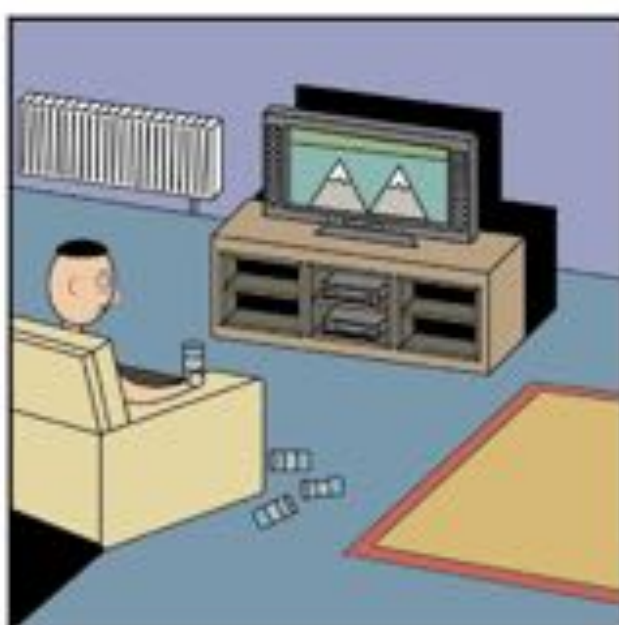




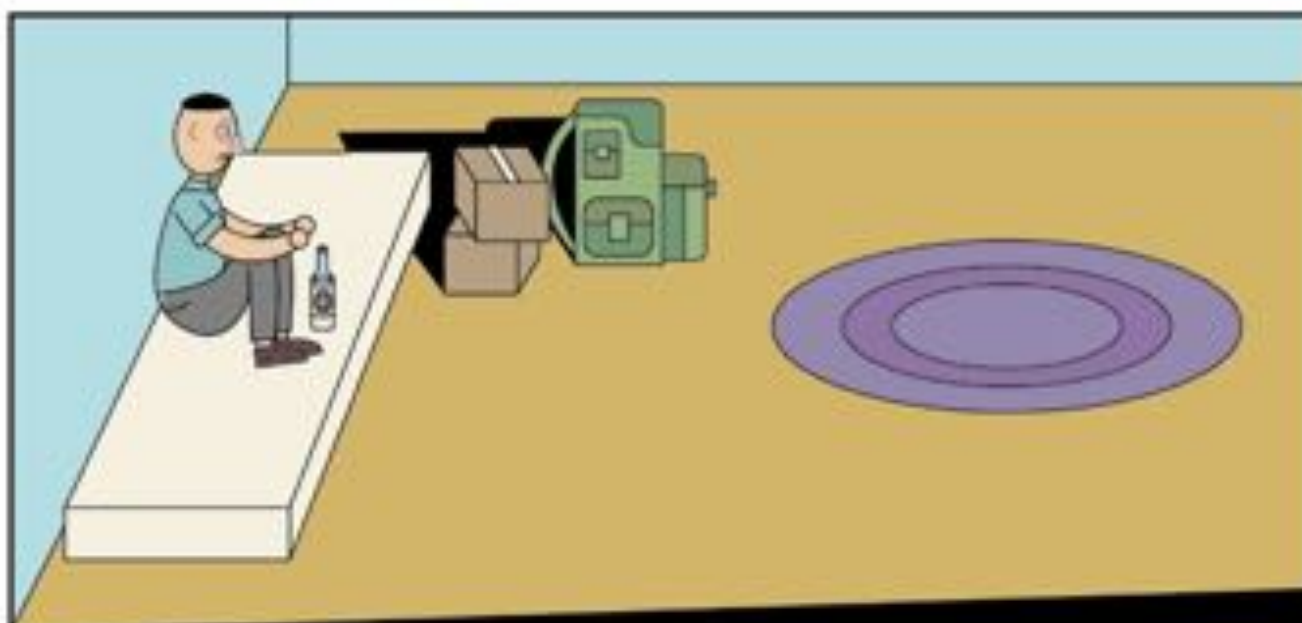
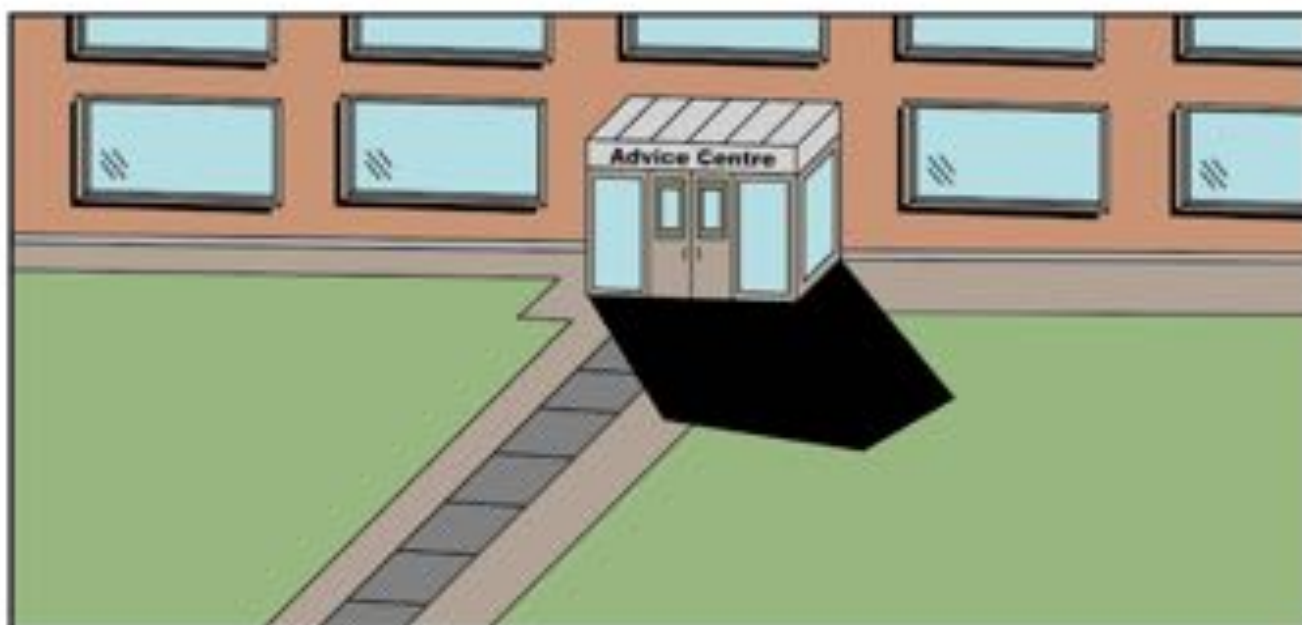


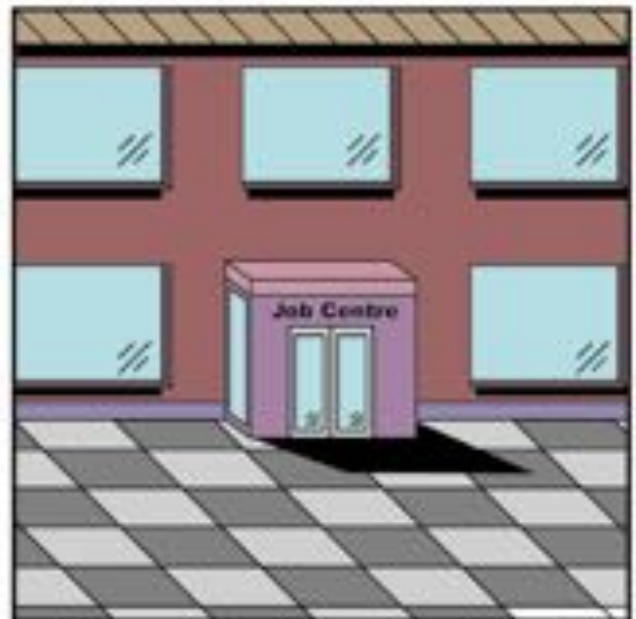














Garry had a difficult early home life and experienced childhood trauma. He left school at 16 and, after struggling to find work in his home town, decided to join the Armed Forces. He served for two years before he was 'kicked out' after testing positive for drugs. Because of the nature of his discharge, he did not receive any transition support. Garry moved back home for a while but struggled to settle. His family were upset and disappointed because of the nature of his dismissal from the Armed Forces. Eventually, he had to leave the family home and hasn't spoken to his family since. Garry moved around a lot, living with friends but also experiencing a few spells of rough sleeping. Whilst sleeping rough, he came into contact with an outreach team, who helped him to move into veteran-specific supported accommodation.



When he arrived at his new accommodation, the workers and the other residents told him about the various support that he could access. A support worker advised him to apply for Universal Credit, helped him fill in the forms online and even came with him to his first appointment at the Jobcentre. He waited six weeks for his first payment, which was very difficult for him. During this time his support worker gave him food vouchers, and some of his friends gave him small amounts of money when they could. After speaking to a counsellor who regularly visited the accommodation, he was also diagnosed with mental health problems, which were attributed to his earlier childhood trauma and also his subsequent experiences of rough sleeping. Because of his mental health issues, the support worker helped him negotiate his Claimant Commitment with Jobcentre Plus. It was agreed that the work search expectations would be reduced and he could look for work for ten hours per week, and also have telephone appointments rather than having to attend in person. Since then he has felt much better about his experience of Universal Credit. Garry is aware that he can't stay in the supported accommodation forever but is grateful for the 'breathing space' it provides at present. He has taken steps towards a new career, which he hopes will help his mental health as well, although he remains cautious.

GARRY







'Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers: Welfare Conditionality and Transitions from Military to Civilian Life' has been funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), a £35 million funding scheme run by the FiMT using an endowment awarded by the Big Lottery Fund.



The 'Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers' project is a parallel stream of work related to the ESRC-funded 'Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions Support and Behaviour Change' project.

