

Portsmouth & Gosport *Festival of Friends* 2024/25

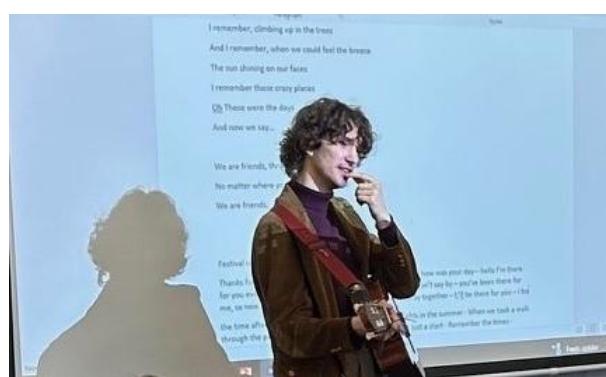
Service children's Pupil Voice event

The importance of 'pupil voice' in schools' support for its Armed Forces children

On the 23rd of January, 120 Service children from naval families between the ages of six and thirteen attended a unique event at the University of Portsmouth. The children, representing 22 schools across Portsmouth and Gosport, attended a variety of art-based workshops in order to explore their experiences of a military lifestyle: the good bits as well as the more challenging aspects, particularly linked to parental separation and in-year school moves. Their voices were clearly heard and will inform these schools' 'pledges' to tailor their provision for this important group of, often, unheard children in our schools.



The day was generously supported by the University's Marketing and Student Recruitment Department, one of a growing number of universities providing invaluable targeted outreach support to children of military families and, in so doing, raising their profile. The popular workshops were provided by practitioners from *Never Such Innocence* and *Seekers Create* with some impressive poems and artwork shared at the end of the day. One group of about thirty children had even created the lyrics of a song entitled '*We Are Friends*' which was performed by all at the end of the day.



Never Such Innocence songwriting practitioner Otto Aday

Never Such Innocence is an education charity whose *Voices of Armed Forces Children Programme* invites Army, Royal Navy and RAF- military connected children to reflect on what Service life means to them. *Seekers Create*, a Portsmouth-based dynamic social enterprise, is dedicated to fostering meaningful connections within communities through interactive, art-based services designed to bridge gaps and unite people with the places they call home.

Pupil feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive. As Maisie L, aged 10, explained: *'It was great fun attending the Festival of Friends at Portsmouth Uni. I was so happy to attend. It was good to be able to meet other military children from lots of schools in Gosport and Portsmouth. It was fun to be able to design a pledge for schools to follow and I hope all schools adopt them to better support us.'*



Festival of Friends project

This Service Pupil Voice event was just one element of a wider, year-long Service children-focused school improvement project being led by specialist education adviser Matt Blyton. This collaborative project has been successfully run in Hampshire, North Yorkshire, Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire in recent years. Its key aim is to improve outcomes, in their widest sense, by developing and sharing good practice whilst also promoting Service children's progression to further and higher education. The project provides opportunities for building links between schools, thereby creating sustainability beyond the life of the project, and for disseminating professional development across the participating schools' workforces. The *Festival of Friends* is designed to be of particular benefit to schools that have smaller number of Service children on their roll, which form the large majority in the city of Portsmouth.

Wider partnership support

The project is being generously funded by the charity *Armed Forces Education Trust* [Home - Armed Forces Education Trust](#)

Additionally, support for this innovative project is being provided by Portsmouth City Council, the Naval Families Federation, the Naval Children's Charity and Aggies.

For further information, please see:

[Festival of Friends - Lincolnshire Case Study - Resources | SCiP Alliance](#)

[Voices of Armed Forces children — Never Such Innocence](#)

[Seekers Create - Seekers](#)

