

**THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE**
by *sodexo**

THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Making every connection count and enhancing the lived experience on base - from pre-arrival to departure.



SHAPING THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE ON BASE

Life on a military site is unique. Few people from outside the armed forces can ever truly appreciate the day-to-day realities, the impact on families and loved ones, and the mental, physical and emotional tolls a life of service can take.

For military leaders, operational readiness is paramount. Achieving it is only possible with a complex understanding of the factors that affect morale, motivation and psychological wellbeing. Practical services, training and support are vital, of course. But the lived experience encompasses everything from the physical environment to job satisfaction and the sense of community and camaraderie on base.

The value of human interaction in enhancing this experience cannot be underestimated. Often, it is the day-to-day moments that truly matter to the individual and shape their experience.

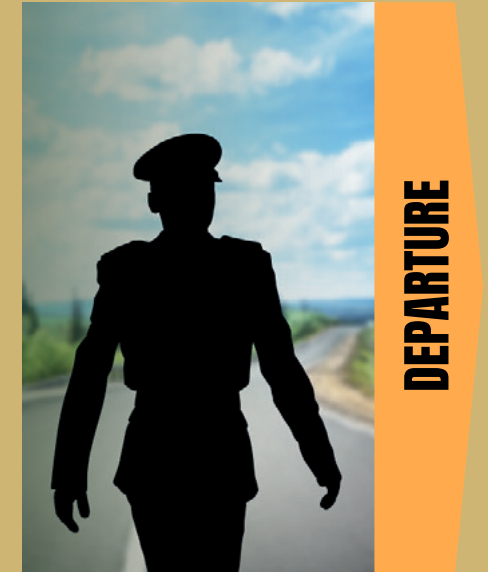
In a previous report - *Bridging the Gap in the Lived Experience* - we explored the six complementary pillars of Sodexo's services and the ways they combine to support Ministry of Defence priorities.

Now, we'll examine the key moments in the journey on base - not only for service personnel, but for their families and loved ones too. From pre-arrival to departure, there are countless opportunities and occasions to enhance the lived experience on base and beyond.



These are the things that truly make a difference to day-to-day life on base.

These are the moments that matter.



If we can improve the lived experience of pre-arrival, arrival, living and departure - even marginally - it will influence recruitment and retention. It's about how we elevate the touchpoints in a similar way to how a hotel or resort or some universities do now - it is the little things that can make a positive difference. ”

ALEX CRAWFORD

Marketing Manager, Sodexo Government

PRE-ARRIVAL

The lived experience begins before service personnel ever step foot on base. Expectations are set in the pre-arrival stage, when there is an opportunity to build morale and a sense of community.

A warm and friendly welcome goes a long way, but more important is practical support, keeping personnel informed and assurances that family will be looked after. Sodexo staff recognise and appreciate this, many having served themselves or been members of military families.

People like Maureen O'Leary lead by example when it comes to **Social Value**, supporting families to settle into new communities and find employment. Further afield in Cyprus, our teams at RAF Akrotiri embody our approach to **Customer Experience**, while our MyWay app represents **Technology Enablement** in action.



Helping families feel at ease

Maureen O'Leary raised a family and built her own career while travelling the world in support of her husband's 28-year army career. She knows exactly how it feels to be redeployed, with all the uncertainty and logistical challenges that come with moving and adapting to a new culture.

As Service Manager for Sodexo at Larkhill Garrison in Wiltshire, she brings that experience to her role every day.

"Around 70% of the people in our team have a personal connection to the military, so they see it as looking after their own," she says. "We care."

When the Army Basing Programme brought a full regiment from Germany to Larkhill, Maureen recognised the importance of laying the groundwork for families. She travelled to Germany to offer support for families and highlight some of the opportunities they would have upon arrival in the UK.

"I knew how those spouses and their dependants would be feeling," says Maureen. "Military life can be daunting - you don't know what you're going into, what you're going to do for a job. We see it as our duty to support families during that transition."

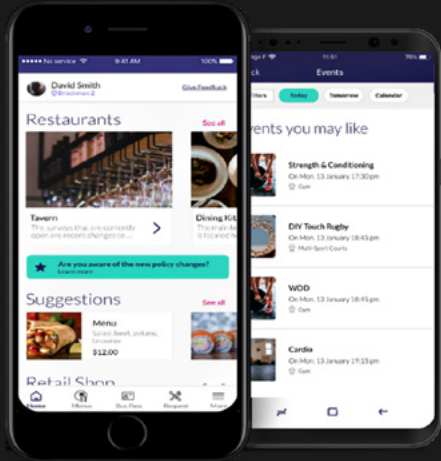
Maureen and her team worked with the army and local schools to keep service personnel and their families informed, and ultimately helped secure employment for many spouses before they even arrived in the UK.

And once they did, she made sure they felt part of a community that understands what they're going through.



MAUREEN O'LEARY

*Service Manager
Sodexo, Larkhill Garrison*



Technology that works for you

Sodexo's MyWay app is all about smooth transitions.

The platform is personalised to each user and provides information about facilities as well as an ability to seamlessly check in to accommodation.

Knowing what to expect is critical to the pre-arrival phase, and technology that facilitates two-way communication goes a long way in helping personnel feel at ease and minimising uncertainty.

[SODEXO.COM](https://www.sodexo.com)

Cool heads prevail

Sodexo's accommodation team at RAF Akrotiri are well used to logistical challenges. They provide daily support for nearly 300 permanent staff as well as thousands of personnel transiting through Cyprus.

Over 1,550 beds can be booked by a wide range of users, including squadron replacements, aircrew and visiting dignitaries, and the accommodation team allocates accordingly so everything runs smoothly.

But when UK Carrier Strike Group 21 (CSG21) was deployed on Operation Fortis in 2021, the team had to quickly adapt to a new approach.

Covid outbreaks necessitated the use of isolation beds at short notice, and operational requirements overruled the booking system.

Fortunately, the Sodexo accommodation team's expertise and experience meant they were fully trusted by Station command and given complete autonomy to manage the situation. The team rallied to identify solutions to the beds crisis and coordinated safeguarding efforts for infected passengers.

All of which allowed the operation to proceed smoothly, with transiting personnel given warm welcomes and seamless support that belied the significant challenges behind the scenes.



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ARRIVAL

The arrival phase sets the tone for a deployment. When personnel can adapt and acclimatise quickly, they are more effective and more likely to sustain long-term wellbeing.

Sodexo personnel are always on hand to enhance the **Customer Experience**, whether providing information about on-base facilities or supporting the check-in process with advanced kiosks and apps.

But military life is unpredictable, and when things change we need to be just as ready to adapt as the personnel we support.

Award-winning operational support

Operation Pitting marked the end of the UK's military involvement in Afghanistan. It was the largest humanitarian aid operation since the Berlin Airlift, with more than 15,000 people evacuated over the course of two weeks in August 2021.

Planning for such an event had long taken place at Colchester Garrison, specifically at Merville Barracks - home of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team. When news of the Taliban offensive broke, these plans went into action, with around 500 Sodexo team members supporting the initial deployment.



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More than 750 Brigade personnel were involved in the operation to recover British nationals and other entitled persons, with the initial expectation that it would span a period of two months.

But as the 150-year-old military adage goes: “No plan survives first contact.” Kabul fell to the Taliban within a matter of days rather than months, and the timescale for recovering troops changed dramatically.



Months of meticulous contingency planning and an intense period of tireless effort in August delivered the largest and fastest emergency evacuation in recent times.



BORIS JOHNSON

former Prime Minister

"We had only a few days to devise and execute a detailed operational plan to welcome the troops back to their home base," says John McMullan, Contract Director at Colchester Garrison. "Of course, all arrangements had to be flexible as the plan constantly shifted. However, our understanding of military operations and the needs of this very complex operation enabled us to respond to changes with minimal notice."

Preparing meals for returning personnel was one of the top priorities, with Sodexo teams assisting a group of 25 military chefs to deliver almost 18,000 meals over five days. Temporary field kitchens were established, with 1,000 freshly cooked meals packed so food was waiting for every returning soldier no matter when they arrived.

We also had to consider the mental and emotional impact of the arrival, so we safeguarded troops' wellbeing by ensuring they could decompress in groups rather than in isolation. Dedicated areas were cleared to house up to 200 soldiers at a time and we plumbed in temporary shower and toilet facilities to maximise comfort.



The approach was ultimately acknowledged with Team of the Year prizes at both the 2022 Public Sector Catering Awards and at our own Spirit of Sodexo Awards. The titles recognised the work of our people

in Colchester not only to deliver on the practical aspects of the operation, but also their extra efforts to ensure the arrival of all personnel was smooth, safe and supported.

LIVING

"It all starts with the everyday."

Sodexo's company-wide motto is based on the principle that small, concrete changes in the everyday lives of people and communities combine to make a significant difference to the bigger picture.

Nowhere is this more important than on military sites, where our daily interactions with personnel and their families contribute to the morale and operational readiness of units. In these unique environments, exceptional **Customer Experience** is about more than delivering a good service; it's about becoming part of the team and the family.

Social Value comes from truly being involved in the community and working to make a difference, while **Technology** should be developed to enhance and support everyday life.





JENNY FOSTER AND LISA ALLISON

Sodexo, Larkhill Garrison

Part of the team, part of the family

Jenny Foster has worked at Larkhill Garrison for more than 30 years and says building a community is key to improving morale and providing effective support. Jenny is a Cleaning Supervisor and her daughter, Lisa Allison, is now a Deputy Service Manager, having worked at Larkhill herself for 12 years.

Two of Jenny's grandchildren have also worked at the site, and the result is a tangible family atmosphere that improves the experience of personnel and their loved ones.

For others, such as Alice Comer and Louise Cooper, becoming a part of the family is less literal, but no less important. Alice and Louise are part of the high level cleaning team at Warminster Garrison and believe the way they interact with people is just as important as the work they do.



Working at Larkhill is a family affair; everyone takes care of each other, and we have a wonderful sense of community as a site. ”

LISA ALLISON

*Deputy Service Manager
Sodexo, Larkhill Garrison*

They frequently go above and beyond to improve the site and resolve issues beyond their remit, so personnel always feel comfortable with them.

“We’re the ones who put smiles on their faces,” says Alice. That experience and service not only helps a person’s day run smoothly, but also reinforces the sense of a community shared by all ranks and teams.

Innovative technology at record speed

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges for everyone, not least for service personnel and Sodexo teams working abroad in places like Cyprus.

When families and dependants were forced to isolate, many were left wondering how they would be able to access vital supplies. Despite the presence of numerous supermarket chains in Cyprus, none had online shopping delivery facilities.

The Sodexo team quickly developed a shopping platform from scratch. It would give customers access to thousands of products and allow them to book delivery slots or arrange to click and collect.



The project developed in three stages at the height of the pandemic:

1

Choose an ecommerce platform to build on, and define requirements for the interface - including devices it would need to work on, online payment options, and time slots for delivery or collection.

2

Compile a list of products that would be made available, and gather descriptions and images. If the supplier did not already provide photos, the team would take them themselves. Approximately 2,500 products were included, across 83 categories.

3

Once the platform was built, retail store colleagues were trained in the processes for operating it and fulfilling orders. This included mapping and planning exercises for delivery routes, and recommendations for interaction with customers who had tested positive for Covid-19.

The new technology was ultimately enhanced by the addition of visual analytics dashboards that provided reports on orders and alerted staff when stock levels were low.

The volume of people isolating meant the Sodexo team were under great pressure, but the sophisticated new system allowed them to provide the right support to personnel and their families when they needed it most.



More than a base

On every military site, community is key. Sodexo mess and events managers organise family days, summer balls, Oktoberfest celebrations and even wedding receptions.

And throughout the year, our teams and service personnel raise money and host events to help the communities around them. At Allenby Connaught, for example, fundraisers have supported Stop Hunger, The Trussell Trust, the NSPCC and local food banks.

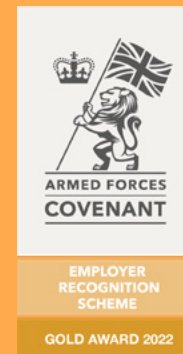
More than £10,000 was raised in 2022 alone, thanks to everything from silent auctions to furniture sales and bake offs.

DEPARTURE

Our support for service personnel and their families never ends. The departure phase is all about a smooth transition to a new phase in their lives, whether it's on another base or they are leaving the military altogether.

Technology Enablement is key to making the process as stress-free as possible, and our MyWay app facilitates a simple, seamless check-out process. We also help departing personnel recycle or donate any belongings they are not taking with them.

And as early signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant, we have pledged to support veterans and their families throughout their post-military careers. We actively recruit reservists and ex-service personnel throughout the organisation, and work closely with SSAFA and other military charities.





RACHEL EVANS

Human Resources Director,
Sodexo Government

Empowering service leavers

SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity, offers a transitional mentoring service that plays a vital role in helping those leaving the forces prosper in civilian life. Mentors with relevant experience provide face-to-face support and guidance, with research showing the programme improves financial and housing stability by 20%.

It also helps reduce feelings of social isolation by 35%, at what can be an especially daunting time in a person's life and career.

Rachel Evans, Human Resources Director for Sodexo Government, is one of many members of the team who have volunteered for SSAFA. She has been a mentor for several years, helping service leavers discover their passions and gain confidence.

"The mentoring training was a life-changing experience, both on a personal and professional level," she says. "I met other mentors, mentees and heard from the communities touched by the service, which gave me an opportunity to look at the world with a different lens."

Lockdowns brought added challenges for leavers, but digital solutions helped Rachel maintain contact with her mentee until face-to-face meetings were possible again. And the service proved more valuable than ever as people learned to adapt to the uncertainty of a new normal.

"Mentoring is not about telling people what to do," Rachel explains. "It's about providing guidance and empowering people to make their own decisions and find their own solutions."

Sodexo is helping ex-service individuals regain their independence and their dignity. Nothing is more important than that.

SIR ANDREW GREGORY
SSAFA CEO

ssafa | the
Armed Forces
charity

ENHANCING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE FROM THE FRONT LINE

Simply put, it has never been more important to understand the role morale and wellbeing can play in operational readiness. The 2022 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey showed just 45% of personnel are satisfied with service life, with 39% reporting low morale in their unit.

Throughout Sodexo, we believe it all starts with the everyday. Empathy, understanding and going the extra mile in the smallest ways at every stage - from pre-arrival to departure - can help shape a better lived experience for the service personnel we support and build a community with.

These are the moments that truly matter in improving morale and, ultimately, retention - as well as forging a better life beyond the forces.

“

People are at the centre of our Defence service. They understand the culture and they understand the people they are working for. Our priority has to be bringing in the right people, training them, supporting them and helping them to understand the way the military operates.”

MARK BAKER

*RAF Veteran and Chief Operating Officer,
Sodexo Government*



SUPPORTING THE WHOLE FORCE

Sodexo has over 40 years of experience supporting the Defence forces of the UK, the US and France.

We are committed to developing a better understanding of military life, so we can improve the lived experience for the whole force.

We are proud to support individuals, the community and the environment on bases of all sizes, working with military leaders to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of all service personnel.

Find out more about Sodexo Government



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