

**WORK FUTURES RESEARCH CENTRE****Team Rubicon UK – Transferring Skills and Finding Meaningful Work**

Team Rubicon UK was founded in 2015 and provides disaster relief and other assistance in the UK and overseas, bringing together veterans, civilians and those still serving in the military. Volunteering, internships and employment in this organisation provide opportunities for skills acquisition and skills transfer, contribute to well-being, and can support the transition from the military to civilian work and life which can be experienced as cultural change.

**Key Points**

## Team Rubicon UK

- engages in disaster relief and supports communities within the UK and overseas drawing on military and civilian skill sets
- provides opportunities for volunteering and peer-support and contributes to volunteers' well-being
- offers internships that provide access to disaster relief
- brings together civilians and (former) military personnel to work together effectively
- provides evidence of best practice from which other organisations can learn

**Introduction**

In 2010, during the Haitian earthquake, two former US Marines formed Team Rubicon USA. A few years later, Team Rubicon UK (TRUK) was founded and has so far responded to a wide range of disasters, for example in Cornwall and Wales, Nepal and the Caribbean. TRUK

comprises staff, interns and volunteers (called *Greyshirts*). One becomes a *Greyshirt* by completing an induction course to be ready to respond to disasters in the UK. Additional courses prepare *Greyshirts* to take on leadership roles and deploy overseas.

## The Study

The following findings are based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation carried out between July 2017 and September 2018. The study concerns:

- The identity of the organisation
- Its approach to disaster relief
- Its support for veterans' transition to civilian work and life
- Its contribution to bridging military and civilian cultures

So far, 14 interviews have been conducted with staff members, interns and volunteers. Interview questions concerned respondents' backgrounds (military, civilian), their roles and views of the organisation and its development. I also attended training events, briefings and staff meetings. Observations focused on the activities, how they are organised and the division of labour. This is an ongoing study, and further interviews, participant observations and surveys are planned. Funding for this research project was provided by the University of Southampton.

## Preliminary Findings

The disaster relief organisation Team Rubicon UK is based in Wiltshire, where the Head Office is located, and London. The organisation has members all over the UK and is active nationally and internationally. In addition, Team Rubicon UK is in the process of setting up ten regional groups all over the UK. The organisation is bringing together (former) military personnel with civilians.

### **Activities of Team Rubicon**

At the Head Office in Wiltshire, staff and interns monitor disasters around the world and prepare disaster responses. The training and deployment of *Greyshirts* are also taking place here. A *Greyshirt* is a member of the organisation who is trained to participate in disaster response or service projects nationally or internationally, depending on skills and training. Weekly emails inform *Greyshirts* about training courses, fundraising events and opportunities to participate in disaster responses and planned operations.

### **Training**

Training is delivered by staff, interns and volunteers and, depending on the complexity of the course, takes place at weekends or from mid-week to Sunday. Holding courses over weekends allows those who are in full-time employment to participate without having to take time off work. Course participants stay on site – in a rural area, not easily accessible by public transportation – for the duration of the training. Participation in the training is affordable as it is free and accommodation and meals are provided. Staying on site provides socialising opportunities outside the training which includes some talks, but primarily exercises which are performed in teams. The introductory training ends with the award of a branded t-shirt and a photo opportunity for the newly minted *Greyshirts*. A range of further training opportunities offer *Greyshirts* the opportunities to gain additional skills which are necessary for international operation and for taking on leadership and other specialised roles.

***Planned projects and Disaster Response***

In planned projects (which might involve construction work) and disaster response operations *Greyshirts* are deployed for periods of up to two weeks. If a project or operation lasts longer, the first group returns and another group is sent out. The short deployment period allows *Greyshirts* to reconcile volunteering with paid employment and other responsibilities. Furthermore, the rotation provides more *Greyshirts* with an opportunity to participate in operations. At the same time, whether disaster relief or planned operations, domestic or overseas, all operations need to be monitored and supported from the Head Office. Evaluation is ongoing and if necessary the strategy is adjusted. Involvement in operations thus takes place simultaneously at Head Office and at the site of the disaster or service project. This means that volunteers can participate in a wide range of activities, supported by staff and interns. This also includes informing family and friends of deployed *Greyshirts* as well as the wider public about the operations.

***Internships***

Internships with Team Rubicon UK can last from three to six months and provide important opportunities for breaking into humanitarian aid and disaster relief. Aid organisations tend to require academic credentials and field experience. Whereas veterans acquired field experiences during military service, they might not have university degrees. TRUK interns also include university students and graduates of undergraduate or Masters degrees who seek field experience. Internships with Team Rubicon offer hands-on experience and, compared to other unpaid internships in the sector, are affordable given that the organisation provides board and lodging for the interns. Internships can lead to

a staff position within the organisation. In addition, some volunteers become interns, whereas some interns continue to volunteer with the organisation upon completing the internship. Volunteers and interns include UK nationals as well as internationals. The organisation thus brings together people from a variety of backgrounds who learn with and from each other.

***Meaningful Work and Skills Development***

Staff, interns and volunteers described their involvement in Team Rubicon UK enthusiastically as providing an opportunity to do something meaningful. During training, staff meetings and interviews, first and foremost the desire to help those in need was emphasised. At the same time, the opportunity to learn, face challenges and to develop skills and gain new experiences was stressed. The fact, that some of the work of Team Rubicon UK is carried out overseas clearly plays an important role. Decisions about operations are based on need – whether the community that is affected by a disaster is asking for support – and the capacity of the organisation.

***Partnerships and Fundraising***

The organisation is developing a number of partnerships in order to fund its activities. Service or planned projects are developed together with partners from the private, public and third sectors including non-governmental organisations. Similarly, disaster response operations are planned with local partners. Partnerships draw on local expertise and reputation, financial support as well as logistics, transport and equipment. The organisation is also engaged in fundraising activities, providing further volunteering opportunities. Staff members who engage in fundraising, development, and media activities are supported by volunteers and interns

## Policy Implications

The cross-governmental Veterans Strategy, launched in November 2018\*, notes the contributions that veterans can make and the support they need. Team Rubicon UK provides evidence of how ex-service personnel can make an important contribution in times of national and international emergencies. In particular, TRUK offers important opportunities to transfer and utilise skills, undertake meaningful paid and unpaid work, and to enter disaster relief. The organisation connects military and civilian cultures in general and in the context of disaster relief in particular. In addition to helping communities in need, the organisation provides career opportunities for staff, interns and volunteers. Furthermore, it provides a space for peer support among former veterans who can

relate to each other's experiences, and provide networking opportunities.

Team Rubicon UK:

- makes an important contribution to integrating veterans into civilian work and life and benefiting of the skill set of this group
- by bridging the military-civilian divide contributes to challenging stereotypes about veterans and developing more understanding of military culture
- provides evidence of good practice from which other organisations in private, public and third sector can learn.

\*<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-our-veterans>

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