



ROYAL CANADIAN NAVAL **BENEVOLENT FUND**

RCNBF Programming Needs Assessment & Program Development Project 2022-23

Part 1: A Report on Needs



CHARTING A COURSE FORWARD

Members of HMCS YELLOWKNIFE gather around the Pelorus (compass) on the bridge of the ship, in the Pacific Ocean, on March 28, 2019. Photo by Captain Annie Morin

June 2023

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Every day, individuals in our Navy family across Canada depend on military-serving charities to help them through tough times, improve their lives, and remember their service to their country. Over the past 80 years, the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF) has made a tangible difference in the lives of the people who need us most, distributing more than 42 million dollars and helping 22,000 veterans, serving sailors and their family members.

Thank you to Navy Public Affairs, Royal Canadian Navy for providing imagery.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The RCNBF Programming Needs Assessment & Program Development Project represents the first time in many years that the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF) has taken the time and invested resources in a comprehensive and formal scan of what it does and how it does it. This report is the result of the first part of the project – the examination of where we have come from and how our stakeholders view our work, along with recommendations regarding the next steps. Based upon these findings, in the second part of the project, the RCNBF will establish a new suite of programs meant to serve and possibly expand our client base in more impactful ways.

This exercise was a catalyst for reconnecting with the realities and repercussions of naval life and hence with the RCN itself. Not only did we question ourselves internally, but we reached out to external stakeholders to get honest views about how we operate. For example, we knew that over the past few decades, most military-serving organizations had transitioned to serving the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) community overall, with very few remaining that support individual branches. Therefore, the RCNBF operates in a very small but specialized space among hundreds of other nonprofits and charities.

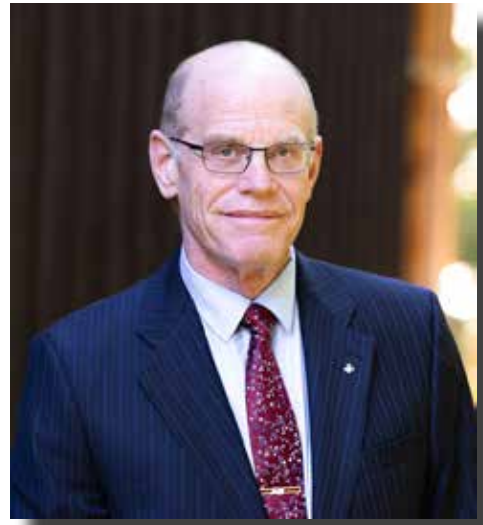
Nevertheless, the naval community clearly senses a requirement for supports that reflect the particular needs of naval veterans, serving members and their families. Accordingly, those consulted implored the RCNBF to find ways to continue supporting individuals with financial needs and provide the means for Command Teams to aid members experiencing difficulties. The report also found that the Fund's recent practice of seeking out strategic partnerships to support groups that help our client base provides a multiplier effect, effectively impacting more people each year.

The needs assessment project confirmed much of what the Fund members knew anecdotally, provided new ideas for programming, and opened doors to potential partnerships for future collaboration. Most of all, it has set the Fund on a firm footing to move forward with change – always a daunting task but rewarding in its revitalizing and stimulating effects.

Thank you to all the volunteers and partners who provided input. We hope you see your comments reflected in the report. A special note of thanks to RCN Leadership for providing an opportunity for serving members to have their say as well. Stay tuned for the next round of programs and a more closely connected RCNBF.

Yours, aye!

Tom Riefesel, President



Tom Riefesel, MMM, CD
President

1. INTRODUCTION

The Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF) has a long tradition of helping members of the Royal Canadian Navy since its inception in 1942. Over time, it diversified its client base to include serving and former members and their families. As a result, the RCNBF has assisted over 42,000 people and disbursed over 21 million dollars.

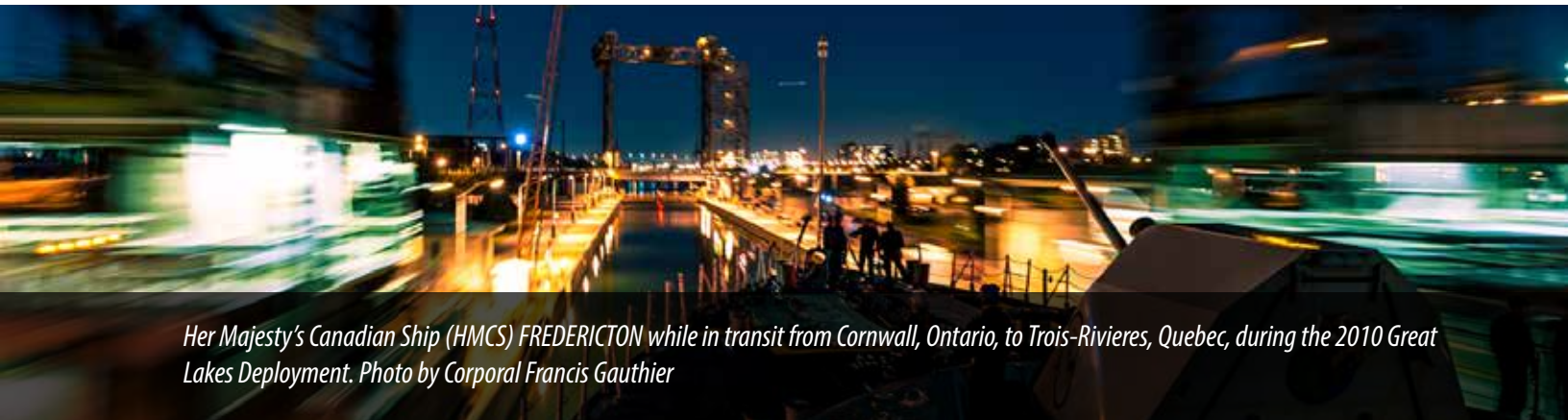
To ensure that the organization's efforts remain relevant and impactful, the organization produced the Strategy for Renewal 2021-2024, in which it identifies four areas of focus:

- an inspired and engaged community of support,
- relevant and valued programs,
- resilience and capacity for lasting impact, and
- strategic leadership and action.

The RCNBF Programming Needs Assessment & Program Development Project (Needs Assessment) centres on the second area of focus – *creating relevant and valued programs*. The intent is to assess and understand the current suite of RCNBF programs, identify emerging needs of target audiences and potential gaps in service, and formulate recommendations for relevant, effective programs that achieve community impact. At its conclusion, this project will result in recommendations that:

- identify potential services and programs as well as delivery mechanisms better attuned to our naval family's actual and evolving needs, including those not currently addressed by the military support community,
- identify barriers to program access,
- suggest strategies that mitigate the barriers,
- identify opportunities for collaboration to achieve a more significant and more lasting community impact, and
- suggest ways to extend the organization's reach for programming purposes.

Ultimately, the RCNBF must be able to tell a compelling story about what it offers and the value it brings. It must craft a simple proposition that donors, partners, and participants can readily appreciate and support. To chart a meaningful way forward, the RCNBF must articulate “what” it is doing before



Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) FREDERICTON while in transit from Cornwall, Ontario, to Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, during the 2010 Great Lakes Deployment. Photo by Corporal Francis Gauthier

identifying “how” to do it. This begins by identifying programming that matters – a direct intended outcome of this initiative.

2. CONTEXT: HOW THE RCNBF HAS OPERATED TO DATE

The RCNBF has historically received cases for support through referrals from partner organizations such as the Legion branches, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) via Support our Troops (SOT) and the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP). In recent decades, the RCNBF has become a resource that makes up for the shortfall when other services (government and other organizations) cannot meet the financial demand for help or a client in need does not meet the criteria. While it was the first stop for support in its early years, the RCNBF became a support to other organizations after the Government of Canada/ Canadian Armed Forces/Veteran Affairs Canada (GoC/CAF/VAC) developed an increasingly broad array of services and supports. As a result, the organization became an important supplement to existing services and, in many cases, a resource of last resort.

Until 2021, the RCNBF served naval veterans, serving members and their families (including other CAF branches who served in a maritime capacity) through the following services:

- Individual grants to relieve financial distress.
- Interest-free loans.
- Educational supports.
- The Vice-Admiral Mark Norman Leadership Award (VAMNLA) (since 2020).

In 2021, the Fund undertook a comprehensive review of programs as demand for grants and bursaries had steeply declined. The loan program experienced a high attrition rate and was costly to manage. The resulting report provided the impetus for this Needs Assessment project. In the meantime, the board of directors made critical decisions as follows:

- Forgive all outstanding loans and discontinue the practice.
- Review educational funding and continue under new guidelines.
- Continue individual grants but streamline the process.
- Pursue the VAMNLA.

As the Needs Assessment project got underway, the board of directors recognized that an interim suite of programs was necessary. A bridging strategy, developed by an internal Program Planning and Review Committee (PPRC), provides support until the Needs Assessment project outcomes offer direction for the next steps. In 2022-23, the RCNBF rolled out the following:

- *Community Support Program* contributes to military-serving organizations that address issues affecting naval veterans, serving members and families.
- *Capital contributions* to support projects that address issues affecting naval veterans, serving members and families. In 2022 and 2023, the fund supported homeless veterans (Homes for Heroes) and the national commemorative monument honouring naval Reservists during their 100th anniversary.

- *Individual support* through partner organizations such as RCL, VAC, and SOT. Notably, this funding eliminated double verification of cases by both the partner and the RCNBF and entrusted the partner organization with the tasks associated with intake and verification.

Self-examination, research, evaluation of the bridging strategy, and, most importantly, inputs and insights provided by volunteers and partners who participated in the Needs Assessment project will determine the next generation of RCNBF programs.

3. METHODOLOGY

The RCNBF Needs Assessment project builds upon previous work associated with the 2021 RCNBF Situational Report¹ and feedback received through subsequent surveys and town hall events with members. As part of its research and discovery phase, the Needs Assessment project consists of a literature review and consultations conducted with key informant groups.

ASTECC Inc., an Ottawa-based company with over twenty years of experience in qualitative and quantitative research, led and conducted further consultations to obtain stakeholder insights and suggestions. *ideaConnect Marketing and Communications* undertook a comprehensive literature review of existing services provided to CAF members, veterans, and their families and potential service gaps. Both companies collaborated to develop the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations. RCNBF staff provided background information, alerted stakeholders about the need to support the initiative, and provided contact leads and contact information for key informants and focus group participants.

Literature Review

The literature review was conducted through a search of websites and document information associated with Canadian military support. This included federal departments responsible for naval members and veterans, as well as not-for-profit and charitable organizations that provide support services, at least in part, for the Canadian military and their families. Programs, benefits, and services offered directly by the Department of National Defence were excluded from this list as they constituted activities associated with the employer-employee relationship. The companion document, *Needs Assessment Project: Literature Review*², provides detailed information and support for the literature review findings. Any omissions are unintentional.

Stakeholder Consultations

Focus groups included a 90-minute session with Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) representatives consisting of eighteen serving personnel and two organizers and a 60-minute session with RCNBF Program Planning and Review Committee members. In addition, the RCNBF Board of Directors were interviewed individually. Twenty-one individuals participated in 30-minute key informant interviews with the lead consultant, and thirteen people responded to an online survey.

1 Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, *RCNBF Situational Report*, October 2021

2 Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, *Needs Assessment Project: Literature Review*, March 23, 2023.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS

A literature review, undertaken January – March 2023, lists organizations in Canada that offer services and support to the naval community, the type of support and the extent/impact of that support (where available). These results provide valuable intelligence against which the consultants could validate the degree of service support gaps identified through the consultation process and analyze the findings.

4.1 Community Scope

To better understand the extent to which support services are required, it is essential to appreciate the current scope and context of Canada's military community. For example, the 2021 Statistics Canada Census³ found that:

- 97,625 Canadians served in the CAF, and 461,240 were counted as veterans.
- Currently serving CAF personnel were younger on average (36.2 years old) than the employed population overall (41.9), and almost one in five were women older than their male counterparts.
- While more than 4 in 10 veterans were seniors 65 and older, almost one-third were in the core working age group of 25 to 54.
- Ontario (35.4%) and Quebec (20.2%) had the highest share of currently serving military personnel.
- Belleville–Quinte West and Kingston had the largest share of military personnel among Canada's census metropolitan areas, given that they are both near military bases.

Within the CAF, the RCN indicates having approximately 8,400 Regular Force personnel, 4,100 Reservists and 3,800 civilian employees⁴.

Of the 461,240 Canadian veterans identified in the 2021 census, Statistics Canada⁵ indicates:

- Almost one-third (32.0%) of all veterans enumerated were in the core working-age group (25 to 54 years).
- More than 4 in 10 (41.8%) Canadians who reported being a veteran in the census were 65 years or older, while 33,420 veterans were aged 85 and older.
- 3.6% of Canadians who reported being a veteran were living in a collective dwelling, compared with 2.1% of the total population aged 17 or older. Most (93.6%) of these veterans also lived in a health care or related facility.
- Veterans represented 1.5% of the total population 17 years or older. The census metropolitan areas of Belleville–Quinte West (4.5%), Halifax (4.4%), Kingston (4.0%), Fredericton (3.8%) and Saint John (3.5%) had the highest share of veterans among the total population aged 17 or older.

3 Statistics Canada, *On guard for thee: serving in the Canadian Armed Forces (2021)*, Released: 2022-07-13, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220713/dq220713c-eng.htm>

4 <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy.html>

5 Statistics Canada, *Our Veterans' stories told in numbers*, November 10, 2022, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/2233-our-veterans-stories-told-numbers>

- Almost one in six (16.2%) or around 75,000 veterans were women. Female veterans' average age was lower than their male counterparts (59.1 years and 61.7 years, respectively). As a result, 43.7% of male veterans were 65 or older, compared with just under a third (32.3%) of female veterans.

Regarding the state of military families, the True Patriot Love⁶ Foundation indicates:

- Over 600,000 veterans and their families currently live in Canada, many of whom are impacted by challenges related to transitioning to civilian life.
- 2,500 military personnel are medically released annually, with approximately 700 spouses and 900 children also impacted.
- 60% of medically released military personnel have permanent physical limitations.
- Children from military families experience double the rate of mental health issues compared to children from civilian families.
- Behavioural disorders increased by 19%, and stress disorders increased by 18% in children between the ages of 3-8 years when a military parent was deployed.
- Children from military families experience 2X the rate of mental health issues compared to civilian families.
- 80% of regular force members have a civilian partner.
- 39% of veterans report difficulty in adjusting to civilian life.
- 41% of Canadian Armed Forces personnel who are medically released suffer from mental health injury or illness.
- An estimated 10% of veterans will experience Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) in their lifetime.
- 57% of veterans have reported a decline in mental health functioning compared to before the pandemic.
- The risk of suicide in both the male and female veteran population is higher than that of the general population.
- Of military personnel who are medically released, 60% have permanent physical limitations, and 42% suffer musculoskeletal injuries.

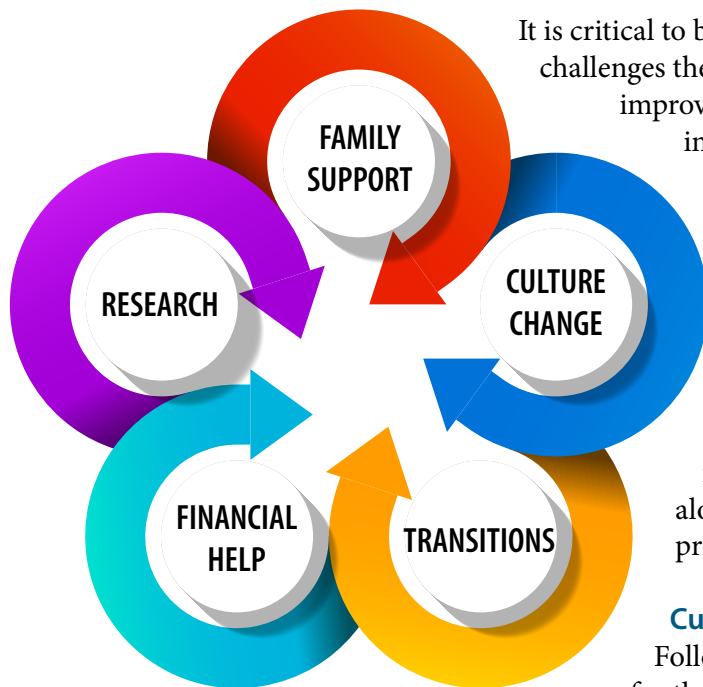
4.2 Service and Support – Improvements Needed

A cursory review of recent publications and reports suggests several areas where additional work could be undertaken to improve services to those in the military and their families:

Family Support

Families play a significant role in supporting military members. Unfortunately, this responsibility can have tremendous impacts on family members who often need increased access to support in their own rights and that reflects their unique circumstances.

6 True Patriot Love, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://truepatriotlove.com/why-we-need-you/> and <https://truepatriotlove.com/content/uploads/2022/01/TPL-Impact-Report-2021-8.5-x-11-in.pdf>



It is critical to better support families through the numerous challenges they face, such as frequent relocations, by improving service and program alignment, increasing awareness of supports, implementing a holistic client approach, and improving service availability.

Children and youth in military families use mental health services differently from the general population. Advocates stress the need for provincial policies to increase access to mental health specialists for children and youth in military families, alongside targeted federal services and programming through military organizations.

Culture Change

Following multiple scandals and issues reported for the Canadian Armed Forces in recent years and inquiries that revealed deficiencies within the military

culture, several reports underscore recommendations for improvements. Examples include making it acceptable and accessible to ask for help at all levels, eliminating the stigma attached to seeking assistance, and providing more assistance programs in all forms.

As in the rest of the CAF, military culture has impacted the RCN. Over time, it is felt that improvements to the cultural realities of the RCN will help mitigate the many emerging issues faced by sailors and their families that ultimately become the purview of support organizations. Improvements will also lessen implications for the RCN itself. For example, the RCN faces personnel shortages. In acting to attract a new generation of sailors and retain experienced personnel, the Navy is reviewing which jobs are critical, ways to avoid burnout and additional stress, and the means to transform the military's culture and make it more attractive as a workplace.

Transitions

Various reports deal with transitions, including leaving the military, relocation, injury, etc. For veterans, the perceived loss of military life and associated camaraderie are significant. Therefore, increased support for military-to-civilian life transitions, especially for medically released veterans, would be helpful. In the case of families, most are resilient and manage transition challenges successfully – only a small percentage struggle. However, for those who struggle, access to systems of care and supports could enhance their resilience to manage these transitional challenges.

Financial Help

Military individuals and families face many of the same financial stressors as civilians. Still, they also experience additional military-specific financial stressors and risk factors related to relocation, non-military spousal employment, deployment and integration, transitions and significant life events, and marital stress.

Research

Research on resilience to adversity/stress in the RCN is limited. The material suggests that more study is required to account for the unique experiences of Navy personnel and the need to consider a broad range of risk and resilience factors. Maximizing these resilience factors and reducing these risk factors is thought to enhance mental health and well-being among Navy personnel.

4.3 Existing Program Review Findings

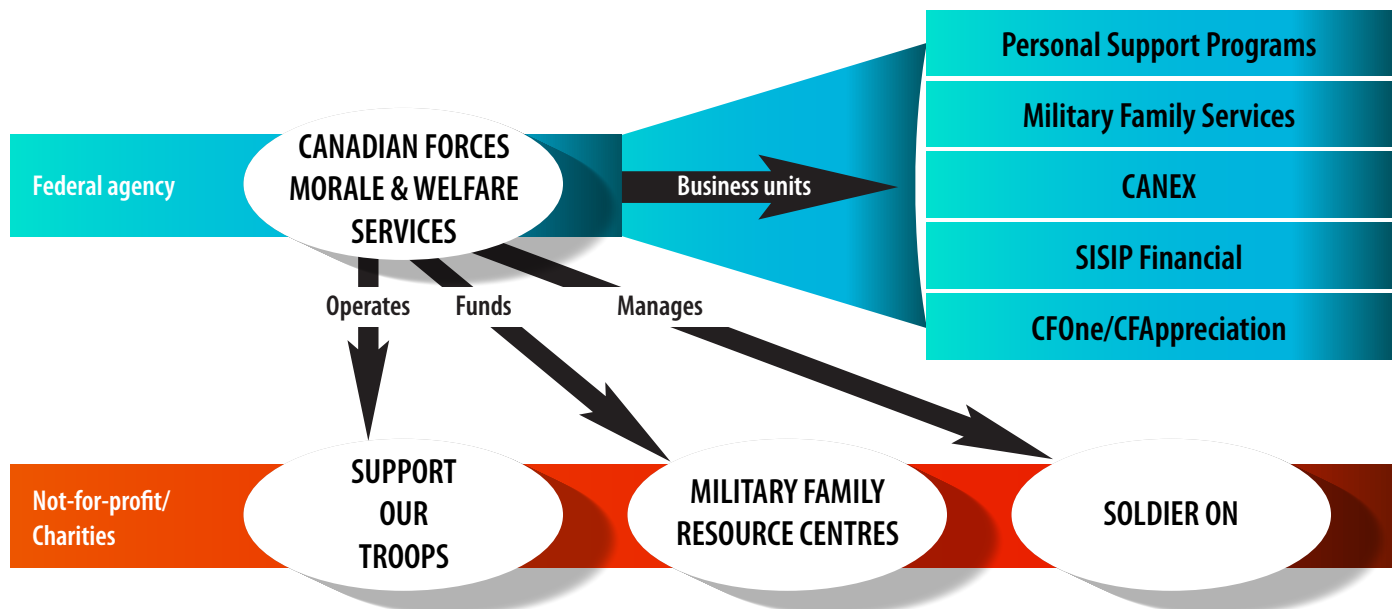
This literature review identified many organizations that provide various services and programs to military members and their families. Several themes have emerged from these findings.

Support Geared toward the Canadian Military as a Whole

Almost all support has been designed for the entire Canadian military rather than for distinct branches, with only a few, like the RCNBF, catering to naval members. This approach may overlook any specific circumstances and realities naval members experience, such as sailors being out of contact with family members and others for significant periods while deployed.

Several Linkages and Integration

A few organizations are closely linked and provide integrated support services and programs. For example, Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs) are arm's-length, independent charities that receive funding from the CFMWS and are integrated within the CFMWS website. The MFRCs in Halifax and Esquimalt are located on the naval bases, providing a close connection to RCN families.



Performance Measurement

Only government or larger not-for-profit organizations shared the impacts of their efforts online, and most of those employed performance measures relating to dollars spent and/or numbers of people using their services. As a result, there were no clear indicators relating to the longer-term efficacy of their efforts. Additionally, because many organizations are connected as either funders, service providers, or both, the risk of “double counting” the number of people using the services exists.

Several “Niche” Organizations

While some organizations offer a multitude of services, many could be grouped into providing “niche” activities and programs related to:

- Mental Health (including post-traumatic stress disorder and operational stress injury)
- Military to civilian transitions
- Remembrance
- Military families
- Housing
- Camaraderie
- Advocacy and information
- Financial
- Support Animals

5. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Fifty-seven stakeholders were consulted through focus groups, key informant interviews or surveys. These methods were designed to indicate respondents’:

- Background and perspective from which they would be responding.
- Perception of the service landscape for the CAF.
- Knowledge of the RCNBF and its service offerings.
- Ideas regarding service gaps that the RCBNF could fill.
- Suggestions, comments, and observations.
- Thoughts on the RCNBF’s role and what would be lost if the RCNBF ceased to exist.

5.1 Key Informants’ Backgrounds

It was encouraging to receive valuable input from RCN serving members, who offered their frank insights into the Navy’s current issues. Veterans often had the most understanding regarding the organization’s history, including those who might have accessed it previously. In addition, the current RCNBF board of directors (Board), volunteers, and staff were eager to contribute and offered a wide range of insights. Partner organizations playing a pivotal role in the ongoing work of the RCNBF additionally contributed their valuable perspectives.

5.2 Service Landscape for the CAF

Informants provided their understanding regarding available programs and services for the CAF:

- Generally, serving members are referred to SISIP for financial help and counselling.
- The Royal Canadian Chaplain Service (RCCS) is a critical partner in aiding all CAF members. Its proactive approach looks at the root cause rather than quick fixes.
- Chaplains have their own discretionary funds and access to hampers programs, the Poppy Fund, and Together We Stand (TWS) emergency funds for families (a portion of TWS funds destined

to support naval personnel and their families comes from the RCNBF). A key informant stated that 16% of RCCS activities supported the Navy.

- The Legions' role appears to be evolving, as does that of other organizations that provided input. The Legion key informants stressed that applications for help are increasing, especially around mental health issues. They recognized that although many organizations and programs are available, there are still gaps. They supported the idea of partnerships, especially with organizations directly impacting sailors and their families.

Informants also identified issues that could directly influence future RCNBF programming and services:

- Better service access for coastal areas is needed.
- Naval personnel are posted in expensive regions of the country (Victoria, Ottawa, Halifax).
- Affordability has become more significant than other issues (mental health, childcare, etc.).
- Sailors may be reticent to ask for help.
- It is challenging to access supports because many receive a salary “on paper” but not in reality due to paying spousal support, large mortgage, etc.
- Military service puts a strain on such situations.
- There is a need to circulate information better/provide educational guidance/support application processes.
- Some need help to find organizations to help in unique circumstances that do not fit standard support criteria.
- Transition centres have unique insights to connect people.
- Sailors are closely committed to the sacrifice of military life.
- Families also make sacrifices.
- The RCN is broader than only those who go to sea.
- The circle needs to be more inclusive – to access services, the definition of a family needs to change in organizations to include a description of extended families.
- Rebranding and removing the word “benevolent” eliminates the stigma associated with receiving charity.
- Sailors come and go more than in other branches of the military.
- It is easier to deploy than be the ones left behind.

5.3 Knowledge Regarding the RCNBF and its Services

General Organizational Awareness

Numerous informants did not know about the RCNBF and its services, including many serving members and some veterans. For the most part, the organization was familiar to veterans who served many years ago, past and current Board members, and partner organizations collaborating with the RCNBF. Even some Board members professed a lack of familiarity with the RCNBF before they joined the Board. One shared that they had “only moved from unawareness to awareness while in command positions and when help for a subordinate was required.” Another Board member referred

to pre-unification (1968) when every sailor knew about the RCNBF because they made a monthly contribution from their pay, and it was widely regarded as a first source of support. One informant became aware of the organization through facilitating support from another fund, and one serving officer learned a little about the RCNBF when being solicited to donate by a Board member. However, this key informant had become somewhat disillusioned when they could not obtain “just in time” help for a colleague in need. Only three members of the RCN focus group had a slight knowledge of the RCNBF, with the rest having none.

And, although a few service providers such as SOT, SISIP, the Legion, and VAC are familiar with the RCNBF, there have been long periods where little or no knowledge of the organization existed within the community it was established to help. This has significant implications for its role in the future.

Awareness of RCNBF Programs and Services

Due to a lack of familiarity with the RCNBF, insights from informants into the programs and services the organization currently provides were limited. However, all key informants mentioned the importance of the RCNBF being specifically for the Navy, which should never be overlooked – although few articulated why this is important and what programs and services are specifically required for the naval family.

Did You Know?

The RCNBF began as a first-stop support for RCN members in its early years, and before unification, sailors saw the RCNBF as a pseudo-insurance policy for needs that might come in their later years. The Navy provided the organization with offices and collected donations directly from serving members on behalf of the RCNBF. This direct relationship eventually faded as CAF members began accessing services through CFMWS and VAC. There has been increasing distance with the Navy and sailors over the years as the RCNBF moved to a position of last-resort supports. The *Needs Assessment Project: Literature Review* illustrates how extensive the existing support network is, although not always well-known or accessible.

Some informants shared examples regarding past programs and services:

- In-need clients were sent to the Legion for help, and at times the Legion sent a request to the RCNBF for funding. As a result, all parties engaged in verification activities and application evaluation, creating duplication of tasks and somewhat invasive investigations regarding clients.
- Clients exhausting every avenue of help from SISIP could receive a loan from RCNBF as a last-ditch effort. While this support was intended to relieve stress, it often created more tension as these clients struggled to repay the RCNBF loan resulting in a high default rate. Additionally, managing the loans was cost-prohibitive for the RCNBF.
- Many familiar with the RCNBF from the past spoke about it being “the last chance” fund for sailors and their dependents.

Current staff and Board members discussed the new direction around increased partnerships with other agencies. As mentioned, recent temporary programs have been established that leverage partners’ work through RCNBF grants to directly help naval veterans, serving RCN members and

their respective families. Key informants who were familiar with RCNBF largely supported this transition. However, it was felt that the organization had been underutilized for the past few years, and its activities resulted in too little impact.

Although the RCNBF historically always dispersed funds based on referrals from other organizations, some key informants suggested that the loss of perceived “direct delivery” distanced the organization from the naval family it intended to serve. Others thought that the RCNBF was losing its identity and the Navy was losing its dedicated source of relief. Conversely, some felt that the current direction was positive because it allowed the RCNBF to support its target audience in a timely and cost-effective manner and would serve more significant numbers of people.

5.4 *Desired RCNBF Services*

Throughout the consultations, informants shared numerous “issues” that might provide the impetus for new support and services for the naval family. At the same time, they had difficulty articulating what form these supports should take and if the RCNBF is best positioned to offer the most significant impact.

Key informants consistently expressed the concepts of belonging to the “naval family,” “the Navy looks after its own,” and “putting the RCN back into the RCNBF.” According to many key informants, this naval family is perceived as being distinct and having different needs than other CAF branches, citing posting locations, the size of the Navy related to other CAF branches, the higher degree of isolation during deployment, and relocation and transition challenges that differ from those of other service branches.

Almost all key informants held the view that the RCNBF should be a vital source of support to naval personnel, veterans, and their families, although there were some differences in how this should be realized:

- A few felt that the organization had lost its way and was no longer functioning to meet the needs of its clients – though whether this perceived drift applied over the past few years or decades varied by the respondent.
- A few felt that providing indirect services (through referrals) made it difficult for those in need to access help discretely and quickly. Others thought the RCNBF should refrain from dealing directly with clients as, at one time, it had started “giving money away for the wrong reasons.”
- Significantly more key informants believed that the RCNBF is a vital part of a safety net for naval veterans, serving members and their families. Further, they felt the current practice of

Did You Know?

In 2022-23, the RCNBF implemented bridging programs to provide support until new programs stemming from this Needs Assessment project could be implemented. The temporary programs, including the *RCNBF Community Support Program* and *Contributions to Capital Projects*, provide funds to eligible organizations that support clients directly linked to the RCN. Current activities include support for:

- Families with special needs (SOT)
- Sports equipment for naval personnel recovering from injury (Soldier On)
- Operation Emergency Fund Support (for naval families via Together We Stand)
- National Naval Reserve Monument Revitalization
- V/Adm Mark Norman Leadership Award
- Building a home in the Homes for Heroes Veterans Village in Kingston
- Financial support for individuals through referrals
- Educational bursaries

operating through partner agencies would enable it to meet the needs of more clients more effectively.

- Most felt that some form of individual relief should be maintained, especially for those who do not necessarily meet the criteria of larger organizations and therefore “fall between the cracks.” Several serving members suggested that the RCNBF website should maintain and provide links to partner agencies and, if possible, facilitate communications between agencies to simplify the process of accessing help.
- The RCN consultation advocated for Command Teams to have the capability to directly access RCNBF support for individuals under their command since they felt they were in a better position to validate needs rather than a third-party agency or padre.

5.5 Suggestions, Comments and Observations

Increased Demand for Help

Almost all key informants identified that the need for assistance is increasing and will continue to do so as a matter of affordability. Respondents identified the following areas that might require additional support:

- Mental health
- LGBTQ2s+
- Sports therapy
- Special needs children
- Daycare

NATO ships sail in formation during OP ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR.



- Overnight and weekend childcare support
- Spousal support (e.g., maternity, paternity, employment)
- Transition services
- Urgent needs

The literature review indicates that various organizations already offer many of these services.

Increased Competition among Service Providers

The multitude of programs identified in the literature review supports views expressed by some key informants that the RCNBF risks getting lost among so many offerings. On the other hand, the RCNBF is one of the few organizations dedicated to supporting the naval family and occupies a special position in providing assistance. Therefore, it was recommended that the RCNBF reconnect with the RCN, serving members, veterans, and partner agencies to re-establish its position as a source of help for RCN members and their families.

RCNBF Operational Advice

Key informants identified the need to promote the organization and develop a communications plan that includes the website and social media. They also advocated for increased fundraising efforts and engagement with the RCN and partner agencies to raise awareness and solidify relationships.

5.6 If the RCNBF Ceased to Exist

Ninety-four percent of key informants felt that if the RCNBF ceased to exist, it would be a significant loss to the naval family. It was thought that the history would be lost, the connection with the RCN would be lost, and the unique needs of sailors and their families would not be addressed. Many felt it extremely important that the organization maintain its naval connections and continue to use its resources to only support naval personnel and their families.

6. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the consultations, it became clear that most key informants, including some RCNBF members, did not fully comprehend the organization's core activities in recent years and could not articulate where future efforts should be specifically focused. At the same time, most expressed a strong desire for the RCNBF to continue as an organization that supports navy-specific needs and that it should reconnect and forge a strong relationship with the RCN. Also, there was almost complete support for the directions and services that the RCNBF has temporarily implemented – while some advocated for delivering direct help to those in need, a large majority of informants indicated that engaging with partner agencies to provide services was the way forward for the organization.

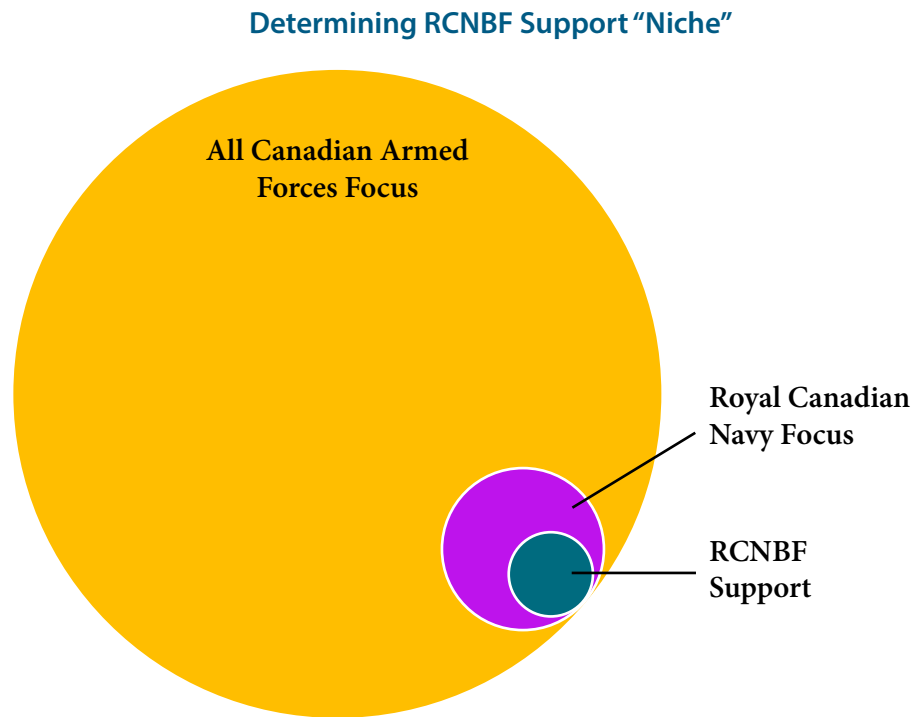
The literature review and consultations identified several areas where increased assistance could be beneficial, including mental health programs, general support for families, help with transitions, financial aid, and fostering culture change away from sexual misconduct and abuse of power. The literature review also demonstrated a wide range of programs and services available for military families to address these issues. The challenge remains for the RCNBF to determine how to optimize its resources for the naval family while leaving more fulsome systemic solutions regarding issues such

as mental health and affordability to larger institutions. In addition, the RCNBF must determine the “niche” it will occupy, given that it has limited resources and cannot realistically enhance ALL broader CAF services with a navy-specific focus.

Note that consultations did not identify the RCNBF bursaries and awards as important needs.

Because minimal research exists on needs for those in the naval family, conducting ongoing engagement and research with the RCN and key stakeholders would be valuable to determine naval support priorities that would fall within the RCNBF’s scope and mandate.

Several informants offered operational advice on “how” the RCNBF conducts its business, namely around communications and fundraising. Such planning has already been considered, but implementation would only occur once the organization determines “what” it is doing and the associated value proposition. This clarity will directly inform future impactful programming, the basis for meaningful communications, fundraising and engagement.



7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations align with the intended outcomes of the Needs Assessment project:

Proposed RCNBF Service, Program, and Delivery Mechanism Characteristics

- Based on the findings of this report, determine priority RCNBF programs/services to be developed and implemented in 2023/24.
- Maintain focus on the naval family.
- Evaluate the temporary Community Support Program to improve and develop it as a regular offering.
- Explore support delivery mechanisms to serving members through Command Teams.

- Identify and provide delivery mechanisms for other individual supports through partners.
- Continually engage with key stakeholders and the RCN to identify emerging/diminishing needs falling within the RCNBF scope and mandate.
- Annually evaluate and revisit programs to determine additional priority areas of support.

Strategies that Mitigate Barriers to Program Access

- Identify, develop, and promote RCNBF programs and services with a clear value proposition that inspires participant, partner, and funding support.
- Rebrand the organization to remove the stigma associated with asking for help, such as the use of the word “benevolent” in the name that is synonymous with charity.
- Leverage partners to promote RCNBF programs and services.
- Stay abreast of trends and connect with stakeholders effectively.
- Provide links to other/existing services on the RCNBF website.

Opportunities for Collaboration to Achieve Greater Impact

- Continue to develop relationships with RCN leadership and Command Teams to build strong naval connections.
- Develop a strategic partnership policy to create partnerships aligned with RCNBF principles and better leverage resources, providing further support to more people in the naval family.



Extending the RCNBF's Programming Reach

- Dedicate additional internal resources towards developing partnerships and attracting funders.
- Equip the RCNBF to promote activities, attract funders, and establish programming partnerships.



*Northern lights flare above HMCS HARRY DEWOLF during Cold Weather Trials near Frobisher Bay on February 21, 2021.
Photo by Corporal David Veldman*

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Her Majesty's Canadian Submarine (HMCS) WINDSOR transits Halifax Harbour, with George's Island in the background, in preparation for the Canadian Leaders at Sea (CLaS) Program, on 14 December 2017 in Halifax, NS. Photo by Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class Shawn M. Kent