

Supporting Seafarers 2007

The report of the conference

1. THE CONTEXT

Supporting Seafarers 2007 brought together 75 maritime charities and organisations to consider the findings of the research programme on the needs of the UK seafaring community.

The conference launched the summary report of the research findings and conclusions 'Supporting seafarers and their families: challenges for the future.' That report is available in hard copy from the merchant Navy Welfare Board and Seafarers UK and as a PDF at www.mnwb.org/supporting-seafarers-2007.php where the full reports, from which the summary was drawn, are also available as PDFs.

The research programme demonstrated substantial potential unmet need in the UK seafaring community and that the overall number of people in potential need is not reducing as rapidly as the number of active UK seafarers. For example, the number of all potential beneficiaries associated with the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets is likely to be maintained for at least 20 years during which time the number of older seafarers and dependants associated with the Merchant Navy will increase.

The research identified unmet need related to:

- ★ poverty and debt, particularly among younger seafarers and their families and older seafarers and dependants reliant on state pensions
- ★ isolation
- ★ lack of information and advice
- ★ limited access to appropriate healthcare, including rehabilitation
- ★ lack of emotional and parenting support
- ★ limited access to appropriate housing for seafarers who are single.

Recommendations emphasised the value of preventative action, and in particular:

- ★ debt, money management and pensions advice
- ★ retraining and resettlement support after leaving the sea
- ★ health promotion and prevention initiatives.

Recommendations also emphasised the value of maritime charities working with other, specialist, organisations and in partnerships across the maritime sector. Collaboration was identified as a means to make better use of charity resources and of developing specialist services to better respond to needs.

2. THE CHARITY COMMISSION

Andrew Hind, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission reviewed and supported the research and the value of its findings and conclusions.

While endorsing the work of maritime charities he highlighted the challenges facing them and suggested that, to meet those effectively, trustees and staff will increasingly need to work in ways that make best use of resources.



“Your beneficiary group is extensive — nearly one and a half million people — and its needs are diverse. Your resources are finite and unlikely to be growing significantly anytime in the foreseeable future. The only realistic way you can more effectively tackle your users’ needs is by better collaboration and greater efficiency By working better with each other, developing partnership and collaborating more effectively with other charities and statutory agencies you have the opportunity to create the power of the multiplier”.

“Working together and creating partnerships to develop the responses needed — both in terms of service delivery and public policy — will probably be the single most effective thing you can do with the resources you have.”

“The Charity Commission is very clear about the fact that all charity trustees must ensure they are using their charity’s resources most effectively, sharing their knowledge most widely and delivering the best possible service to their beneficiaries. Collaborating with others is very often the best way for trustees to fulfil these responsibilities.”

He emphasised the value of the report to charities (and others) in extending support for seafarers and their families.

“This report differs from many others in a fundamental way. As well as highlighting the very real challenges that maritime charities face it also provides solutions. It doesn’t attempt to minimise the very different needs within the seafaring community as a whole and it doesn’t pretend that the picture it paints is complete or immutable. What it does is painstakingly address all the problems it has identified and provide concrete first steps for joined-up action. It is the best report of its kind I have seen and deserves to be well used and widely regarded”.

“This valuable report makes it clear just how much maritime charities do, but it doesn’t fight shy of showing how much more remains to be done. By working together and developing partnerships with other charities you have the strongest possible chance of maximising your significant potential. Only you know the difference this will make to then lives of your beneficiaries”.

3. DEVELOPING CHARITIES’ RESPONSES

Facilitated workshops provided structured opportunities for participants to consider the research findings and their implications for maritime charities.

a) Priority areas for charity responses

Many of the research findings were not surprising. They affirmed charities’ experiences and reinforced their concerns that potential unmet need exists. By highlighting the seafarers’ needs, the findings also added new perspectives and opportunity to develop new ways of working and new responses that can increase the range, quality and impact of support to meet seafarers’ needs.

Some charities were surprised at the similarity of needs across the three industry sectors and the evidence compiled by the research of shared experiences among seafarers and their families regardless of their association with the Merchant Navy, Naval Service or Fishing Fleets.

Conference participants supported the research recommendations for ‘preventative’ action by charities that may reduce the likelihood of some needs arising. There was particular support for the development of:

- ★ debt and money management advice and support for seafarers and their families to access Benefits and entitlements, including promotion of existing information and advice services (SBAL, ISAN and Citizens Advice)
- ★ steps to improve access to healthcare and rehabilitation
- ★ the development of preventative health initiatives
- ★ resettlement and retraining to support seafarers leaving maritime work
- ★ emotional support services and support for contact between seafarers and their families.

Charities endorsed recommendations for new ways of working to increase their ability to respond to needs.

Particular support was given to:

- ★ development of partnerships across maritime charities and with other organisations
- ★ the development of professional caseworking skills
- ★ introduction of assessment systems to enable clear and shared records of applicants' needs
- ★ improved communications — between maritime charities, with other organisations and with the seafaring community
- ★ steps to support trustee and volunteer contributions
- ★ re-branding the image of 'charity' to emphasise support rather than dependence.

Many participants wanted to consider the full reports of the research which are available at www.mnwb.org/supporting-seafarers-2007.php. Some participants wished to do so in relation to:

- ★ the needs of non UK seafarers visiting UK ports: this was addressed in part in the research on working age seafarers and much of which is dealt with by the ITF Seafarers' Trust report referred to below
- ★ the needs of older seafarers from minority ethnic communities
- ★ evidence of particular and different experiences and needs associated with the different industry sectors.

The MCFG research should be read alongside a recent study by SIRC, funded by the ITF Seafarers' Trust. The SIRC/ITF study, published on 19 June 2007, focuses on port based welfare services supporting working-age seafarers; and because of this, the MCFG research did not go into detail on port welfare provision. To read the SIRC/ITF summary report, see www.itfglobal.org/seafarers-trust/welfarept.cfm.

b) Practical help

The research focussed on documenting and understanding the needs of the seafaring community.

The conference workshops aimed to identify the implications of those needs for the work of charities.

Charities considered where they needed practical help to develop and deliver services in response to needs in the UK seafaring community.

In descending order of priority, the areas where charities wanted practical help to support development of their work are listed below.

- ★ Debt and Money advice services
- ★ Healthcare initiatives
- ★ Trustee roles
- ★ Charity legislation
- ★ Emotional support services
- ★ Volunteer support
- ★ Preventative health initiatives
- ★ Resettlement and retraining initiatives for those leaving work at sea
- ★ Services to support preparation for retirement
- ★ Housing advice for seafarers
- ★ Property management advice for charities
- ★ Parenting advice services
- ★ Support groups for seafarers and their families.

The first two priorities reflect the research findings about significant needs in the seafaring community. The next two address the importance which charities attach to making the most of trustee contributions and of charity status. Other priorities reflect research findings about both seafarer needs and charity needs, from help to provide emotional support services to help to support volunteers.

Other areas where practical help would be welcomed were discussed.

c) **Priorities for further work**

In workshops charities considered where more work should be developed to support their roles and activities and to identify the resources needed to develop their knowledge, skills and working methods rather than particular services. The following priorities (in descending order) for further work were identified.

- ★ Better publicity about charities for seafarers: support to improve the information about charities that reaches seafarers and their families
- ★ A directory of maritime charities: development and support for a comprehensive directory that is accessible on line as well as on paper
- ★ Updates and alerts for staff, trustees and volunteers: about national policies that impact on the lives of the seafaring community
- ★ Collection and provision, by statutory and other authorities, of information about the demographic profile of UK seafarers
- ★ Targeted research to collect and provide further information about the health of seafarers (and former seafarers)
- ★ Targeted research to collect and provide further information about the needs of minority ethnic seafarers (and former seafarers) living in the UK
- ★ Improved information to non maritime organisations: about seafaring and its impact on people's lives
- ★ Casework: support to develop effective caseworking systems and share expertise across charities
- ★ Assessment systems: shared development of appropriate systems to undertake and record assessments of applicants' needs
- ★ Grant making and decisions: shared systems, information and decisions across the sector
- ★ Eligibility criteria: review and refinement in the light of this and further research that defines length of careers at sea and evidence of hierarchies of need
- ★ Accreditation for charities: shared standards for various services and systems for review
- ★ For charities working with young people in maritime youth groups: targeted information resources to support training, ship visits and career development.

Areas where charities suggested that further work to support them was needed, and that are not described elsewhere in this report or the research, are set out below.

- ★ Ask referring agencies to provide information in a consistent way about the issues facing potential beneficiaries
- ★ Information sharing among maritime charities about what each does and what other, general, charities do
- ★ Volunteer training to common standards
- ★ Support for improved volunteer and trustee recruitment
- ★ Help for charities to access sources of public funding (EU, government)
- ★ Disseminate the report to relevant government departments
- ★ Opportunities to share the SIRC / ITF Seafarers' Trust research findings and consider action to address the needs of non UK seafarers visiting UK ports
- ★ Seminars to monitor progress against the research findings and recommendations
- ★ Guidelines for shared standards in similar services
- ★ Develop links between caseworkers and SBAL
- ★ Action to reduce the regulatory bureaucracy for charities, especially for those working in more than one nation of the UK
- ★ Support for mutual recognition of seafaring qualifications and training across the different industry sectors.

d) Informing practice

Charities' experiences informed discussions about how to develop effective responses of the research findings. A range of suggestions for action included the following points.

- ★ Publicity about charities should be clear and targeted to media used by seafarers and their families. ISAN and SBAL should be extended to reach more people. Information should also be accessible from websites, general and maritime organisations. Coordination and collaboration to produce good publicity will be important and the value of sector specific leads or umbrella organisations should be considered as one way of achieving this. Care should be taken in using the term 'charity' in order to make clear the 'support' available to seafarers and their families
- ★ A coordinated directory of all maritime charities is an important resource for maritime and other organisations. This will be of most value if available in paper and electronic formats, with interactive search facilities that support search by name, need and geographical area, and linked to individual charity websites. The responsibility for updating should be shared with charities listed
- ★ Information updates and alerts are needed for staff and trustees. They should be carefully targeted to balance wide circulation and 'a need to know'.
- ★ Improved information is needed to increase awareness of needs in the seafaring community among non maritime organisations. This requires coordination and carefully targeted work that can reach leaders and advocates for seafarers. Electronic formats are increasingly needed.
- ★ Support to develop effective caseworking requires collaboration to create a flexible system that can respond to particular charity interests while supporting confidentiality and shared action in response to applicants' needs. Caseworkers will need to be better trained, and have specialised skills relevant to work with children, older people or vulnerable adults. If possible their skills should be accredited.
- ★ Information that can build on the research and regularly update demographic profiles and understanding of needs in the community is important. Opportunities to use existing research and data collection (in public and voluntary services, maritime and other charities) should be maximised and information collected made accessible on a website
- ★ For young people the importance of developing sea going experience requires links with UK ship owners as well as the Naval Service as well as action to address and manage health and safety issues.

4. NEXT STEPS

The research programme provides clear evidence of the nature and scale of need in the seafaring community. The conference indicates where charities would most welcome practical help and further work to develop their responses. Together the research and the conference create an agenda for action to support the development of maritime charities' work.

The MCFG is committed to supporting charities in their response to the research and taking the agenda for action forward.

Involving each charity in that work will be important and a new system of working groups will be developed to encompass charities within each industry sector. These new groups will help share experience and skills and make the most of resources.

The conference showed where charities need practical help to apply the research and an initial programme of work has been outlined to provide the following resources.

- ★ A range of demonstration / pilot projects that test models for service development. Projects may include the provision of debt advice, health rehabilitation and emotional support services
- ★ Development projects that encourage and support new ways of working, starting with caseworking, and approaches to services, in particular extended information and advice services for seafarers and the organisations that work with them
- ★ Targeted research projects, initially the health needs of working seafarers (and effective responses) and the needs of minority ethnic seafarers resident in the UK

- ✦ Information and support for skills development in charities, through systems to share information and develop skills
- ✦ A communications programme to increase awareness of seafaring among general organisations that may respond to needs in the seafaring community
- ✦ A review of MCFG members' grants policies and practices so that charity responses to the research and conference conclusions are supported.

A programme manager: supporting seafarers' and their families, has been appointed by the MCFG, and will take up her post in October 2007. She will oversee the programme and work with maritime charities to ensure that resources are used to best effect.

Many charities have suggested that regular reviews of progress and updates on good practice will be important and further 'Supporting Seafarers' conferences will be planned as well as smaller events focused on particular areas of service development.

MCFG, August 2007