

Team UK Invictus Games Programme Summary Evaluation Report

November 2025

By M·E·L Research

INVICTUS GAMES
VANCOUVER • WHISTLER 2025
ATCO BOEING
FEB · FÉV 8-16 2025



m·e·l
research



Table of Contents

About the Invictus Games	3
--------------------------	---

About the Team UK Invictus Games programme	4
--	---

About the evaluation	5
----------------------	---

Who we spoke to	6
-----------------	---

Findings at a glance	7
----------------------	---

Part 1: Pre selection - Discover and Engage Phases	9
---	----------

Part 2: Preparation - Progress Phase	11
---	-----------

Part 3: Games time - Propel stage	13
--	-----------

Part 4: The impact	15
---------------------------	-----------

Factors that led to changes	18
-----------------------------	----

M·E·L Research's Armed Forces community Research Experience	21
---	----

About the Invictus Games

The Invictus Games is an international multi-sport event for wounded, injured and sick servicemen and servicewomen, both Serving personnel and veterans.

The Invictus Games acts as a crucial part of recovery journeys for many from the Armed Forces community and aims to positively focus on what they can achieve post injury or illness, celebrating their fighting spirit, though an inclusive sporting competition that recognises the sacrifice they have made.

It uses the power of sport to inspire recovery and support rehabilitation.

The Duke of Sussex was inspired to create the Invictus Games after visiting the Warrior Games in America 2013. The first Invictus Games took place in London in 2014 and was followed by games in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022 and 2023.

For 2025, the Invictus Games Vancouver-Whistler brought together over 500 competitors from 20 nations to compete in a series of adaptive sports.



About the Team UK Invictus Games 2025 Programme

RBL has independently supported Team UK since the 2023 Invictus Games in Dusseldorf. For Vancouver-Whistler 2025, the programme ran over 18-24 months using a four-stage approach—Discover, Engage, Progress, Propel—forming the core recovery pathway and enabling tailored work with veterans and Serving personnel.

The Discover phase began with expressions of interest and applications. Those who advanced, were invited to the Engage phase, attended other RBL recovery programmes and training camps. The Progress phase focused on the final selected Team UK competitors, including structured training camps and the Family & Friends programme. The final Propel phase covered Games time, post-Games support, and the Homecoming event.

RBL supported Invictus Games 2025 Team UK competitors and their family and friends, through the Games process, which consisted of:



Facilitated training camps and coaching for each of the Invictus sports.



Supported those not selected and offering other recovery opportunities.



Delivered Team UK to the Games and supported them throughout.



Provided access to a range of RBL support i.e. holistic wellbeing



Delivered the friends and family programme.

About the evaluation

1

The mental and physical health of UK Armed Forces personnel and veterans is a significant concern that has grown in importance over time. The unique challenges they face during and after service—such as physical injury, combat exposure, deployment stress, and transitioning to civilian life—can deeply affect their wellbeing and that of their loved ones. These factors contribute to a higher prevalence of mental health issues in this community compared to the general population [1].

2

The Royal British Legion (RBL) has supported recovery through sport since the 1940s, beginning with work at Stoke Mandeville's National Spinal Injuries Unit. Today, the Battle Back Centre is central to the RBL Recovery Services Strategy, offering courses and support for serving personnel, veterans, and their family and friends. It plays a key role in many recovery journeys and serves as the home and training hub for the Team UK Invictus programme.

3

M·E·L Research was commissioned to independently evaluate RBL's support for Team UK Invictus Games 2025 competitors and their family and friends. The evaluation examined both the programme's impact on competitors and their close networks, and the journey experienced by all involved. The approach and research questions were co-designed with RBL delivery staff and competitors.

This is a summary version of a full evaluation report examining the process and impact of the Team UK Invictus Games programme. For more information, readers can contact RBL at recoveryService@britishlegion.org.uk.

[1] UK Armed Forces Mental Health: [Mental health support for the UK armed forces](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-armed-forces-mental-health) - GOV.UK



Who we spoke to

The evaluation factored in a period of co-design and used a mixed methods approach, collecting primary qualitative and quantitative data and analysing secondary data. For this evaluation we used traditional surveys, feedback forms, interviews and observational research, alongside more creative approach such as a graffiti wall, conversation trees, photo-elicitation, body mapping and video interviews.

Overall we spoke to:



56% of competitors n=36



55% of ambassadors n=6



70% of coaches & welfare staff n=16



60% of RBL support staff n=9

We are unable to say how many unique conversations were held with family and friends due to the nature of the creative qualitative methods used.

Findings at a glance

Sixty-four veterans and serving personnel (which included 4 Reserves) took part as competitors in the Team UK Invictus programme alongside 144 family and friends. They were supported by 37 coaches and welfare staff, 11 ambassadors and 15 RBL support staff. Key highlights uncovered by the evaluation found:



1

The programme's recovery-focused approach was highly valued, allowing competitors to participate without athletic expectations.

2

Structured phases (Discover, Engage, Progress, Propel) created clarity and efficiency, and limiting applicant numbers enabled tailored support.

3

Family and friends played a pivotal role in strengthening support networks and enriching the experience.

4

Reconnecting with the Armed Forces community fostered companionship and a renewed sense of purpose.



Findings at a glance continued

5

Flexible sport selection allowed competitors to personalise their journey, and participants who had competed in a previous games found meaning in supporting others and reflecting on their recovery.



6

Having family and friends present at the Games was crucial for recovery, helping bridge the gap between military and civilian life. International participation fostered resilience, encouraged ongoing involvement in sport, and created meaningful connections.



Respondents stressed the importance of continuing activity beyond the Games, with some finding new opportunities for engagement i.e. joining clubs, connecting with family and friends.



Part One

Pre selection - Discover and Engage Phases



m.e.l
research

1 A recovery-focused approach



The programme's recovery-focused approach was highly valued, enabling applicants to take part and participate without pressure or athletic expectations.



Recovery-based questions during the pre selection ensured a fair, needs-driven selection.



The structured phases - Discover, Engage, Progress, Propel - have improved clarity and efficiency, especially for staff - compared to previous approaches.



Limiting applicant numbers allowed engagement and tailored support to be provided.



Delivering activities in familiar settings like The Battle Back Centre eased anxiety and provided consistency, while individualised support made competitors feel valued.

“It wasn't about your ability. It's part of your recovery journey...so I think that was huge. I didn't actually have to go and perform.” (Competitor, veteran)



Part Two

Preparation - Progress Phase



2 Journeying together



Family and friends played a pivotal role, strengthening support networks and enriching the overall experience whilst they and competitors prepared for the Games.



Competitors appreciated the opportunity to reconnect with the Armed Forces community, fostering companionship and a renewed sense of purpose - which increased over the Propel phase.



A well-judged balance of challenging and rewarding activities encouraged competitors to step outside their comfort zones and rebuild confidence levels.



Coaches and staff were instrumental in sustaining engagement, while the flexible approach to sport selection enabled competitors to personalise their journey.



For competitors who had taken part in a previous Games, meaning was found in supporting others and reflecting on their own recovery process.

“For me it’s not necessarily about the games, but more about the people. This has enabled me to have a greater support network to help my recovery.” (Competitor, veteran)



A photograph of two male wheelchair basketball players in a gymnasium. They are wearing black jerseys with the 'RBL' logo and black shorts. They are sitting in their wheelchairs, holding red and white basketballs. The player on the left is wearing black knee pads and black socks with a yellow logo. The player on the right is wearing blue socks. The background shows wooden bleachers and a wooden floor. A semi-transparent geometric overlay is present in the center of the image.

Part three

Games time - Propel stage



m.e.l
research

3 More than medals



Having family and friends present during the Games was pivotal in recovery, strengthening support networks and bridging the gap between military and civilian life.



Participation in an international event fostered resilience, encouraged sustained involvement in sport, and created meaningful connections among competitors.



Respondents emphasised the importance of continuing activity beyond the Games, with some discovering new opportunities for engagement i.e. joining clubs, local activities etc.

“To be able to share this with family too has been amazing, and bridged some of the gap between military and civilian life.” (Competitor, veteran)

“Participating in the programme gave me a springboard...so even though the Games finished, that journey had already started me on the pathway to change.” (Competitor, veteran)



Part four

The impact

TEAM
UK



m.e.l
research

4 What changed for competitors?



Participation in the programme helped competitors to regain personal drive and focus, inspiring many to set new goals, routines, and long-term commitments.



Social connections were also strengthened, with competitors building relationships within the Armed Forces community, reducing isolation, and fostering mutual support.



The programme helped competitors develop resilience, self-confidence, and improved on their ability to bounce back from challenges.



Most importantly, many reclaimed their self-identity, redefining themselves beyond their injuries or service-related struggles, which contributed to a renewed sense of purpose and autonomy.



“Because without being selected for Team UK feeling the support from the Royal British Legion giving me back some confidence in my abilities and myself. I am not sure where I would be right now. I was in a spiral and in a bad place before.” (Competitor, veteran)

“It has given me a support network, I have met people with the same diagnosis as me so can talk to them. For me, it’s not necessarily about the event or sport, but the people you are with.” (Competitor, Serving personnel)

5 What changed for family and friends?



The family and friends programme helped to strengthen social bonds by fostering friendships and a sense of belonging, helping to create connections within the Armed Forces community - with hopes that this would be long term.



Many felt a deeper sense of pride—not just in their loved ones' achievements, but in their own personal journeys as well.



The programme also encouraged personal growth and self-discovery, helping them recognise their own strengths, resilience, and adaptability.

“This has given our family the purpose and motivation to push ourselves out of our comfort zone and we have enjoyed every second! It has given us all purpose and improved so many aspects of life.”

“Pride, learning, friendship, experience. It has taught me so much about myself.”



Factors that led to changes



m.e.l
research

Mechanisms of change

Based on the findings, M·E·L Research identified the key factors that needed to be present to lead to positive changes:

By  Led to



Including family and friends throughout the programme.

- Supported recovery.
- Reduced feelings of isolation and stress.
- Created a stronger emotional safety net.



Offering adaptive and inclusive sports.

- Aided self-discovery by encouraging participation in unfamiliar sports.
- Mindsets reframed.
- Helped overcome injury related fears.



Focusing on recovery rather just sport.

- Moved from medal-driven goals to enjoyment and experiences.
- Gained life skills beyond the sports.
- Trusted relationships developed enabling emotional openness and support seeking.



Activities with peers with lived experiences.

- Meaningful connections and bonds created.
- Those who had been to the Games before benefited from deeper team connections.



Allowing people to take part in two Game cycles.

- Helped competitors to become leaders and mentors.
- Helped build on and sustain the value the programme has brought to their lives.



Providing holistic wellbeing and recovery support.

- Safe spaces fostered comfort and engagement.
- Easy access to rehab, injury management and recovery services / guidance.

Empowering recovery, connection, and growth

Quotes from competitors and their family and friends

“What is important is the change you have to make in yourself as part of the process, it gives you the “building blocks” to continue the change outside of the programme.” (Competitor, veteran).

“It means a road to recovery and also you're gaining an extended family. So it's not just about yourselves. It's about me and everyone else and being one big whole family when you're out here.” (F&F).

“I thought it would really accelerate my physical recovery but actually it's had the greatest impact upon my mental wellbeing and that's been a real surprise.” (Competitor, Serving personnel).

“It's all about finding something to take forward as well, helping redefine my identity and make me a happier person.” (Competitor, veteran).



M·E·L Research's Armed Forces community research experience

Using evidence—rigorously and respectfully—to improve outcomes for veterans, serving personnel, and their families.

At M·E·L Research, we partner with charities, government and system stakeholders to understand what works, for whom, in what contexts across recovery, community development, family support, and employment. Our approach blends realist and empowerment evaluation, traumainformed practice, and participatory methods, so insights are robust, actionable and centred on lived experience.

The Team UK Invictus Games programme evaluation team:

Sophi Ducie
Senior
Evaluation Lead

Richard Newman
Research Executive

Skye Curtis-Guilhen
Evaluation and
Inclusive Practice
Consultant



Contact Us

Whether you're a public body, charity or organisation looking to understand your audience, evaluate impact, or inform future strategies, M·E·L Research is here to help:



+44 (0)121 604 4664



sophi.ducie@melresearch.co.uk



www.melresearch.co.uk