

# Arabella Scott on Military Life and Her Transition to Lead Nurse for Substance Use and Harm Reduction at Keys

## Can you share a little about your background in the Armed Forces and the role you had before joining Keys Group?

I spent 12 years in the British Army as an Emergency Care Specialist Nursing Officer in the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps. I've worked in across multiple NHS Emergency Departments, 3 major trauma centres, defence rehabilitation and deployed hospital settings. I was also responsible for the welfare and professional development of the military healthcare practitioners and soldiers and junior officers I worked with.

Following my medical discharge in 2024, I was excited but also slightly anxious, unsure of what the future might hold. I threw myself into as many opportunities as I could, including clinical and non-clinical consultancy roles, and undertook a Foundation Counselling course as well as Holotropic Breathwork modules with Grof Transpersonal Training. I trained and volunteered as a festival harm-reduction practitioner with PsyCare UK, and became involved with Heroic Hearts Project UK – who support veterans with mental health problems to access psychedelic and progressive therapies.

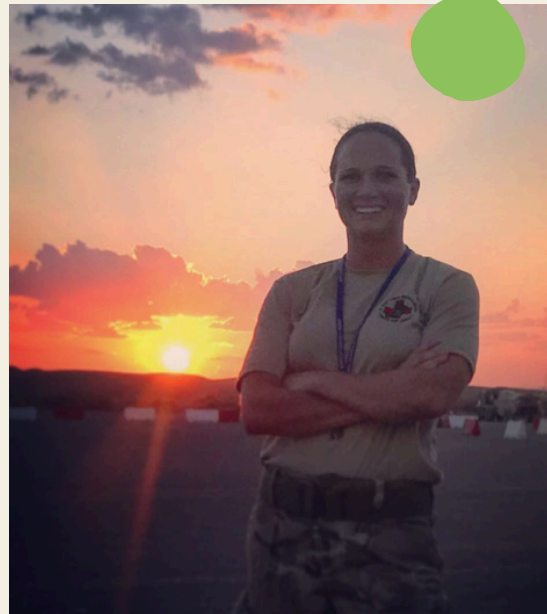


I also worked as a PIP Health Assessor, it was clear to me by this point our current systems misunderstand and fail to care properly for those who may have never truly felt safe or cared for in their life. By the time the Lead Nurse for Substance Use role at Keys came up, I knew I was ready for a new challenge.

In my personal life, I live in Sheffield with my partner Tim (also ex-military), step-son and our dog Leeloo. I love festivals, reading, writing, foreign cinema and science fiction. I'm also learning to play guitar, I sing and love to cook!

## What support helped you most during your move into this new role?

Leaving the military - or healthcare more broadly - can feel like stepping into the unknown. You move from a system where your role, identity and value are clearly defined to one where you have to reconstruct that for yourself. I was unhappy in my previous job and it felt rather serendipitous that Ash, a recruiter from Compass I had previously worked with before, reached out again with another opportunity, helping me translate my experience into a completely different sector and sensing a strong fit with the hiring manager, Diane Palmer, who had extensive previous experience of working with the military and NHS so understood the culture I was coming from.



The informal chat with Diane followed by a guaranteed interview as a veteran also really suited me as I'd much prefer the opportunity to chat to someone so we can sooner get a 'feel' for one another and gauge whether the fit was right- I felt listened to and could sense the passion and drive in the conversation around what the role would involve. I was invited for a formal interview which felt more comfortable as I had already had the chance to talk to someone. I was thrilled to get a call back to so quickly to confirm I had been successful, and not left to wait hanging as I had been for previous job applications. I accepted the offer - and haven't looked back!

Diane conducted a values and psychological safety session with me and other new starters in our team, which was a breath of fresh air- I feel incredibly fortunate that MY values are actively supported, not just acknowledged.

Alongside getting my feet under the table in my new role, I also sit on Key's Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group and the Veterans' Staff Peer Support Network, undertook a fundraising walk for Walking With The Wounded, attended Key's Remembrance event at the National Memorial Arboretum, and continued my work with Heroic Hearts Project UK and the Home Office Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Advisory. My wider experience and values are seen as part of the role rather than separate from it, is what made the transition both possible and meaningful, and is synergistic to my role supporting adults who use substances.

## **How have the skills and experiences from your military background helped you in your role at Keys Group?**

Although the environments are very different, the core demands are similar. In social care, no two days are the same! In the military you're trained to operate in uncertainty, adapt quickly, make decisions with incomplete information, and stay accountable under pressure. Those skills translate directly into social care, where we're often holding complexity without clear answers and working with people affected by trauma, inequality and systemic gaps (MUCH like those serving in the armed forces!).

Teamwork is another constant. You can't do this work in isolation, and the ability to communicate, share insight and rely on collective experience feels very familiar. What's been different at Keys is the culture around that professionalism. There's real openness to reflection and growth, and a strong emphasis on psychological safety through trauma-informed practice. Through the Key's Connect training, I've learned how to better support myself, my colleagues and the people we support with curiosity, compassion, non-judgment and accountability.


## **What advice would you give to other service leavers who are thinking about starting a career with Keys Group?**

The biggest thing I'd say is this: don't underestimate the value your military background brings. Even if you haven't worked in social care before, the skills you've developed - leadership, adaptability, working under pressure - are incredibly relevant.

Reach out and network. There's no such thing as a stupid question, and most people genuinely enjoy talking about themselves and their work when given the chance - especially if it helps encourage, inform, or reassure someone who's walking a path they once walked.

Follow your curiosity, especially when it takes you outside the lane you've been told you "belong" in. That's where the magic happens - where bridges are built and innovation starts.

Stay open-minded. For anyone transitioning into civvie life, there are veterans represented across the full spectrum of the armed forces working in roles you might not even realise sit under the social care umbrella. We have nurses, SEN teachers, support workers, adventurous training instructors, positive behaviour support workers, associate psychologists, business support, IT, HR, L&D... the list goes on. Don't hesitate to reach out - and good luck finding your next role.

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## How has Keys Group encouraged further growth?

Keys are an IIP Gold employer and strongly support continuing professional development. I've completed my AET Level 3 Certificate in Education, undertaken motivational interviewing training, and been encouraged to attend external events and conferences that broaden not just my own perspective, but in turn the collective expertise of our team to help us provide better care for staff and people we support.

I would say my growth at Keys hasn't just been professional, it's been deeply personal as well.

Coming from an environment with very clear structures and expectations, stepping into a psychologically safe culture that encourages autonomy can actually feel quite disarming. Especially if (like me and others who joined to military with a fairly out of whack nervous system seeking solace in chaos and adventure) self-expression and authenticity hasn't always felt particularly safe.

What's made the difference is the space and patience I've been given to work through that. Through the incredible welcome and camaraderie I've received from not just the clinical team, but those in PBS, operations, children's services, organisational development, complimented by the voluntary work I continue to do, regular supervision and team meetings and my own therapy, I've started to recognise and gently challenge those old patterns. I'm learning that growth isn't about having all the answers - it's about trusting your judgement, contributing openly, and using that feedback to build self-esteem. I hope that in sharing my own experience of transition that it might resonate or provide some hope for others getting out of the military that whilst it feels scary at first, it does get better, and you don't have to do it on your own.

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