**The GM Moving Podcast**

**Episode 1: The importance of social connection in keeping the Armed Forces Community Moving**

**Introducer:** [00:00:00] This podcast has been brought to you by GM Moving, part of GreaterSport. We're here to help the people of Greater Manchester get moving and to improve lives through physical activity.

**Eve Holt:** [00:00:32] So I'm Eve and I'm the Strategic Director for GM Moving. So as part of us adapting what we do and how we do it as we realise the challenges of Covid 19 we're experimenting with different ways to convene people so we can continue to share our learning, our reflections, our tips of leading, learning, connecting, and staying active in GM.

And today we're looking at how we are keep GM forces moving at the moment. So I'm really pleased that we've got Pete and we've got Liz from GreaterSport who are going to share some of their reflections on what they're currently doing at the minute, what's working, what's not working, and hopefully there's a few things there that might be helpful for the rest of us as we adapt and learn.

So, go on then Pete, starting with you, do you want to just introduce yourself and your role and how do you like to move?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:01:23] How do I like to move? Oh, right. Oh, straight into that one. Okay. So, yeah, my name's Pete Carruthers, I'm the, lead for the Moving Forces project at GreaterSport. Um, and how do I like to move? Do you know I'm really missing playing football. Because one of the things we did with Moving Forces was get the Man City military veterans team started and we used to do that every Tuesday night and it was the best stress release ever and I am missing it, I must admit. At the moment doing more like things like press-ups and sit-ups and group workouts in the front room or in the bedroom or wherever I can get some space. I'm going for walks with my partner, going for the odd run, just making it up as I go along, really.

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:02:09] Hi, I'm Elizabeth Hill, I'm the Development Officer for Moving Forces. Um, which means I support Pete on the programme, and I've been doing it for about three months now. I think the sport or the activity that I'm missing the most is probably either climbing with the military veterans that we normally do on Wednesday nights or, um, I like going to these HIIT workouts sessions and that's obviously been stopped. So I'm missing those a lot. I'm trying to instead go for runs or go for walks if I just don't feel up to it that day. And, and doing quite a few of the challenges that we're setting for the vets and challenging each other with. Um, so that's been, that's been really fun and it has been a big positive part of this.

**Eve Holt:** [00:02:55] So what have you both been doing until now to keep GM forces moving?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:03:01] So until the recent, restrictions. Yeah, we, we do all sorts. So there's quite a few Military veterans football teams. That was quite a good one to start with cause, everyone, well, a lot of military vets want to play football particularly, the younger ones that we've been supporting. But we've been doing all sorts, so climbing, archery, Tai Chi, yoga, kayaking, sailing. We've been trying all sorts of things really, anything that just gets people being social, having a laugh in a group, not taking things too seriously. Not so much a focus on really getting super fit or becoming really skilled in whatever activity it is that you attend, it's just about having that regular thing that you can look forward to every week to get out of the house and mix with likeminded people really.

**Eve Holt:** [00:03:54] Anything in particular for you Liz since you joined that sort of stood out in what you were doing pre-covid?

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:04:01] Pre-covid, I think it's the fact that built into all of these sort of workout sessions or activities we've got, just great times to sort of catch up and chat with everyone and I think that's a huge draw. It helps sort of in terms of social isolation, but it's also you build a good group of friends while you're doing it.

And that's something that's, been maintained through this time, even as the WhatsApp chats that we had going before are still quite active and it's still everyone talking to each other and having a good time.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:04:38] Yeah, and I think that was one of the starting points for the project is that it's quite difficult to engage veterans in new stuff, historically really. One thing that we found that was really successful when we were about to start was the military veteran breakfast clubs that have been successful all over the country. Where veterans will just turn up maybe once a week or once a month, a cafe or a room at someone's hired and just have a chat to have a brew, have a bacon sandwich and that sense of just knowing what you're going to be looking forward to, you know, either weekly or monthly, and like we're speaking to them in, the consensus was that it gets to a point where you could take the breakfast away and they'd still come because it then becomes just about having a chat with your friends and having a catch up.

And I think that's the kind of the aim, the sort of feel that we were going for with our sessions in that even without the football, the Man City vets team would still meet up or still chat on WhatsApp. You know, they'd become friends first and that almost becomes the most important part of it.

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:05:46] I would say another part of that is that, moving forces was able to build some structure, both for the programme and for other people's lives. So you knew exactly when the classes were going to be happening or the sessions and it was a regular thing that you did and there were regular people that you saw. So it's kind of with that breakfast club situation as well, no matter what other things are going on in your lives, and we know sort of difficulties veterans vary dramatically, it provides constant structure in their lives.

**Eve Holt:** [00:06:19] I love that idea of, yeah, friends, friends first, and the importance of structure, which when people's lives have shifted, you know how important that is really. And I guess that's all the more important right now when all normal habits and structures have sort of literally gone out the window, haven't they? We've not just taken away their breakfast. You've taken away their spaces in which they would normally move. So, how have you adapted to that?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:06:45] Well, I would say we're still adapting. It's, it's still early, very early, really. You feel that we've been doing this for a long time already. I'm working from home and everything, but we're still working out what's going to help people and we are literally in the process now of going back to the veterans and saying, " What have we tried so far that you like and what could we do that you want? And something that we've been quite keen on with Moving Forces is that it needs to be owned by the veterans themselves. It's not something that we just hand out. It's something that we want the veterans to grab hold of and shape that themselves.

So we started off just very quickly making sure people knew we were going to be doing something. So doing live broadcasts on an evening where I was doing press ups and sit ups and seeing if I could beat my challenge and see if anyone wanted to challenge me. And we started getting, some yoga sessions and Tai Chi sessions going, but also setting just... Well, we noticed there's a lot of people starting to set like silly challenges, like doing kick-ups with toilet rolls and doing squats to music and things like that. And so we started sharing some of those ideas, trying to encourage people to tag each other in, in a sort of a with, do you remember the ice bucket challenge like that, that kind of feel like making sure people just rope their friends in and keep that sense of connection, that sense of community going while we're all stuck in our homes really. Have you got anything to add to that Liz? I'm sure I've missed loads.

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:08:19] Oh, I'm not sure, I think that was a pretty good description of what we're doing. I think we're, we sort of, when we went back to the drawing board, literally like yesterday and the day before, we were sort of thinking like, right, what's something that absolutely works in those face to face sessions and what are the pros of those and how can we properly translate that?

Cause I think initially we did look at that, but maybe in a different point of view and perspective. And we've sort of gone back and realized that yes, structure is a big part of it, so we need sort of regular sessions if possible. Have things set out each day at specific times, that people love that, that chat before and after. so we're going to try and build those into those sessions rather than what we have been doing, which have been sort of separate "Brew and chat" sessions that some people regularly attend but haven't really picked up too much. And then, yeah, just trying to keep everyone challenging each other and keeping that community alive.

Cause I think they would be doing that anyway and it's something that happens a lot of the time within sessions. I know in the climbing group, a lot of times we'll sort of go like, right, I'm going to try this one. Are you going to try it as well? And keeping that sort of camaraderie and a bit of competition going really keeps everyone engaged.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:09:38] Yeah

**Eve Holt:** [00:09:38] Chat, community, challenge, camaraderie. Lots of these great C words.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:09:46] I think as well, accepting that it's not always about the activity being the star. One of the best sessions we've had so far was a quiz night, which was just everyone sat in front of their laptops, having a bit of a laugh taking the Mickey out of each other, and doing a very informal but brilliant quiz, Liz put that together I didn't put that together. And so, yeah, I think just remembering what the project is about. Yes, we work with activity to bring people together and to reduce social isolation and improve mental wellbeing. but if we can do that with things other than activity, then we will do that as well. It's about the community and keeping that together and keeping people connected.

**Eve Holt:** [00:10:28] So, you seem to be on lots of different platforms that you're using to do, this, so which platforms are you using and with what level of success to engage people in this new virtual world?

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:10:39] We're using, we started off using a lot of Facebook because we were already established there. We have a general Moving Forces page that anyone can look at, it's completely public. And then we have a Moving Forces members page that actually was set up about a month before, Covid came around, so it was great to sort of have that there already. I think we've sort of doubled or trebled the numbers on that since everyone's been in lockdown. So we use that. We post a lot of the members specific things to the member page to try and make sure that we're still getting people involved in Moving Forces and that it's benefiting the right people. And then we're also using Zoom to put out a lot of the sessions, just because we've been using it with GreaterSport and it's been a great, platform. There have been some challenges making sure that everyone feels comfortable with Zoom and that they understand how to do it. But literally one of the polls that we've put out is, you know, is there a lack of understanding about Zoom? Is that hindering you from joining these sessions or is it something else?

Um, so yeah, I think working with what you've already got and working with what you know works and then trying to add in whatever else is needed is kind of the basics.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:11:56] Trying to keep as much consistency as we can, during this quite tricky transition that we're in that can be quite traumatic. And also we've had to accept that for some of our members, you know, they just won't be interested in this. It's all about, you know, being physically with other people and if they can't do that, then, maybe it's not for them just now. But hopefully those people will come back once things settle down. We'll keep reaching out to them and keep offering it to people.

There are some people that have grabbed it with both hands straight away and really got on board. And there's a whole spectrum of people in between as well.

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:12:35] Yeah

**Eve Holt:** [00:12:36] So there's some real inherent tensions aren't there in the mix of that in terms of having that structure and consistency, but at a time that you've also having to quickly adapt with a shifting picture and also a space where, you know, we're all experimenting, we're having to experiment and to keep going, "well, what's working, what's not working?". So trying to get that balance right and to be able to offer people, I guess a range of options in terms of different spaces because one, you know, Facebook might work for somebody, Zoom might work for somebody else, but I think everybody's grappling as well with this list of choices and not being overwhelmed.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:13:15] And we've not had six months warning to test and come up with different ideas and a project plan. It was just thrust upon us and we had to go with our gut really. And so I think we've, we have done that, we've gone with what we thought would work. Some of it has, some of it hasn't. We have to expect that because it was really, you know, seat of the pants stuff.

And I think at times like this, you've just got to let your ego go and go, we expect that things are not going to be perfect straight away and the world is going to be changing week to week, so we're going to have to change with it as well. You know, we don't even know what we're going to be left with after this, whether there's going to be big changes to the way we work, the way we meet up, the way we exercise.

And so I think keeping that open mind and that sense of innovation and experimentation is going to be key to it and being prepared to accept when things haven't worked out and trusting that people will expect that I think.

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:14:16] Yeah. And I think one thing to note is that we're actually really lucky. Just to already be in such a supportive community. So, GreaterSport is extremely supportive. The Moving Forces participants and that community are so supportive. So if there's ever been a time where we've tried something out that didn't work so well and there, definitely have been those times of the last few weeks.

There's no, there's no like backlash or annoyance over that. All of the participants that I've talked to, all the people in the community have sort of been like, "look, we're all doing this for the first time. We know that you're all experimenting and it's expected." It's not like people out there are expecting a perfect sort of service or things like that. And I think to keep those expectations more set in reality helps everyone.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:15:05] And I think they, they accept that the easiest thing for us to have done would have been to say, "Well, good luck, we'll see you on the other side when we can get back to what we were doing", you know, but that wouldn't have been good for anyone so it's better to take risks and trip over a few times, I think, and make sure we help a few people, you know, well help as many people as we can between now and whenever really.

**Eve Holt:** [00:15:32] I love that phrase you use there, Pete, in terms of, you know, it's no time for ego really. Lots that you're saying there that really kind of reflect back on our GM Moving Pointers For Practice. So that sense of genuinely laying the track as we go, you know, together really, and convening people with all these different perspectives, you know, in these different spaces and having to learn from what works for people really. And at a point when there is this need for this rapid response that you're providing to the situation that we're in.

And I guess I wonder with your particular community, so with veterans, you know, they'll be used to having to provide a rapid response in wartime and from their own lived experience will have had to adapt quite quickly to a sudden crisis or need. I can see that that could provide both opportunities and challenges for them in the current time. Is any of that emerging in your work?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:16:24] Yeah, well, I mean, one of the mottos that we've adopted as one of our hashtags actually is the "improvise, adapt, and overcome", which is a really famous military catchphrase. You know, motto, mantra, whatever you want to call it. And so we've adopted that kind of approach as well. And I think our members will recognize that, absolutely. But the other thing to remember is that, you know, although most veterans transition well and are absolutely fine, we do have a number of members who might have mental health issues and might suffer with anxiety or even a post traumatic stress disorder and things like that. And for people like that, structure and predictability is key. So any type of uncertainty and chaos, like this is going to be really, really challenging. So in some ways they will be trained to be part of that response, that kind of, well let's just sort of make it up as we go along and work out the best thing that we can do with what we've got. But there will be those that are struggling or really finding this hard and feeling, perhaps more isolated than most. Because you know, they might only rely on other veterans and if they're in an area where their neighbors aren't, they might really struggle as well. So, it's finding the ways to reach those people. Because I think at the moment those people will probably just be bunkered down and looking after themselves and their families. And it might take a bit of coaxing to get to those people. And that's the people that we really want to help most.

**Eve Holt:** [00:17:59] Thank you. Sounds really important. So I've had a bit of a glimpse into this world, I suppose, really, cause you've been helping us as well at GreaterSport to keep fit and active and well over the last few weeks. And I know, I've really appreciated it actually for the same reasons in having that structure. So for anybody watching or listening, you know, Pete has us now at 8:45 doing a morning team plank. And we also have team lunches, don't we and we have these circuit training. So, do you want tell us a little bit more about what you've brought because it's been fantastic and it's made a definite difference to my day in designing into the things that I need at the minute.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:18:36] Yeah, so in fact Liz and I were talking about this yesterday in our reflection on what we've done with Moving Forces so far, and one of the pluses was that, we took what we were doing with Moving Forces quite quickly and said, well what could we use out of this that would help the wider team at GreaterSport?

Because I'm the mental health lead for the team as well, so I think it, I don't know, I realized that this could really help in people's resilience, at a difficult time when people were finding it hard to adjust to being at home and not seeing their colleagues day to day. So I think we identified quite early that it was important to find times to connect, that wasn't about work, where we could just shut the doors and talk about our own day to day lives and have a bit of fun, but also stay active together as well. So yeah, the morning plank was one that came out quite quickly that's been good fun where we all start the day getting our blood pumping, saying good morning to each other and setting ourselves up for the day, and the lunch, because quite often at work, we'll have a lunch break at 12 and most people will go into the kitchen and sit down and have a chat and talk about stuff other than work. Rather than miss out on that, we've set up a regular zoom session where people just come with or without their food and just sit for, they might just check in for 10 minutes or they might be there for half an hour and just have a bit of a catch up with people. See how we're all doing, get some news on people's lives. Which has been quite good fun and we've come up with some ridiculous things to keep ourselves entertained in there. And then, yeah, the sort of body weight circuits that we're doing, just really simple 20 minute workouts. A bit of music, friendly faces, encouraging each other to get a bit hot and sweaty in the front room or in the bedroom, well in a, you know, family friendly way.

And we're just still evolving that and still checking in to see what's helping, what might be putting people off. How do we bring more people into that in the team. And I think that the longer we go on, the more I realise that we've really got to make our priority looking after our team and making sure that we're well and, resilient through this. Partly because when we, when we do come out of it, we're gonna have to be ready to go and primed. You know, we're not frontline NHS staff by any means, but we've got an important role now and in the future. We need to protect our team and keep morale up for that.

**Eve Holt:** [00:21:09] That's a really important point actually, is there's a lot of focus isn't there on people that have been deemed to be vulnerable. And I find that word personally quite a struggle really, because I think often the system's made them vulnerable at the minute, it's not that we want people to be seen or to feel that they are vulnerable. A lot of focus on that and how we can support those people to keep moving. But absolutely, it's about the workforce as well, isn't it?

It's all those people that, we're absolutely reliant on now to provide essential or non-essential services as we might describe ourselves. To keep that resilience in the system so that everything can continue to function. And absolutely, we're good to go when, you know, during Covid, but after Covid and also we're fit and well for what else comes next because you know, there's a good chance that it'll flare up again, you know, in a year's time. And we need to have the population as fit and active and well as possible because that will ultimately save lives. So yeah, there's definitely, it's a long time, isn't it? It's not just about the immediate rapid response, it's some of these kind of habits really, that we're establishing.

So the words you started off with at the beginning, I was just thinking the chats and the community and the challenge, you know, I definitely have felt all of that, at GreaterSport in terms of what you've brought. And certainly the challenge with our one minute 50 seconds plank this morning, my goodness. Abs of steel by the end of this if nothing else. But also just in the belly laughs really, which have really helped, both the stomach muscles but also my facial muscles and my general morale.

So, yeah, I really appreciate it and the role that, both of you and the team have played in that and how we can kind of continue to get cascade that out and hopefully inspire others out there. So is there anything else you want to add or any final thoughts before we wrap up?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:23:03] The only other thing that's been on my mind, particularly the last few days is that sometimes, I'm quite a positive, pragmatic person in terms of someone who looks at what's happening and tries to find solutions and tries to find a positive spin on things. But I think accepting that we're in a difficult time and there are going to be people that are not in the mood for that right now, and are justifiably worried and feeling low. And I think just perhaps making sure that even though we do offer these opportunities for people to come out of that, that we're not making people, I don't know, shaming is probably a bit of a big word, but, risking doing that by saying, "Oh, look at how great and how positive we are and how active we are" just to make that message that if people are struggling, that's absolutely fine and we're here and we're ready to help when you're ready. Yeah, I think that's, it really.

**Eve Holt:** [00:23:58] Yeah I think that's really, really important. And you're absolutely right there, that word shaming and people can certainly take those messages, can't they? They can land as this is something that you have to do and if you're not doing it can bring about shame for whatever reason.

And that feels so key to all the work that we're doing and all those messages and a hard one to get right, actually, because we need, different people need different things at the minute, don't they, and at different times. And what have you seen then in terms of, cause we're going to see that in the ebb and flow of people engaging as well, aren't we both within GreaterSport, but also in terms of the work you're doing with Moving Forces.

So what does it look like in terms of the numbers before Covid that you're engaging when you are face to face and then over the last few weeks as we've been experimenting with different ways?

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:24:46] I don't know, Liz, you've been looking more at the numbers, what would you say about that?

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:24:50] I'd say before Covid, you know, we were working with our sort of general mix of people doing just a gradual incline of bringing more people in. I think since Covid, there's been a definite spike when the novelty was really there. And I think we saw that with GreaterSport as well sort of in the first couple days of it, everyone was uber enthusiastic, was uber positive. You know, they could see themselves getting a six pack in three months and, you know, joining in every single day and, staying good and positive and only eating healthy foods and never drinking alcohol. And all of these things and I think you can really see with the numbers, and just in like face to face conversations, how that does ebb and flow over time. And the sort of, the first two weeks the numbers were growing quite rapidly. And then sort of the second week there was a bit of a drop. And then the third week there was a big drop. And, now you're just kind of doing a bit of a regular spike and low and, that just comes from people sort of going through those daily challenges and with sort of what's going on around them and what's going on with their mental health. So, yeah.

**Eve Holt:** [00:26:12] It's definitely in sustaining it. I mean, it feels that there was a lot of, a lot of that enthusiasm was kind of seen across social media, wasn't it? Those first couple of weeks, there's a lot of noise, a lot around the kind of stay in and work out and people jumping around with kids on their own. But you know, as the reality of it all and the reality of our lives, I guess shift as well, that's gonna change and how we make sure that we're still reaching people that need it and find support they need. It feels like that's the real challenge going forward.

**Pete Carruthers:** [00:26:45] It's almost like that post new year thing, you know, like everyone had that, "Right, okay, this is going to be me. I'm going to be completely different and I'm going to transform myself and learn a new language and cook loads of fresh meals, and buy all the flour so no one can bake." So all that's been happening I think, and then yeah, those good intentions have perhaps started to run out now, understandably. But what I think in terms of an opportunity that we have is that before this, we didn't really think about what we could do digitally because we were doing everything face to face. And that can sometimes make it difficult for some veterans and their families to engage you know, if there's like, say transport issues or they're just in a more remote part of the country. So with this, at least we do have the opportunity now to, to find things that will work to combat that. And hopefully when we do get back to doing more face to face sessions again, which are obviously going to be the core of what we do, we might be able to maintain some of that online stuff so that we're providing for a wider proportion of the community.

**Eve Holt:** [00:27:51] So there's opportunities definitely that come out of this in terms of having an eye on the future, that engagement and offer. So if anybody's listening or watching now, and they're not yet engaged with Moving Forces and they'd like to, where would you direct them to? How do they get hold of you and get involved?

**Elizabeth Hill:** [00:28:09] So, go to the Moving Forces Facebook page, it's just @MovingForcesUK. Have a look on that page, go to the website, movingforces.co.uk and see what we're all about. Look at some of the videos and see how much fun some people are having, and just get in touch.

**Eve Holt:** [00:28:29] Brilliant. Keep well, keep learning, keep moving.

**Outro:** [00:28:33] If you've enjoyed this podcast, why not share it or tell a friend about it? And if you've got feedback or ideas for future episodes, please get in touch with our team at GreaterSport using the links that you'll find on our podcast page.