

Why AURIS Exists:

The Evidence for Identity-Focused Support After the Uniform

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AURIS White Paper Vol. 5, 2026 — fifth in a series

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About the Author

Gemma Gardner is an independent researcher and the founder of the AURIS Institute, originator of the AURIS Identity System and the Identity Performance Psychology framework. The AURIS Identity System is the subject of a trademark application filed with the UK Intellectual Property Office (application UK00004432535, Classes 9, 41 and 42, filed 18 August 2026); the application is under examination and not yet granted. This is the fifth in a series of AURIS white papers documenting the Identity After the Uniform research programme; the first four are cited in full in the references below and are also available on Zenodo under the same CC BY 4.0 licence.

Abstract

Occupational transition support for military, police, fire, ambulance and NHS clinical personnel is well developed on practical questions of housing, finance and employment, but less consistently addresses identity disruption: the process of rebuilding a stable sense of self once a role that provided purpose, belonging, status and community has ended. This paper sets out the evidence base for the AURIS Institute's Identity After the Uniform research programme, structured around a framing question (RQ-000) and four supporting research questions (RQ-001 to RQ-004), tested through a target of 108 coded qualitative interviews, of which 34 are coded at the time of writing. It then presents a case study of Trafford Veterans CIC, an independent veteran community organisation operating continuously in Trafford, Greater Manchester since November 2016 and incorporated as a Community Interest Company in July 2020, inside which AURIS now delivers its coaching framework. A structured review of 24 monthly newsletters (November 2016 to October 2018) plus a 2020 organisational year-in-review is cross-referenced against two currently available coded AURIS findings, showing that practices Trafford Veterans developed independently, before any AURIS involvement, correlate with mechanisms subsequently identified in AURIS's own coded interview data. The paper concludes with a discussion of what this corroboration implies for future joint work, including a persistent gap in support between crisis intervention and identity rebuilding, and a documented 'discovery problem' in how people locate reliable support services, which AURIS is addressing through a new externally-audited support directory. Limitations, including the partial state of both the newsletter archive and the coded interview correlation, are stated throughout.

Keywords: identity transition, veteran support, peer support, occupational identity, coaching, Armed Forces community, community interest company

1. Introduction

AURIS exists because of a question that occupational transition support has generally not asked directly: who am I, once the role that gave me purpose, belonging, status and community is gone. Discharge, retirement, and role loss across military, police, fire, ambulance and NHS clinical settings are usually treated as logistical or financial events, or as risk factors for specific clinical outcomes (General Medical Council, 2025; NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre, 2026). What is less consistently addressed is the identity disruption itself: the process by which a person rebuilds a stable sense of self once the uniform, and everything that came with it, is no longer there.

This is the fifth paper in the AURIS white paper series. The first (Gardner, 2026a) set out the applied AURIS Identity System; the second (Gardner, 2026b) set out the Identity Performance Psychology framework; the third (Gardner, 2026c) set out an integrated model of sustainable behavioural change; the fourth (AURIS Institute, 2026) examined where identity work belongs within the wider continuum of support. This paper builds directly on that fourth paper's question by examining a live delivery partnership in detail. It has two purposes: first, it sets out, briefly, the evidence base and research questions underpinning AURIS's work (Section 2); second, and at greater length, it presents a structured case study of an independent, long-running delivery partner, Trafford Veterans CIC, and cross-references its documented practice against AURIS's own emerging findings (Sections 3 to 5), before discussing what this implies for future collaborative work (Section 6).

2. Background and Evidence Base

The scale of the underlying workforce strain in uniformed and clinical services is evidenced at a general level by large-scale national surveys. The 2025 NHS Staff Survey received 729,423 responses across 238 organisations in England (NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre, 2026). The General Medical Council's 2025 National Training Survey was completed by over 71,000 doctors in training and trainers across the UK (General Medical Council, 2025). Both point to persistent, population-level pressure on wellbeing and belonging within these workforces, though neither addresses identity transition specifically. Behavioural science offers a general account of how sustained change occurs: the COM-B model holds that behaviour change requires capability, opportunity and motivation acting together (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011). None of these sources describe the specific identity mechanism AURIS is built to investigate, which is why AURIS runs its own coded interview programme.

2.1 The AURIS research questions

The programme is structured around a framing question, RQ-000, asking where, if anywhere, identity-focused coaching has a defined place within the wider continuum of support, for whom, when, and under what circumstances. Four further questions ask whether an Identity, Community, Purpose, Stability sequence holds across sectors and not only the military (RQ-001); whether pre-emptive identity work undertaken before transition reduces disruption (RQ-002); whether internally generated regulation strategies prove more durable than externally anchored ones (RQ-003); and whether non-clinical coaching is an appropriate and effective delivery model for identity transition compared with therapy (RQ-004). Thirty-four of a planned 108 qualitative interviews across military, police, fire, ambulance and NHS clinical personnel are coded at the time of writing.

3. Case Study: Trafford Veterans CIC

Trafford Veterans CIC has operated continuously as a community organisation in Trafford, Greater Manchester since November 2016, and formally incorporated as a Community Interest Company on 8 July 2020. It is an independent organisation with its own decade-long track record, inside which AURIS now delivers its coaching framework: Trafford Veterans CIC leads delivery, drawing on its own reach, volunteers and community trust, while AURIS provides the coaching framework, training and research oversight.

Reported current reach is an average of 80 to 100 veterans and family members engaged monthly across its programme of activities, plus additional outreach beyond that figure (Trafford Veterans CIC, personal communication, 2026). Its Facebook page recorded 16,293 followers in its own 2020 Year in Review (Trafford Veterans CIC, 2020); that figure predates this paper by six years and is reported here as historical context, not as a current metric.

3.1 Methodology

This case study is based on a structured review of Trafford Veterans' own monthly newsletters, 24 issues in total, covering November 2016 to October 2018 without gaps, plus one 2020 organisational year-in-review document. November 2018 to December 2019 has not yet been reviewed and is not included in this analysis. All newsletter content is treated as AMBER-tier organisational self-reporting: useful as a record of activity and stated intent, not as independently verified outcome data.

3.2 What makes the offer distinctive

Four elements recur consistently across the reviewed archive and are confirmed still active: food share and doorstep welfare delivery, which became central to the organisation's activity during the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued since; a working allotment (Warslow Drive, Sale), a hands-on, shared, outdoor activity with a visible ongoing output; a weekly breakfast club, the organisation's longest-running and most consistently documented activity; and monthly community drop-ins, including access to Forces War Records research, providing a standing point of contact that does not require crisis or referral to use. No single element is unique within the veteran sector; the combination, sustained continuously for close to a decade by the same organisation, is what distinguishes it.

4. Cross-Referencing Practice Against Coded Findings

Rather than checking Trafford Veterans' documented practice against general published literature, this section checks it directly against findings already coded in AURIS's own interview dataset. At the time of writing, two coded findings are available for this comparison: an emerging finding on imposter syndrome, drawn from three podcast interviews and two coaching logs (AURIS-RES-091, internal working document, pending academic review), and interview EP030 with Justin Stoneham, a 29-year UK Fire and Rescue Service veteran, recorded 7 August 2026. A fuller correlation against the complete 34-interview coded set was not possible within the scope of this paper and is recommended as further work.

Practice observed	Archive evidence	Correlation with coded AURIS findings
Breakfast club and weekly drop-ins	Low-barrier, repeatable contact point, documented weekly to monthly across every issue reviewed (n=24), explicitly framed by the organisation as reducing isolation.	Interview EP030 (Stoneham) describes a colleague noticing distress and asking directly as a turning point, and notes that people most in need often were not at formal sessions but sought contact informally afterward. A regular, low-barrier point of contact is the structural mechanism that would catch this pattern.
Food share and allotment	Practical, hands-on activity with a shared task and visible outcome, documented continuously from January 2018 onward.	Consistent with the Community-then-Purpose sequence observed across coded interviews: structured shared activity appears to precede, rather than follow, explicit identity work.
Inclusive membership (no service requirement)	Stated explicitly and repeatedly across the archive: membership open to non-veteran community members.	The Imposter Syndrome finding (AURIS-RES-091) identifies doubt over whether one's own service 'counts enough' to belong in a veteran community as a recurring mechanism. An explicitly inclusive membership policy is a direct practical response to a mechanism independently present in the coded dataset.
Hobby and skills groups (model making, golf, walking football)	Multiple parallel groups, each with a steady core of regular attendees, volunteer-led throughout.	Illustrates Purpose being built through skill and contribution rather than only through discussion, a route suggested by coded interviews and shown operating in independent practice.

The pattern across all four comparisons is consistent: practices Trafford Veterans developed independently correlate with mechanisms separately identified in AURIS's coded interviews, despite having been designed without reference to AURIS's framework. This is offered as independent corroboration from an organisation that built its practice on lived experience roughly a decade before AURIS existed, rather than as confirmation generated by AURIS testing its own hypotheses against its own conclusions.

5. Discussion: Implications for Future Work

5.1 The gap between crisis support and a rebuilt identity

A conversation with a UK ambulance-sector charity independently described a support pathway moving from crisis, to recovery, to resilience, to identity, to a sustainable life, and stated directly that existing services can stabilise someone and return them to daily life but have little to offer for what comes after that point. Trafford Veterans' ongoing activities, described in Section 3.2, are structurally well suited to that later stage, low-barrier, long-running, and not contingent on ongoing crisis, but were not originally designed with that specific gap in mind. Testing whether an established community model of this kind can be deliberately extended to cover the post-crisis, pre-identity stage is proposed as a concrete area of joint future work.

5.2 The discovery problem

Across the newsletters reviewed, the organisation's own printed list of support contacts changed on at least two occasions without explanation to the reader: a national veterans' helpline remained listed as active after it had, by the time of writing, closed, and a listed mental health helpline was replaced with a different service partway through 2018 with no note that anything had changed. This is not presented as a criticism of Trafford Veterans; rather, it demonstrates that even a well-established, decade-old organisation cannot reliably keep its own signposting current, because the landscape of available services changes faster than any single organisation's printed materials can track. AURIS's proposed response is a directory of peer and identity-focused support organisations with external audit for accountability, rather than self-submission alone. This remains at an early stage of development at the time of writing.

6. Limitations

- The newsletter archive underpinning Sections 3 to 5 is not continuous: November 2018 to December 2019 has not been reviewed, and the 2020 organisational summary is therefore presented alongside, rather than integrated into, a continuous account.
- The cross-referencing in Section 4 draws on two of 34 currently coded interviews. This is an illustrative, not a comprehensive, correlation, and should not be read as a systematic finding.
- Newsletter content is organisational self-reporting and has not been independently verified. It is treated throughout as AMBER-tier evidence.
- AURIS's own founding publications, cited in this paper's wider programme description, are self-graded under AURIS's Conflict of Interest Policy at 3 to 4 out of 10 as independent evidence, since the author is both developer and evaluator of the framework described.
- Reach figures for Trafford Veterans CIC are reported as given directly by the organisation at the time of writing (2026), except where explicitly dated to an earlier organisational report.

7. Conclusion

Trafford Veterans CIC's independently developed practice, sustained for close to a decade before any AURIS involvement, shows meaningful correlation with mechanisms subsequently identified in AURIS's own coded research. This corroboration is partial and preliminary rather than comprehensive, drawing on a fraction of both the available newsletter archive and the coded interview set, but it supports treating community-led peer support of this kind as a genuine and independently arrived-at response to identity disruption after service, worth further, more systematic investigation as the AURIS research programme continues.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Trafford Veterans CIC for a decade of community delivery on which this case study draws, and to Dr Tepora Emery (Toi Ohomai, New Zealand) for ongoing comparative collaboration through the AURIS comparative working group.

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