

Ooex Platform for UK Armed Forces Veterans with Pain
Design with Real Lived Experience Applied
Umio Case Study | May 2025

Executive Summary

Background

UK Armed Forces veterans living with chronic pain, especially those also managing long-term conditions post-service, face fragmented, decontextualised, and often ineffective support systems. Existing health and care pathways struggle to account for the full complexity of their real lived experiences (RLX): the emotional, material, spatial, and temporal dimensions of pain. Umio's RLX-based project, funded by the UK Office for Veterans' Affairs, sought to reimagine this landscape.

Key Outcomes and Takeaways

Problem Reframed

Chronic pain in veterans is not simply a clinical issue but an evolving, relational, and existential experience. Veterans often suffer in silence, caught in a culture of stoicism, isolation, and systems that are blind to the full field of their lives.

Ooex Platform Developed

A first-of-its-kind *Real Lived Experience in Motion* platform, Ooex enables veterans to:

- Capture meaningful daily experiences, not just symptoms
- Track affective patterns over time
- Receive personalised suggestions to move toward valued action
- Engage with peers for mutual support and shared growth

RLX Paradigm in Action

The project applied RLX thinking from the ground up, shifting from top-down intervention to co-composed transformation. Veterans were not users but co-creators of the platform itself.

Real Experience Expression Interface

Veterans log moments of life, whether gardening, walking, resting, socialising or anything, highlighting what works or does not work for them. This empowers reflection and self-discovery, enabling veterans to see their experience differently.

Peer Support in Affective Flow

A built-in community feed allows veterans to connect, share, and uplift each other, supporting relational resonance, belonging, and shared meaning. RLX recognises such affective co-composition as core to healing.

ACT Tailored for Veterans

A self-guided Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) programme is embedded in Ooex. Co-designed with a military chaplain, this supports value-driven action, self-compassion, and psychological flexibility, and is grounded in veterans' own language and context.

Local Engagement Tools

Veterans can discover, organise, and reflect on nearby events and services, reinforcing the relational field around them. Ooex acts as a connector, amplifying small, meaningful shifts into lasting change.

Emergence, Not Intervention

The platform enables transformation from within, not by managing pain, but by moving with the flow of real experience. This is Design with RLX that perceives, nurtures, and supports change as it unfolds.

Scalable Model for any Condition and Geography Following successful proof-of-concept, Umio set-up a separate technology company Ooex Limited to fund, develop and scale the solution internationally.

Strategic Significance

This case study shows how designing with real lived experience (RLX) can transform care from static models to dynamic, participatory systems of support. It offers a new paradigm for chronic pain, mental health, and long-term conditions that can be applied in any health context and geography.

Problem

Despite decades of effort, UK veterans living with chronic pain remain underserved by health and care systems that view pain primarily through a clinical-biomedical lens. For many of the estimated 900k UK veterans with chronic pain - 200,000 of whom experience severe, persistent forms - available models of care struggle to capture or support the true nature of their lived suffering. A narrow focus on pain sites, diagnostics, and medication can leave veterans isolated in their homes, trapped in cycles of self-management, and excluded from meaningful wellbeing.

Veterans often do not seek help due to a deeply ingrained military mindset that values stoicism, self-reliance, and a reluctance to show vulnerability. This compounds their marginalisation, resulting in social isolation, deteriorating physical and mental health, and diminished life potential. Most manage their pain alone, bouncing between ineffective treatments, unclear diagnoses, and misunderstood outlooks, despite high levels of PTSD comorbidity and wide-ranging impacts on home life, relationships, work, identity, and everyday movement.

What is missing is a deeper ability to perceive, understand, and support the full unfolding real lived experience (RLX) of chronic pain in veterans. Without this, veterans remain invisible to systems that claim to support them. What's needed is a radical shift: not just better care access and delivery, but more and smarter perception, participation, and transformation in and of experience itself.

Project Overview and RLX Paradigm Alignment

Umio's work with UK Armed Forces veterans living with chronic pain - funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs Health Innovation Fund - is a prime example of Design with Real Lived Experience (RLX) in practice. The project centred on co-designing a mobile platform (now evolved into the Ooex platform) that helps veterans overcome their struggles with chronic pain when transitioning to or feeling limited in civilian life.

Rather than a traditional top-down intervention, the solution was conceived to create valued impacts in the flow of veterans' real lived experiences. This aligns with RLX's distinctive shift from intervention to co-composition, from problem-solving to possibility sensing, and from user-centredness to experience attunement. In other words, the project's value and impact emerges by working with the grain of veterans' lives - their everyday activities, feelings, and interactions - instead of trying to manage their experience from the outside. By honouring the intensities, transitions, environments, and emergent meanings that shape how health is felt and lived across time, the project illustrates how Design with RLX opens new pathways for agency and transformation in the context of chronic pain (or any condition).

Co-Composed with Veterans

From the outset, the solution was developed with veterans, not just for them, embodying RLX principles of deep perception and co-composition. Chris Lawer, Umio creator, and the team conducted in-depth qualitative research with 15 veterans from all branches of the Armed Forces to understand the diverse lived experiences behind the label of "chronic pain". This immersion in veterans' day-to-day realities reflects the RLX mandate to attend to experience as an ongoing, dynamic flow rather than fixed snapshots and to understand experience relationally, shaped by social, environmental, technological, cultural and other contexts.

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Insights from these engagements drove an iterative design process: Umio created early wireframes of a novel real lived experience interface and let a small group of veterans test them in their own lives over two weeks.

The veterans' feedback directly shaped the next design iteration, leading to an interactive prototype that another cohort of veterans walked through and critiqued.

In practice, every design decision - from interface to features - was informed by veterans' lived perspectives, ensuring the solution emerged from the field of their experience rather than being imposed by outside experts. By the end of the 12-month project, Umio not only had a functional proof-of-concept app, but also a rich understanding of the diversity of veteran pain experiences documented in a research report. The co-composed development journey itself set the stage for a tool attuned to real needs and possibilities in veterans' lives.

Capturing Lived Experience Events and Perceiving Relations

A cornerstone of the Ooex platform is its Real Experience Expression interface. This enables veterans to document meaningful daily events and activities - from gardening to a night at the cinema, from a gentle walk or fast run to a night in the pub; from cooking to just resting. This goes far beyond logging pain levels. It invites veterans to pay attention to what they do and how they feel in the moment, fostering a habit of active perception of their lived experience in its relations. By keeping a personal feed of these moments, users can reflect and start to identify patterns - learning what works and what doesn't when living with pain.

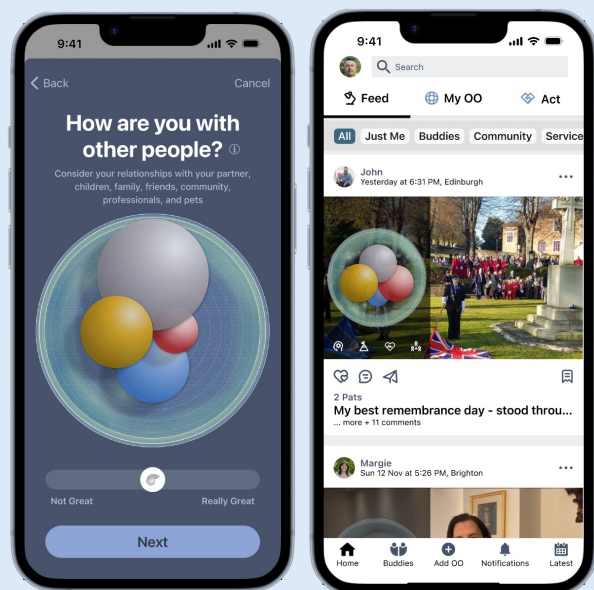
This design reflects RLX's emphasis on perceiving experience in its emergence and over its duration. Chronic pain is not static; it unfolds in shifting rhythms, intensities, and meanings... pulsing, flaring, receding, transforming rather than following a linear script. The app is built to capture these fluid movements of experience, instead of forcing veterans through a predefined routine. Over time, the platform's intelligence helps make subtle patterns visible: veterans can discover hidden relations, patterns and trends in their everyday experiences and even query the system for ideas, receiving personalised activity recommendations and resources to

help them do and achieve more in their lives.

In RLX terms, the design is helping to make the virtual perceptible - surfacing latent possibilities within veteran lived experience that might otherwise go unnoticed. By attending to the temporal flow of everyone's life (**Principle 6 in the Design with RLX Manifesto: See Events and their Expressions in Duration**), and by revealing connections between activities, feelings, and pain, the Ooex app empowers veterans with new, deeper experience insight. It extends their relational perception of their own reality, enabling them to see which everyday actions foster positive affect and/or reduce the burden of pain.

This focus on qualitative data (instead of abstract pain scores alone) exemplifies how Umio designs within the fabric and flow of experience - capturing events, expressions and thresholds forming life as it is lived - and then using those findings to guide each veteran toward better days.

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Affective Flow and Peer Support

Another key aspect of the project is the cultivation of a veteran community within the app - a peer support network that functions through the flow of shared experiences. Users can connect with fellow veterans (including finding old comrades), share their recorded experiences in group feeds, and exchange encouragement and ideas to help each other push everyone on. Even just knowing a friend is there can make a big difference in itself. This social design element addresses the affective dimensions of chronic pain - the loneliness, frustration, or discouragement that often accompany it - by channelling affective flow between peers.

In RLX terms, the platform is attending to the field of experience (**RLX Principle 2: See the Experience in its Relational Field of Affect**) by recognising that a veteran's experience is inherently relational, being shaped by camaraderie and shared understanding as well as many other more-than-human forces, constraints and factors (home, environment, resources, technologies, etc.). The peer feed creates a space where underlying intensities (e.g. the motivation boost from camaraderie, or the relief in feeling understood) can circulate and amplify. This is aligned with **RLX Principle 3: Engage Intensity Before Identity**. Here, veterans aren't reduced to patient identities or symptoms; they are active participants exchanging feelings of support and hope.

When things are dark and then maybe there's eight recurring black mental health records in there [the expression interface], then you or other veterans will reach out and say, hey mate, are you all right? And then you don't get to that point of crisis. – UK veteran

The design thus works on an affective level, helping positive emotions and resilience flow through the network. It also manifests co-composition in practice: each veteran contributes to others' healing journey by sharing stories and tips, essentially co-creating a collective knowledge, motivation and support system.

Rather than a solitary self-management pain app then, Ooex becomes a living community where value is co-composed among peers in real time. This collaborative, interactive ethos mirrors **RLX Principle 11: Co-compose Within the Flow of Experience** - the idea that we participate dynamically and responsively in the ongoing movement of lived experience. Indeed, the veterans and the platform together generate new experiences (a supportive comment, a suggested activity, a meetup) that can alter individual or peer group journeys.

The affective flow within the community is not managed from outside but arises from veterans' interactions, with the design gently supporting emergence of trust and mutual motivation (**Principle 8: Recognise Directionality, Not Just Intervention**).

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Tailored to Veterans

Importantly, the project integrated an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) process tailored specifically to the veteran experience. ACT is a well-established therapeutic approach for chronic pain, emphasising acceptance of what cannot be changed (such as persistent pain) and a commitment to living a value-driven life.

In the Ooex app, a bespoke ACT program - co-designed with input from a serving Army Major (Padre) chaplain - offers veterans a self-guided journey of tools, exercises, videos, and actions. This program is scientifically-proven (grounded in evidence from over 3,000 research papers) and reframes pain management as a lived experience learning process. Veterans and their families are guided through recognising how pain shows up in their life, practicing mindfulness and acceptance strategies, clarifying what a valued, fulfilled life means to them, and taking gradual steps toward that life despite pain. This deeply resonates with RLX philosophy: rather than trying to eliminate symptoms or impose an external definition of success, it supports an inner transformation in how veterans relate to their pain.

The ACT component encourages veterans to tap into their own values and motivations (their emergent meanings in life) and to develop new capacities for agency and resilience. It treats veterans as human beings in the flux of life rather than as clinical subjects. In RLX terms, this is a design that nurtures ongoing, subtle processes of change rather than imposing fixed solutions. In essence, the app moves within the person's field of experience. For instance, a veteran might use an ACT exercise during a pain flare to mindfully accept the moment, or set a small goal aligned with personal passion - thereby generating change from within the flow of their real life, and not as a disconnected therapeutic assignment. By grounding the therapy in veterans' own language and culture (thanks to the Army Padre's input) the solution also honour[s] difference and context, making the process more engaging and relevant.

Lightening the Load. That's a brilliant way of summing it up. That's exactly what it's like.

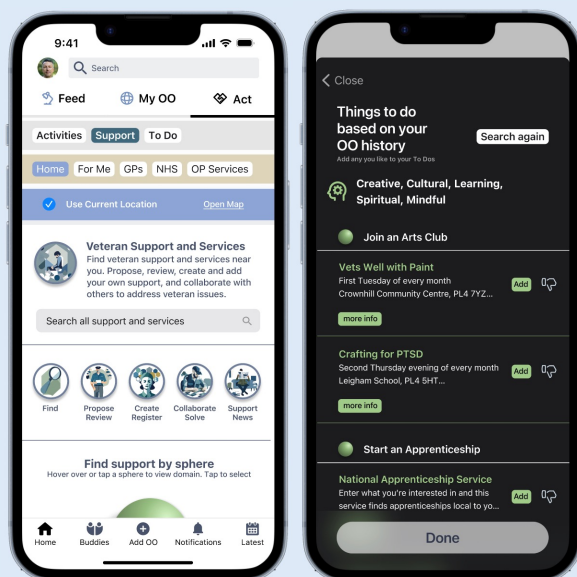
Local Engagement and Emergent Value

Extending beyond individual and virtual interactions, the platform also facilitates local engagement by helping veterans connect with real-world support and activities in their community. Veterans can find support and things to do near where they live or are located, as well as create and organise their own meet-ups, events, or support groups. Crucially, they can then record and share their experience of these activities back into the network for others to discover. This feature grounds the RLX approach in the immediate lived environment of the user, again exemplifying **Manifesto Principle 2: See the Experience in its Relational Field of Affects** by acknowledging that meaningful change often emerges in wider social and environmental contexts.

By enabling veterans to propose and initiate their own local events and contribute their feedback, the design entrusts them as co-creators of their own support ecosystem – a clear nod to co-composition. It treats the community, place and environment as part of the healing experience, aligning with RLX's call to **Design Across the More-Than-Human (Principle 12)**.

For example, a veteran might start a weekly walking football group via the app, bringing together others in the area for light physical activity and camaraderie. The app supports this emergent solution by providing the platform and by capturing the positive veteran experiences it generates. Over time, such bottom-up initiatives can transform what support looks like altogether. Instead of solely formal clinical sessions, support becomes an integrated part of veterans' day-to-day life, whether a kickabout, shared hobby, a coffee meetup, or a community service project.

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The Ooex platform thus serves as a catalyst and connector, helping veterans design their own pathways to well-being in concert with their peers and surroundings. This approach embodies RLX's ethos of releasing moral and creative energy in health solutions by moving away from rigid systems and by empowering those who are living the experience to shape it.

Emergence Over Intervention - RLX in Practice

Together, these elements - real experience capture, peer support, tailored ACT, and community engagement - define a holistic RLX design that operates within veterans' life-worlds rather than acting upon them from outside.

The project explicitly did not aim to manage or control veteran's experiences of pain through prescriptive protocols. Instead, it created tools and conditions in which veterans could actively make meaning and find momentum in their own lives, with supportive guidance along the way. This is the essence of participat[ing] dynamically and responsively in the ongoing movement of lived experience, as the RLX manifesto advocates.

By helping veterans and their partners and families to perceive and capture the meaningful **Events and Thresholds** (see Appendix A) of their RLX, especially the more positive macro-level surfacings that reveal new possibilities or directions, the Ooex app enables change to arise from within the flow of life, not outside it. Such Events might include the moment a veteran notices how their mood subtly lifts after gardening, the sense of calm that returns during a quiet walk with a dog, or the unexpected warmth of a conversation with a neighbour that lingers. None of these alone constitutes transformation, but together they accumulate, shifting how the veteran relates to pain, time, place, and connection. Over days or weeks, these exposures become a pattern of reorientation until a Threshold is crossed: the decision to reach out, to return to an old hobby, to show up to something they had stopped believing was for them.

Ooex doesn't push for outcomes but holds space for possibility sensing. It recognises that Thresholds are not dramatic, but often quiet and crossed not once, but gradually, through many surfacings of hope, rhythm, or relational movement. This is how Design with RLX creates a platform for co-composed healing: by attending to perception (helping veterans notice what uplifts or opens), duration (allowing change to unfold across time), co-composition (inviting veterans and their communities into shaping what supports them), and affective flow (sensing how emotion moves with and through pain). The result is not a tool that treats, but a companion that perceives and moves with veterans through the real cadence of becoming.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The success of our RLX-driven approach is evident. The 12-month project achieved proof-of-concept, with veterans themselves validating the app's usefulness and potential (see Appendix B – Veteran Feedback). Participants reported that capturing and communicating their experiences helped them reflect and convey their experiences more clearly, and that connecting with others through the platform fostered a greater sense of community and encouragement.

At the time of writing, we are seeking to expand the project through further field trials with larger veteran cohorts and by securing funding partnerships to deepen the platform's capabilities.

If you're interested in exploring how Ooex could support veterans or any condition context, we're now offering demonstrations of the platform.

You can book a session directly with the team and experience firsthand how Ooex senses and supports real lived experience in motion.

In summary, the Umio veteran project stands as a powerful illustration of Design with RLX, showing how health innovation grounded in real lived experience can achieve outcomes that are both profoundly human and practically impactful.

Appendix A - How Ooex Senses and Supports RLX Events and Thresholds

Ooex is designed to perceive, hold, and make visible the subtle, often unspoken movements of Events and Thresholds in the lived experience of veterans with chronic pain. Rather than tracking symptoms or producing metrics, Ooex works relationally, rhythmically, and perceptively to stay with what is shifting before it is named, and to accompany veterans in their becoming. It does so in four fundamental ways.

1. Expressing Events: Surfacing the Pause

Ooex doesn't ask, What's wrong? It asks, What's shifting? It invites expression through sensory rhythm, social withdrawal, spatial pacing, or body quietness, not through formal reports. Veterans may track a change in mood after gardening or flag a sense of disconnection without having to explain it. These expressions of events are held gently. They are seen as part of life in motion, not problems to solve.

Example: *Went to the supermarket alone. No panic. Just tired. Logged it and felt like something. Noticing endurance without drama but strength as the ability to stay.*

2. Perceiving Thresholds: Holding the Moment of Transition

Ooex is designed to recognise when experience reorganises, not by clinical metrics, but by how veterans shift their relationship to time, connection, and agency. When someone stops reaching out, reorients their day around fatigue, or begins posting differently, these are threshold cues.

Example: *Messed an old mate today. Haven't spoken since I left. Not sure why I did it. Just needed to. A reorientation in connection, not explained, just expressed.*

3. Creating a Field of Perception, Not a Stream of Metrics

Rather than generate scores or outputs, Ooex constructs a dynamic field where experience can unfold. Veterans trace their own becoming - mood, movement, micro-uplifts - at their pace. The platform doesn't ask for change. It allows veterans and professionals alike to witness it. Thresholds emerge in gesture, in drift, in return.

Example: *Three weeks with no black mood entries. Didn't think that was possible. Still not sure it is. With the doubt included, the expression makes the field real.*

4. Relational Co-composition After the Threshold

Ooex supports veterans not only in recognising that they've changed, but in making meaning from that change with others. The platform creates space for reconnection, shared reflection, and quiet companionship, offering language without judgment, and continuity without demand.

Example: *Told the GP what it's really like this week. Felt like being honest, finally. Not a breakthrough. A movement toward truth in relation.*

Why Ooex Is Different

Most platforms ask: What's happening to you? Ooex asks: What's moving in your experience field?

Most systems ask: Have you changed yet? Ooex says: Let's sense the change as it's happening.

Ooex doesn't just collect data. It listens. It perceives. It co-composes.

Appendix B - Veteran Feedback

It's about knowing you have the capacity to take charge of your own life.

I'll put my hand on my heart and tell you, when I was in the forces, I was literally, you know, largely in life, dead confident, not afraid of anything. Whereas for a long time post-serving, I'd say I was like almost a shadow of that person. And it's almost been a journey to where I am now to find, and I'm still definitely not that person, but I'm like, let's say I'm 80% of that person. So yeah, to find and recover 100% of that person, you know, would be brilliant.

It looks good. Very LinkedIn. Not like other pain apps.

It's a bit like Instagram but without the nonsense. Instagram with purpose.

More involved than Facebook. Facebook is for frivolous things.

The fact that it's simple to use will encourage the older, less computer savvy guys.

Looks easy to use. It'll be especially helpful for people who struggle to articulate or express themselves.

The spheres are brilliant. It's clever because it takes in the lot.

I like the domains. They're very good, very effective. They all overlap and interact with each other.

I'm really impressed. That's really good stuff. I love the idea of kind of tracking on the calendar your domains, what's going on for you, and to be able to look back and reflect, oh how was I feeling on that day?

It's like a kind of fitness blog and a pain diary. It's good that people are sharing and can give each other praise and advice.

It would help build the knowledge set of what activities affect me and how.

This app identifies trends so that I can highlight what activities cause an increase in pain or a decrease in mood or mental wellbeing.

Pain is something you can't see, like an injury or your arm falling off, you know, it's hard to prove to others. This'll help.

When I go to the doctors or a specialist and they ask how things are going, I can show them.

I was just thinking obviously if a veteran was to go to their GP or something and they're like look I'm really struggling at the moment and sort of be able to show them this app and say well this is what's making my pain worse and this is when my moods are at their lowest and stuff like that.

It's about getting people keyed in. This would help massively.

It would be good to see what's available locally, services and activities and people with similar injuries, abilities and service background, where I'm not going to turn up and everyone's a marathon runner you know?

I think more people will get involved knowing that they can help other veterans.

I like that you get to suggest activities, I like that the system takes information from other people's input to determine what it presents to you.

And it's thinking, thinking, thinking. And then it comes back with ideas you may never have thought of. Wow.

It will show, especially for young men, that talking about and seeing other people's mental health is completely normal. And it is normal. That in itself is absolute gold.

It's good that other veterans can see if you've been doing something and you're in absolute agony and it's made your mental health worse. You know, they can give you a message and say, oh, you're all right mate.

It's a way to lean on other guys who have got the same sort of mindset, have the same sort of things. I buy into that.

It's very well needed. Community is so massively important. It provides support and networking.

If this had been around, and I'd known about it, my journey might have been a hell of a lot different, and I may not have struggled in the way I have.

If this platform had been available, I'd have been all over it. I'd have been like, what else can I do that's local to me? Who else can I chat to? What have they been doing that I could be doing? And what have I been doing that they could be doing?

About Umio

We offer bespoke consultancy, services, research, and educational programs that help enterprises, teams, and communities design with the real lived experience (RLX) of health, illness, and human transformation.

All services are grounded in the principles of Design with RLX – our philosophy that perceives health not as a fixed category, but as a relational, unfolding process of lived experience.

Contact us to discuss your requirements, explore Bergson, our Experiential Intelligence tool. or see a demo of Ooex – our platform for Real Lived Experience in Motion .



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