

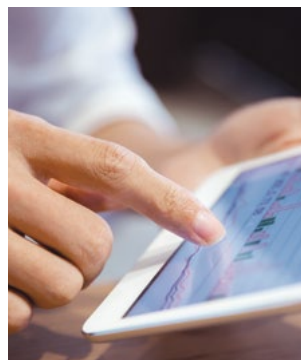
## "I'm there when they need me"

Discover the vital role peer recovery worker Corrine plays



## Unlocking the power of data

Our new digital platform



## Light at the end of the tunnel

Veteran Andy's journey to recovery



# COMBAT STRESS

Spring 2024

## OVERCOMING MILITARY TRAUMA

### How trauma-focused therapy can help

We treat veterans who have experienced military trauma. Eighty percent of the veterans that seek our help have PTSD or Complex-PTSD but every veteran has unique needs. Our specialist psychologists and psychotherapists are trained in a range of different trauma-focused therapies so we can personalise the treatment we offer for each veteran to help them recover. It's important to us that the treatment we provide has been proven to work.

### WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is defined as an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events. Post-traumatic difficulties are lasting emotional responses to traumatic events that significantly impact the person's whole life.

### Why trauma-focused therapy?

The nature of some traumas means that at the time they happen our brains do not process them in the same way as everyday events. After a trauma people may avoid thinking about them, because of the ongoing distress this causes. These two understandable responses mean the memories of the trauma are not stored in the same way typical events are stored and cause PTSD.

Trauma-focused therapy provides a safe space to process traumatic events. The goal is to enable the brain to store these traumas so that they are experienced as in the past and allows the individual to move forward with their life. This is the most proven way of recovering from PTSD.

**The trauma-focused therapies we offer include CBT, NET and EMDR.**

**CBT:** Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for PTSD provides an opportunity to look at each trauma in significant detail, processing

the memory of each. It provides a way to re-evaluate the meaning of a traumatic event for the individual and look at it from a range of perspectives. This can change unhelpful beliefs about the trauma, that often keep PTSD going, to help someone recover. CBT has a very strong evidence base and is the most commonly used therapy for PTSD.

**NET:** Narrative exposure therapy (NET) is based around the story of a veteran's entire life. During therapy sessions a veteran constructs a visual image of highly significant events throughout their life, a 'lifeline', with rocks symbolising a traumatic event, flowers indicating a happy memory or relationship, candles representing a loss, and sticks signifying an event where the veteran has themselves perpetuated violence that was traumatic for them. NET provides an opportunity to look at trauma through the whole lifespan and to process multiple traumas in a safe, contained space. The use of NET is well evidenced and the majority of our psychologists and psychotherapists are trained in this form of therapy.

**EMDR:** Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EDMR) therapy involves a veteran recalling a traumatic memory whilst at the same time doing something that involves bi-lateral, or alternate right and left-sided, movement. This could mean moving your eyes from side-to-side, tapping your hands or even listening to alternating sounds in left and right ears. Although this therapy sounds unusual in its approach, like all trauma-focused therapies EMDR involves re-visiting memories and has an excellent evidence base for treating PTSD. It can be useful for those veterans with non-combat related trauma experienced during their military careers or for veterans who hold traumatic memories in their body – for example, feeling physical pain when they recall a trauma or phantom limb pain following the loss of a limb.



An example of a narrative exposure therapy 'lifeline'

**COMBAT  
STRESS**  
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

Continued on page 4



# OUR LATEST NEWS



## Together we march

It's not too late to take part in our annual March in March event. All you need to do is walk or run 10 miles on any day during March to raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans. Simply register for free online, decide when and where you're going to do it in your local area and then get started!

To find out more, visit [marchinmarch.co.uk](http://marchinmarch.co.uk)



“With every mile, I hope we can walk towards a brighter future for veterans with invisible wounds and our wider society.”

## 3,000 mile challenge

Supporter Sujan Katuwal will be taking it one step at a time when he attempts to walk 3,000 miles this year to raise funds for the charity. In January Sujan launched his challenge from the Embassy of Nepal with the help of Dame Joanna Lumley and our loyal supporter and Combat Stress Benefactor Lord Rami Ranger. Sujan will be walking an average of 13 miles a day until September when he hopes to have raised over £250,000. Funds raised will be shared between a total of six charities, one of which is Combat Stress.

Keep track of his miles and support his efforts by visiting [givewheel.com/fundraising/2124/sujan-katuwals-3000-mile-challenge/](http://givewheel.com/fundraising/2124/sujan-katuwals-3000-mile-challenge/)

## Read all about it



Our research department was established in 2014 with the goal of exploring the needs of the veteran community so that we can understand better ways to support veterans. Our research has included the first study to explore long-term outcomes of PTSD treatment and the first study to validate the concept of moral injury in the UK and to understand its impact.

We're committed to publishing our research as part of our undertaking to contribute to the advancement of the veteran mental health field. We have recently published a report detailing our major findings over the last 10 years. The report is available on our website at [combatstress.org.uk/research](http://combatstress.org.uk/research) or you can contact us for a paper copy by emailing [supportercare@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@combatstress.org.uk)

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

We'd love you to join us at one of our upcoming events:



### 18 APRIL

Join us for a private tour and lunch at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. To find out more or to book tickets, please visit [combatstress.org.uk/sandhurst](http://combatstress.org.uk/sandhurst)



### 10 MAY

Fire up the oven and put the kettle on. Sign up to take part by visiting [events.combatstress.org.uk/brewandbake](http://events.combatstress.org.uk/brewandbake)



### 25 JUNE

Save the date for our inaugural Golf Day. Find out more at [combatstress.org.uk/golf-day](http://combatstress.org.uk/golf-day)



### 26 SEPTEMBER

Get a team together for a day of clay shooting. To find out more please visit [combatstress.org.uk/clay-shoot](http://combatstress.org.uk/clay-shoot)





## Corrine is one of our peer recovery workers who has a unique role in our specialist support for veterans.

“From the very beginning of their journey with the charity, I’m there to support a veteran however they need it. This might be anything from helping them complete our initial assessment forms, assisting them with IT queries, talking through any concerns they have during their treatment or a simple check-in call to see how they are. I also help host our peer support group meetings. I like to think I’m always there as a veteran goes through their treatment – lurking in the background, I say!

“The military has always been a part of my life. I grew up in a military family and am a veteran myself. I have that understanding of being in the military and that means I’m immediately on an equal footing with other veterans. We talk the same language – and I’ll always find something to laugh about with them!

“I’m available to veterans Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm. I work closely with the clinical team to support a veteran’s treatment. For example sometimes a veteran might not have completed the forms needed for the next part of their treatment or confirmed an appointment so I’ll be the one who follows up with them. It works really well.

“Sometimes someone just needs time to talk things through and that’s where I come in. I’ll listen and support them. I think that’s one of the benefits of my role – I’m an extra person a veteran can talk to. I’m not a clinician and that can be easier for some veterans.

“If I had to give three words to describe my job, I’d say it’s rewarding, challenging and enjoyable. It’s rewarding because I see the difference our treatment is making to the lives of veterans. It can be challenging as I do sometimes get calls from veterans in crisis but we have a robust process in place for this to ensure they get the help they need. And finally it’s enjoyable – it’s wonderful to hear how veterans thrive during and after treatment.

“One of the biggest issues I encounter is getting veterans to understand that they do deserve help, they are not weak, they are deserving.”

“I absolutely love my job. I wouldn’t give it up for the world. I love the fact that I can help keep veterans stepping forward in their lives.”



# £30



is how much it costs for Corrine to provide a 1:1 session to a veteran. Please help us provide this to more veterans by making a donation.

[combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate)



# HOW TRAUMA-FOCUSED THERAPY CAN HELP

Continued from page 1



Stephen Lounds, Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, provides trauma-focused therapy

**At Combat Stress our psychologists and psychotherapists are trained and supervised in at least two empirically evidenced trauma focused therapies.**

## WHAT DOES EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE MEAN?

Empirical evidence means that the therapy has been scientifically researched through clinical trials and the results have shown that it is safe and appropriately qualified clinicians can feel confident to use it in their clinical practice.

### Choosing the right therapy

We carefully assess the needs of each veteran – what has happened to them that has led to them now living with PTSD, and use our knowledge about treatment we know works and always

taking into account veteran choice. Some are drawn to the lifetime narrative approach used in NET but for others the meaning of a traumatic event may be very problematic so CBT might be most appropriate. Others may prefer a therapy that doesn't involve as much talking as others and so EMDR can be very helpful in these cases.

We are also currently piloting and carefully evaluating trauma-focused art therapy for a small group of veterans. This can be offered if a veteran has received an evidence-based therapy but has not fully recovered or has a very strong preference for processing information using visual or creative means.

### Evidence and evaluation

As a charity we continually collect outcome data on our treatments to inform the work we are doing with individual veterans, understand how to maximise our effectiveness and also share this information to the benefit of the wider veteran sector. Our new data system is designed to track the quality of our clinical service in detail – what works best for whom – you can read more about this on the page opposite.



# £112



could pay for one veteran to have an appointment with a psychological therapist to help them process and make sense of their trauma to aid their recovery.

Please help us provide this to more veterans by making a donation.

[combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate)



“

Trauma-focused therapy at Combat Stress has excellent recovery rates. Whilst it can be challenging for a veteran to start facing difficult memories, we work closely with them beforehand to choose the most appropriate therapy and support them to feel as ready as possible to take it on. We're able to offer a good number of sessions to try and meet a veteran's needs and we are constantly reviewing goals throughout the treatment.

“

There's no evidence that indicates the time since trauma makes any difference in terms of outcomes for trauma-focused therapy. Whether it has been five years or 20 years since the trauma occurred, we'd encourage any veteran to talk to us to see if we might be able to help. It's never too late."

Dr Claire Price, Principal Clinical Psychologist, England South hub



# UNLOCKING THE POWER OF DATA

There are apps and devices galore today to track your physical health. Pop on a sports or fitness watch and you can monitor your heart rate, track your sleep or keep count of your steps.

At Combat Stress we use technology to collect, store and manage mental health information on veterans receiving treatment to enhance our research, clinical services and decision-making. Known more widely as health informatics, this approach combines healthcare, technology and data science to improve the efficiency, quality and outcomes of our service delivery.

As a modern organisation we are keen to develop in this area, and in July 2023, we invested in the development of a new digital platform, QED (Quality and Effectiveness Data). This highly efficient and user-friendly system was developed and led by expertise from within our inhouse clinical, IT and digital teams. Our aim is to use the data to support improved outcomes for veterans whilst also identifying trends, patterns and (longer-term) opportunities to share big data across services in the sector.



In future phases, QED will allow a veteran receiving our support to access all of their data and be able to track precisely the results of their treatment.

In the first six months since launch, QED collected over 134,000 data points from veterans\* (utilising various different measurements). As the data builds over time, this will provide us with a huge amount of detail to help inform the treatment we provide to individual veterans but also to advance and share our knowledge for the benefit of the healthcare sector and veteran community as a whole.

“

QED has the potential to provide a veteran with real-time feedback on their efforts, similar to how a smart watch does. The data is personal to their goals. Overcoming complex mental health issues can be a difficult challenge but seeing your progress can really help."

Dr Lee Robinson, Clinical Psychologist, part of the QED development team

\*Veteran confidentiality is very important to us. The QED system has been designed to store information in a way that protects it from being attributed data to an individual. A range of standard security protections are also in place to prevent unauthorised access.





# “WHY I’LL NEVER REGRET CALLING COMBAT STRESS FOR HELP.”

**For veteran Andy, it wasn’t until 30 years after leaving the Army that his partner Christine realised he needed our specialist help to put his military trauma behind him. Christine tells us about the experience in her own words.**

“Andy (or Grandy to five grandkids) served for 21 years in the Royal Green Jackets. He saw service all over the world, including Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles. He left in 1992.

“In all the years we have known each other (over twenty at the last count!), he has been through countless periods of having nightmares, so bad that he was waking covered in sweat, bouts of heavy drinking, and periods of withdrawal where he would spend hours, if not days alone on a computer, not really seeming to do anything – just staring at the screen.

“Yes, I persuaded him to visit the GP many times, sometimes going with him. Even though I said I was sure there ‘was something else going on’, each time we were dismissed with ‘well, lots of people have these sort of symptoms – probably nothing more than a bit of stress’. I always knew that wasn’t the case but for a very long time didn’t make the connection between the time he spent in the Forces which was so long ago, and the problems he was experiencing.

“Every argument in our house centred around his drinking. I blamed his nightmares on his drinking, and got upset when he wouldn’t get involved in anything which didn’t involve the pub. I walked on eggshells constantly, trying not to do or say anything which might upset him, and send him back to the pub again.

“The breakthrough came in the spring of 2021. He is a truck driver and hurt his right hand quite badly at work and had to take a few weeks off while it healed. He struggled to find things to do to keep himself occupied and had too much time to think and brood on things. The nightmares returned, the worst he had ever had and continued when he went back to work. He was able to hide them from me this

time because we were working different shift patterns.

“However, one evening he completely broke down, and said he didn’t think he could go to work the next day. I asked him what was the matter, and all he could say was ‘nightmares’. We had talked about Combat Stress, but he always said he wasn’t that bad, and didn’t want or need that sort of thing. I was sure now that he did!

“I fixed an appointment for him with the GP the following morning, as he was obviously not in any condition to get behind the wheel of a truck. The GP gave his stock answer ‘everyone gets nightmares’ and then added for good measure ‘why do you want a sick note for that?’. At this point I saw red! I gave Andy the ultimatum – either you make the call to Combat Stress, or I will. So, I sat by his side with the phone on loudspeaker and made the call. It was the best thing I think I have ever done! The helpline was absolutely brilliant – on that first call, he didn’t feel able to speak to them, so all he was asked to do was to give his name, date of birth and service number, and then give permission for the call handler to speak to me.



“  
For a very long  
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“His assessment began the following day. I know it took all the courage he could summon up to take the call, but afterwards, you could see the relief on his face. From that point on, through countless calls and assessments, and at least four courses, I could watch with absolute delight the changes in him unfolding.

“He really enjoyed the art therapy in particular and was so proud when he was asked if his work could be used to help future groups!

“He lost the sad, vacant look in his eyes. As number three grandkid, aged two at the time, said ‘Grandy, your eyes are all sparkly, like my dress!’. That summed it up perfectly!

“The nightmares gradually faded away, and he hasn’t had one for many, many months now. And if he does have a drink at home, it’s just two small glasses of his favourite red wine with his dinner, both of which he thoroughly enjoys, and then he puts the bottle away.

“From the bottom of my heart, thank you Combat Stress. None of this would ever have happened without your help, and to anyone out there who is like I was, please make the call if your loved one can’t or won’t make it for themselves. You, and just as importantly they, really will never ever regret it. There really is light at the end of that very dark tunnel.”



## ART THERAPY AT COMBAT STRESS

Through his treatment with us, Andy had the opportunity to explore art and creativity, and this was key to his recovery, providing a way to express emotions and deal with his mental health issues.

“Art therapy provides a channel of expression for emotions that may be too difficult to put into words. It provides a different way of working through traumatic experiences,” says Jan Lobban, Senior Art Therapist.

This photograph is Andy’s creative response to an art therapy task around ‘perceptions’ – the translation of observations into meaningful images related to his mental health.

He says, “I think this image represents a brain. The tree above the water is in the light, where my mind is calm and clear and the reflection in the water represents the dark places where I didn’t want to go at the time I took the photo. It’s the same brain, with a different perception.”





# THE STORIES BEHIND SUPPORT

Hear from two supporters with different motivations who both share our purpose and passion.



## CAROLYN

Royal Navy veteran

“I first became aware of the work of Combat Stress when a friend told me about the impact that his experiences in his time serving with the Royal Navy and Royal Marines was having on his personal life – sudden debilitating flashbacks and raw emotional episodes. He eventually plucked up the courage to recognise he needed help and was accepted on a Combat Stress residential course, emerging with a much greater understanding of Combat PTSD and, even more importantly, what he could do to counter its effects. Through regular financial donations, and by leaving a gift in my Will, I am so pleased to be able to support the work of Combat Stress and the outstanding positive impact their efforts have on the men and women who have given so much in their service to our country.”



## ADAM

Lawyer and Chair of the Combat Stress Annual Charity Dinner 2024

“I don’t have any military connection but after seeing an advert in a newspaper which detailed the work of Combat Stress, I became interested in supporting the charity. I began giving on a regular basis as well as attending events. I was really taken with how everyone who works at Combat Stress is really invested in changing lives. I’ve been really impressed with how the charity helps veterans and makes such a positive impact on their families too. I like supporting Combat Stress as I know they are making a difference – 76p of every £1 spent goes directly on veteran treatment. I can really see that the help provided turns lives around. I have enjoyed being involved with the charity so much that I’ve agreed to chair the annual charity dinner on 16 May.”

We’re very grateful for the support from Carolyn and Adam. To find out more about how you could support us, or to find out about leaving a gift in your Will please visit [combatstress.org.uk/support-us](https://combatstress.org.uk/support-us)

## WHY DO YOU SUPPORT US?

We’d love to know why. Please let us know by emailing [supportercare@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@combatstress.org.uk)

## HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

Your donation can help us provide life-changing treatment and support to veterans with complex mental health problems.

Please send this form with your donation to the following address:  
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Oaklawn Road, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 0BX**

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Date:

## OTHER WAYS TO DONATE

- Scan the QR code
- Online at [combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate)
- Call our team on **01372 587 151**

Find out more [combatstress.org.uk](https://combatstress.org.uk)

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FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH