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COMBAT STRESS

Spring update 2025

VICTORY FOR VICTOR

Our Veterans' Intensive Complex Trauma Organised Recovery (VICTOR) programme has won the Healthcare and Rehabilitation Award at the prestigious Soldiering On Awards.

Launched in 2022, VICTOR is the only intensive treatment for Complex PTSD available to veterans in the UK. It is the result of a visionary effort to address the overwhelming need for specialised PTSD care. The programme is delivered to veterans by a team of our expert clinicians, driven by cutting edge research and clinical prowess.

VICTOR is a three-phased treatment programme comprising two weeks of preparatory work, a two- to three-week intensive treatment phase, and three months of follow-up support.

Veterans taking part in VICTOR progress through treatment as part of a cohort of up to eight veterans and attend a variety of groups in addition to their individual treatment sessions.

The intensive treatment phase provides up to 36 hours of evidence-based trauma-focused psychological therapy, as well as a comprehensive range of wider multidisciplinary treatment, and peer and family support to ensure an individualised approach.

The treatment is intensive by design. This is because intensive treatment typically results in much higher completion rates compared to weekly treatment and can accelerate recovery whilst minimising the impact of treatment on family life and work.

The three months following the intensive treatment phase allow time for progress veterans made during intensive treatment to continue and enables us to support them further as they continue their journey to



From left to right: Martin Taylor, Deputy CEO of Redwood Technologies who sponsored this award category, judging panel member Helen Helliwell, Combat Stress VICTOR team members Clare Bate, Professor Catherine Kinane and Dr Naomi Wilson, with host Jeremy Vine.

recovery. The follow-up phase concludes with an appointment with their allocated psychologist to review progress, explore any outstanding needs and consider next steps.

After this point, veterans might go on to access our peer support service (for up to a year); they may be discharged, or they may engage in further treatments to aid their ongoing recovery.

Initial outcomes from the first cohorts undertaking VICTOR have shown great results: 83% of veterans achieved a clinically significant reduction in PTSD symptoms, and 62% no longer met the criteria for Complex PTSD (based on outcome data to December 2024).

The Soldiering On Awards recognises outstanding achievements in the Armed Forces community, engaging the Ministry of Defence, military charities and corporate partners to shine a light on those who make a difference.



Insights from veterans who have undertaken VICTOR

"The team at Combat Stress are lifesavers." Army veteran Simon

"It's important that people know that Combat Stress brings us back from the edge of oblivion." Army veteran Bob

"Combat Stress has given my wife and I our life back." Army veteran Dave

OUR LATEST NEWS



Join the fun of March in March – pictured here are some of our participants in the 2024 challenge.

March in March is back!

It's not too late to take part in our annual challenge, March in March. Take on this 10-mile challenge on your own, with friends and family or even with work colleagues. Not only will you give your mental health a boost, but you'll also be raising funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans.

Commit to the challenge and complete your 10 miles in one day or spread it across the month. Just register online for free, decide when and where you're going to walk and get started! We just ask that you try to raise as much as you can in sponsorship – and you'll earn some fantastic rewards along the way!

To find out more, visit marchinmarch.co.uk

Professor Busuttill retires



Professor Walter Busuttill, our Director of Research and Training and former Medical Director, has retired after 17 years at the charity.

He designed many of our pioneering treatments and led a number of our research programmes. He will continue to play a role in the future of the charity after accepting an honorary position and will advise the Executive Leadership Team and Board of Trustees on clinical and strategic matters.

Walter has led a remarkable career, spending four decades treating service personnel and veterans. He joined Combat Stress in 2007 as Medical Director and led the development of our first intensive PTSD treatment programme.

80th anniversary of VE Day

8 May marks Victory in Europe Day, when the Allies accepted Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender, while August 15 marks the day Japan surrendered, effectively ending the Second World War. The legacy of the war shaped the world we live in today and for many who took part the legacy lived on for the rest of their lives. The Prime Minister has pledged a moment of national reflection.

Visit combatstress.org.uk/victory to find more more about how you can mark this significant date for the nation.

COMBAT STRESS LEARNING

Fully funded training about veterans' mental health

To help increase understanding of veterans' mental health, we recently launched two new learning communities on our dedicated training platform, Combat Stress Learning. The training is available to people working with, treating or supporting veterans, including partners and carers. Thanks to the generosity of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust we can offer 3,000 fully funded places.

Our new training will focus on two key areas:

- **Suicide prevention: Supporting high-risk veterans.** This training aims to reduce veteran deaths by suicide. Our training focuses on increasing confidence (via upskilling and sharing expertise) amongst people caring for or working with veterans with mental health needs who are at high-risk of suicide.
- **Cultivating hope and trauma-informed services.** This training aims to reduce the length of time between veterans with complex mental health issues leaving the military and seeking help.

To find out more or register for a training account visit learning.combatstress.org.uk

Sign up for the Combat Stress Charity Digest

Be the first to know how your support makes a difference to the lives of veterans across the UK. Delivered direct to your inbox each month, our Charity Digest offers inspiring stories, updates on our life-changing work, and ways you can continue supporting those who served.

Visit combatstress.org.uk/signup to start receiving our Charity Digest email.

“**COMBAT STRESS
WILL ALWAYS
BE CLOSE TO
MY HEART.**”



A traumatic experience during the first Gulf War left Army veteran Guy with serious mental health issues. Now, nine years after our life-changing treatment, he reflects on life both before and after Combat Stress.

Guy was 20 when he joined the Army, going on to serve in Northern Ireland and the first Gulf War. It was here in 1991 that he experienced an incident that would change his life. He tried to carry on as usual, but in 2000 realised how bad things had got. “I was drinking heavily and my behaviour had become completely irrational,” he says. “I’d have violent, aggressive outbursts and I couldn’t understand why. At my lowest, I wanted to end it all.”

When everything became too much, Guy called our Helpline. He was subsequently diagnosed with PTSD and in 2015 undertook an intensive

“**I can’t sugarcoat it; if it wasn’t for Combat Stress, I’m not sure I’d still be here.**”

residential treatment programme at our England South hub. “For the first time ever, I was with people who’d been through similar things,” he says. “Having that unspoken understanding made me feel less alone.”

Since completing treatment in 2016, Guy’s life has changed massively. “Life today is the best it’s been in a long time,” he says. “I’m a completely different person – more considerate and understanding.”

Guy is now a well-known face at Combat Stress, kindly giving his time and energy in many ways to help us be there for more veterans who need us. This includes being a member of our National Veterans Forum. This brings together Combat Stress staff, veterans and other sector professionals to co-produce elements of Combat Stress that directly impact veterans, and to give veterans a space to share their expertise. In the long-term Guy would like to become a peer support worker with an organisation like Combat Stress.

Guy also works closely with our corporate fundraising team and takes part in our annual March in March fundraising event – even featuring in a short film to help promote it. His involvement with Combat Stress has led to a new job opportunity with Corps Security, a social enterprise that provides specialist security services including security guarding and security monitoring. “Corps Security is a big supporter of Combat Stress, and I attended its mental health day on behalf of the charity,” Guy says. “Through that introduction I now have a job with Corps Security as a commissionaire, a prestigious security role for high-end events, which is great.”

In 2024 Guy was named our Veteran Volunteer of the Year for everything he does to help the charity. “Combat Stress is always going to be close to my heart,” he says.



Guy during his time in the Coldstream Guards.

To read about the life-changing treatment that we provide to other veterans, please visit

combatstress.org.uk/veteran-stories

£30



could fund a veteran's call to our Helpline, the first step on their journey to recovery. Help us provide this by making a donation.

combatstress.org.uk/donate

THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING

Why we're a trauma-informed organisation

Veterans are the heart of everything we do. We know that asking for help can be difficult for former serving personnel so our staff receive training to understand military life and the mental health difficulties veterans may face after leaving the Armed Forces. Many of the veterans we support have experienced multiple traumas. Therefore, it's important that all our staff recognise the impact traumatic experiences continue to have on everyday life. This means consistently responding to veterans in a way that prevents further harm and supports their recovery.

That's why we're a trauma-informed organisation. All of our staff undertake trauma-informed training to enable everyone to understand some of the ways trauma might affect the veterans who seek our help. Whether veterans are talking with kitchen staff, administrators, fundraisers, clinicians or directors we want every interaction to feel safe and for veterans to feel confident in the care we provide. We work to a set of principles which we and others believe are in contrast to the experience of trauma.

OUR TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES

Trust

We prioritise trust and transparency in our interactions. This means being clear about what we can and can't do, explaining what our treatment entails and what will happen at the end of treatment, so that veterans understand the care we offer and trust us to deliver this.

Empowerment

Trauma can often make individuals feel disempowered. We want veterans to feel empowered to make decisions and have ownership of their treatment journey, and in turn feel empowered to make positive choices in their lives and for their future.

Collaboration

Using a collaborative approach means that we work with veterans, not for veterans – we get to know them, not a diagnosis. We directly involve veterans' voices in decision making about our services to constantly improve what we do and develop our specialist treatment.

Safety

Trauma can leave you with a residual sense of not feeling safe. Feeling safe fosters healthy relationships and builds trust between staff and veterans, which is the foundation of recovery. We seek to integrate our knowledge of the impact of trauma into the whole organisation's practices and policies to ensure veterans feel safe with us.

Choice

Trauma involves a lack of control so one of our main goals is to create experiences for veterans that involve shared decision-making and choice. We will always take into account veteran preference for treatment and also explain the clinical rationale behind different treatment options so veterans can make an informed decision about their care.

Cultural consideration

We want veterans from all backgrounds to feel confident that they can access our service and will be treated with dignity and respect at all times. This includes removing barriers and facilitating care for all, including those in minority groups, being sensitive about our language, and sharing life stories and stories of recovery of veterans from different groups.

Implementing trauma-informed practice

Our specialist services take into account the life experiences of the veterans we treat, including the different ways in which a veteran might be affected by trauma, and we continually work to prevent retraumatisation.

Our trauma-informed practice includes:

- Offering a veteran the choice to work with a female or male clinician.
- Taking collaborative approaches to treatment planning.
- Providing options of individual treatment or group support.
- Recognising that some veterans may be especially anxious about seeking help from a veterans' mental health service (for example, this may include offering online treatment for those who have experienced military sexual trauma).



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

The veteran experience

“

Initially I was reluctant to start treatment with Combat Stress, but by the time we got to the end of the first session all my fears were put to one side.”

“

The team are excellent, and they care for you. From the people on the Helpline, the receptionists when you arrive, to the team who look after you – everybody cares.”

“

The support was amazing and the treatment worked perfectly for me.”

WE BELIEVE THAT MILITARY TRAUMA SHOULDN'T DESTROY LIVES

Gifts in Wills are a vital source of funding for our life-changing mental health treatment. In fact, one in five veterans are helped thanks to this wonderful way of giving.



Crown Copyright 2007

Last year over 100 gifts left in this way enabled us to continue to provide our specialist treatment, transforming thousands of lives. We are profoundly grateful for everyone who chooses to make this lasting difference.

Leave a gift for the veterans of tomorrow

Including a gift in your Will has the power to help veterans with some of the most complex mental health issues to get the support and treatment they need. You'll help them reconnect with their families, restore their lives, and reclaim hope for the future.

1 in 5

veterans are helped thanks to gifts in Wills

You can find out more by calling Sarah on 01372 587 144 or email sarah.seddon@combatstress.org.uk or visit combatstress.org.uk/gift-wills

THE VITAL ROLE OF

What could you do?

VOLUNTEERS

Spreading the word about our specialist services is crucial to help more veterans know how we can help. Our team of fundraising volunteers play a key role in reaching into communities across the country that we just couldn't get to on our own, as well as helping to raise much-needed funds.

Everyone has their own reasons for volunteering and we hope that there's a role for everyone who wants to help. To inspire you, here are some insights from those who choose to support us in this way.

Cris and Jane

Navy veteran Cris Lovett and his wife Jane, from Weston-super-Mare in Somerset, started supporting Combat Stress in 2017 after discovering the charity had no community volunteers in the region. Since then, as county representatives, they have been tireless in their efforts to raise awareness of our life-changing treatment.

"I have PTSD myself but knowing our fundraising is helping other veterans helps me a great deal. We'll take the Combat Stress stand to all kinds of events – Armed Forces Day events, The White Horse Military Show and the Bournemouth Air Show – all places we know veterans and their families are likely to be. Very often it's the family members who come and talk to us, wanting to know how to help the veteran in their family. I really like the fact we're actively able to spread awareness and support veterans who are struggling with their mental health."



Cris and Jane regularly attend events on behalf of Combat Stress. Our President General Sir Peter Wall is pictured with them here.

Sarah

Sarah Ralphs has been on a volunteering secondment with Combat Stress, supported by the John Lewis Partnership's Golden Jubilee Trust.

"I chose to volunteer with Combat Stress as my partner is an Army veteran whose life was saved by this amazing charity. This was my way of trying to give back some of what we have gained.

"The best part of my role was, without doubt, speaking with veterans and their families. It was amazing to hear similar stories to that of my partner and how they too have turned their lives around with the help of Combat Stress. It was a welcome change from the corporate retail world I usually work in, and being able to use my skills and contacts to make a difference and support the fundraising team gave me a lot of job satisfaction.

"I was incredibly sad to leave at the end of January. I continue to volunteer as and when I can."

Sarah has now completed her six-month secondment and has returned to her role at John Lewis. We're very grateful for her impressive work with our volunteer community.



During her time with us Sarah has been busy collecting cheques and attending events.

“

If you have the opportunity to volunteer, DO IT!

It doesn't have to be an onerous commitment, just as much time as you are able to spare, but trust me, it is incredibly rewarding and this amazing charity needs as much support as possible.”

Sarah Ralphs who recently undertook a volunteering secondment with Combat Stress.



If volunteering is something you're interested in, here are our official volunteering roles:

- Our **county representatives** help build support from individuals and groups by raising awareness and funds through their own networking, giving presentations, representing us at events and generally being our eyes and ears within their given area.
- Our **community volunteers** work alongside our county representatives, supporting local events, helping to promote activity and awareness by putting up posters and literature.
- Our **forces representatives** provide a vital link between serving personnel, the military community, and Combat Stress. We want to enhance our relationship with all the services, whether Navy, Army or RAF, to encourage serving personnel up and down the country to learn more about Combat Stress and raise awareness and funds within the military community.
- Our **collection tin coordinators** support our fundraising team by managing Combat Stress collection tins that are being used in the local area such as cafes, restaurants and pubs.



- Our **cheering squad volunteers** give our incredible runners and cyclists massive amounts of encouragement and support at events. We have numerous challenge events happening throughout the year, so having teams of people there to help cheer and support is vital.

If you'd like to volunteer for one of the roles above, the first thing to do is to have a chat with one of our friendly fundraising team. They'll help you choose a suitable role and start the application process. After a straightforward process and checks, you'll receive information and materials to get started as a volunteer. Our regional fundraising team will also stay in touch to support you.



If you're interested in volunteering or undertaking a secondment to support our volunteer community, please contact Rosie Gibbons on 01952 822 719 or volunteering@combatstress.org.uk.

All our volunteering roles are non-clinical and focus on fundraising and raising awareness rather than working directly with veterans. We're unable to offer volunteering opportunities to support our specialist clinical team working with former military personnel.

REGULAR GIVING MAKES A LONG TERM DIFFERENCE

As someone who cares about veterans' mental health, you'll know the road to recovery can be long. There's no quick-fix for complex mental health problems – effective treatment takes time, and that's why we need your help.

If you can commit to give on a regular basis, your steady support will ensure we can continue to provide our specialist treatment, transforming the lives of veterans. A guaranteed income also enables us to make long-term investment plans to improve veterans' mental health care. Combined together, giving on a regular basis can make an amazing difference, helping more veterans tackle their past so they can take on the future.

Ways to give on a regular basis

PAYROLL GIVING

- An easy, tax-efficient way of donating through your salary
- It must be paid through PAYE from someone's wages or pension
- Ask if your employer will match your donation
- Check with your HR department to see if they have a payroll giving provider – if not, encourage them to set one up with Goodpaye

DIRECT DEBIT

- Donating in this way helps you to plan your giving
- There are no payment fees – we get 100% of your donation
- You can change it at any time
- You can set up a direct debit donation online, by completing the form below or by calling our friendly team

To find out more about giving on a regular basis or to set up your direct debit, please call us on **01372 587 151.**

HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

Your donation can help us provide life-changing treatment and support for veterans with complex mental health issues as a result of their military experiences.

Please send this form with your donation to the following address:
**Freepost RTKB-SYUY-CZYR,
 Combat Stress, Tyrwhitt House,
 Oaklawn Road, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 0BX**

Supporter no. (if known):

Full name:

Address:

Postcode:

I'd like to give a regular donation

Please pay the sum of:

£

monthly quarterly
 semi-annually annually

Starting on:

1st 15th of (month)
 until (month/year)
 or until further notice.

(Direct Debits can only be deducted on the 1st or 15th of the month.)

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To: The Manager
 Bank/Building Society

Address:

Postcode:

Service User Number
6 7 8 9 5 0

I'd like to make a one-off donation

£

I enclose a cheque (payable to Combat Stress)

Please debit my Credit/Debit/CAF card

Card number:

Expiry date: / For card payments, please provide your address

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Name(s) of Account Holder(s):

Account no:

Sort code:

Reference number (for office use only):

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Combat Stress Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Combat Stress and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature:

Date:

OTHER WAYS TO DONATE



Scan the QR code

Online at combatstress.org.uk/donate

Call our team on **01372 587 151**



Find out more combatstress.org.uk



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Please send me an acknowledgement letter

I would like to receive information about gifts in Wills

