

## No longer on the scrap heap

How calling our Helpline helped RAF veteran Liz



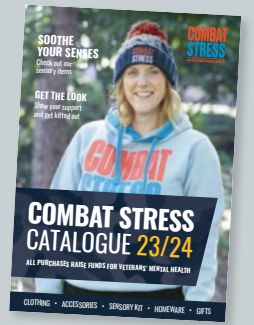
## Nursing know-how

An insight into our nursing team



## COMBAT STRESS CATALOGUE 23/24

Get yours today and help raise funds for veterans' mental health



# COMBAT STRESS

Autumn 2023

## RESEARCH INNOVATIONS FOR PTSD TREATMENT

Most of us will be familiar with the use of virtual reality headsets for online gaming but what about using one to help with the symptoms of PTSD? Thanks to funding from the Watson Trust, that's exactly what we've started to explore in an innovative new research study.

Social anxiety can be central to PTSD but by using virtual reality, veterans can explore what might have been a highly stressful situation for them from the safety of their therapy room. Traditionally, treatment would involve someone being prepared to undertake tasks on their own to overcome their fears and anxiety. By using virtual reality, we can combine this established evidence-based treatment with better support. We began the pilot phase for delivering this innovative treatment in June 2023 and will be reviewing the results over the coming months.

**“Veterans' needs are changing all the time but through research we can adapt and find innovative solutions to help improve treatment for complex mental health conditions.”**

Professor Dominic Murphy, Head of Research, Combat Stress



We've started using virtual reality in our treatment in a new research study

Our virtual reality pilot is just one of many research studies being undertaken by our research department to further our knowledge and understand how best to support the veteran community.

Another area of focus is treatment for moral injury. This is when something an individual did (or couldn't do) went against their personal moral code. After recognising that standard treatment for those with PTSD does not have as good outcomes for those also with moral injury, we have recently completed the pilot of a new treatment for this condition. During the summer we began testing the treatment with a larger group of veterans and hope to make the

treatment available to all veterans who need it in due course.

We've had a research department for 10 years and later this year we will be publishing a report detailing our major findings over this period.

To find out more about our research, please visit [combatstress.org.uk/research](https://combatstress.org.uk/research)

**COMBAT  
STRESS**  
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH



# OUR LATEST NEWS

## VICTOR success story



Veterans Tony and Trev who received treatment for Complex PTSD through our VICTOR programme

VICTOR (Veterans' Intensive Complex Trauma Organised Recovery), our intensive treatment service for PTSD and Complex PTSD, is at the forefront of clinical innovation. A highly specialised service, it includes a three-week intensive treatment phase after which veterans can access support for a further year. The intensive treatment phase provides up to 36 hours of evidence-based psychological therapy for PTSD, as well as a comprehensive range of wider multidisciplinary treatment, peer and family support to ensure an individualised approach.

As of August 2023, we have completed five VICTOR programmes, delivered with a residential intensive treatment phase at our England South hub, with future VICTOR programmes organised. We plan to run an all-female-only VICTOR programme in a few months.

The feedback received from VICTOR so far is positive; with 90% of veterans reporting clinically significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, 60% no longer meeting the criteria for Complex PTSD after intensive treatment. These findings from the pilot phase will help with future developments of the programme.

## Watch our new film



Veteran Herbie and his family generously gave their time to share on camera the devastating impact PTSD can have and how our life-changing mental health treatment can help bring families back together again.

To watch the film, visit [combatstress.org.uk/herbies-story](https://combatstress.org.uk/herbies-story)

## Staff member Steve at the Invictus Games!

Army veteran and Combat Stress staff member Steve is taking part in the Invictus Games (9–16 September 2023). Steve served for over 26 years in the military but sustained life-changing injuries while in Afghanistan. He now works as one of our peer support co-ordinators. Steve will be representing Team UK at the Games, competing in wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby.

"I'm looking forward to being around fellow veterans and all working towards the same goals, competing on a global stage. I hope to make a difference and my family proud, sharing in the joys and excitement of being part of Team UK whilst also creating awareness that some injuries run deeper than what people see."

We wish Steve and all the other veterans taking part the best of luck at the Games!



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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



### WEDNESDAY 1 NOVEMBER

Attend our Armistice Address and hear from military mental health expert Professor Sir Simon Wessely and former mountaineer Darren Edwards.



### THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER

Mark the start of the festive season by attending our Festival of Lessons and Carols at The Guards' Chapel, London.

For more information and to book tickets, please visit [combatstress.org.uk/events](https://combatstress.org.uk/events)



## D-DAY 44 CHALLENGE

Take on our D-Day 44 Challenge – a 44-mile run, a 22-mile run or 22-mile walk that commemorates the 1944 Allied invasion of occupied France on the 80th anniversary of D-Day, 6 June 2024.

For information and to sign up, visit [events.combatstress.org.uk/event/day44challenge](https://events.combatstress.org.uk/event/day44challenge)

“COMBAT STRESS MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WASN'T ON THE SCRAP HEAP”



After being medically discharged from the RAF, veteran Liz found herself “unravelling” in lockdown. Here she shares how calling Combat Stress' Helpline turned her life around.

"I joined the RAF in 2001 and my first deployment was to Iraq in 2003, then to Afghanistan for 10 tours where I was working on the Medical Emergency Response Team. It was relentless and the cumulative impact from that would later catch up with me.

"I was medically discharged in 2019 due to a neck injury and at this point I had no signs of PTSD. I went into the March 2020 lockdown in a good headspace but as it continued, I found it hard. Having left the RAF I'd lost that sense of identity and purpose. Everyday I had put on my flying suit, which felt like my Wonder Woman costume but I no longer had that.

"I struggled with the lack of routine. Exercise and keeping busy had always helped me deal with the trauma, but over four months of lockdown there was a creep where I was slowly unravelling.

"One day in August 2020 I decided to end my life and woke up two days later in hospital, intubated. My overwhelming emotion was 'I don't want to die' which was so far removed from where I'd been.



Liz during her time in the RAF

"When I left hospital I had an appointment with the mental health team who gave me a leaflet for Veterans' Gateway, who said to contact Combat Stress.

"I called the charity's Helpline and there was a friendly voice at the end of the phone, making me feel like I wasn't on the scrap heap. Someone cared – finally someone was giving a damn about me. Combat Stress put in motion for me to have counselling with other organisations, helping me process what I'd experienced and get to where I am today."

“If any other veterans aren't sure whether to call Combat Stress, the longer you put it off, the deeper you fall into the hole. Make the call early.”

# 8,000

Last year almost 8,000 veterans called our Helpline for help with their mental health.

Our Helpline plays a vital role in ensuring veterans get the right help and support they need. For some this will be referral into our specialist services but for others, like Liz, there may be other services better placed to help with their particular difficulties.

It costs £27 for each call to our Helpline. Please help us be there for more veterans by making a donation so they can start receiving our life-changing treatment.

Visit [combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate) or scan the QR code above





# NURSING KNOW-HOW

## An insight into our nursing team

Nurses have long been a core part of our life-changing services, providing support and helping veterans find hope again. In fact our nursing history goes right back to 1919, when the charity was founded by a group of remarkable women who decided to take a stand against the stigma that surrounded 'shell shock', following the First World War.

Today our nursing team provides specialist mental health and substance misuse services. The team includes both general and mental

health trained nurses who deliver a wide range of clinical treatment through a mix of in-person, online and residential services. Several of our nurses were in the Armed Forces or have family who are serving or who are also now veterans. However, many of our nurses have no military background but want to support those former military personnel who need our help.

Veterans using our services may meet several different nurses during their treatment depending on their needs.

## SOME OF OUR TEAM



### Lynn, Substance Misuse Nurse

"I find it incredibly rewarding to see a veteran being in control of the substance instead of it controlling them. In particular, watching them embrace, understand and grow with confidence as they put into place all that they are learning to manage their PTSD symptoms with healthy choices. It is fantastic to see them start to enjoy life again and listening to them talk and make plans about their future with excitement. The first time they start laughing again is great."

### Mark, Community Psychiatric Nurse, Northern Ireland

"I help veterans with managing their mental health such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and anger issues. As part of my job I have helped to facilitate the Cope Better With PTSD programme, which was developed by the charity. This is an online group programme that helps veterans understand how the brain works in processing traumatic events and how they can manage this through lifestyle changes, breathing exercises, mindfulness and other techniques. It is rewarding being able to help veterans and seeing them recover from their difficulties and being able to live more fulfilling and happier lives."



### Rachel Speed, Senior Nurse, Highlands Community Team

"I work with veterans in the community who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health. My main role is to promote recovery, providing them with tools and techniques to manage their symptoms."

"Working at Combat Stress I feel incredibly privileged to be part of a veteran's journey to recovery, often hearing stories they've never told anyone before. I will never stop being in awe of the strength of those I have helped."

To find out more about our nursing team, please visit [combatstress.org.uk/nursing](https://combatstress.org.uk/nursing)

“I’m a nurse at Combat Stress, helping to deliver our service that is driven by research evidence. I wanted to get more involved in a holistic approach to mental health and recovery and that’s exactly what I am able to do in my role here.

“The best part of my job? The fact that we’re veteran-centric, we listen and therefore we evolve.”

Brian, Deputy Head of Operations, Residential, England South, with veteran Tony who recently worked with Brian when he undertook our intensive treatment programme for Complex PTSD





# I RAN A MARATHON HANDCUFFED TO A MEDICINE BALL



## Why supporter Rich goes the extra mile for Combat Stress

As a charity, we are supported by some amazing fundraisers who, through their incredible achievements, have raised amazing amounts to help us continue to provide our life-changing mental health treatment. But what makes someone go the extra mile for Combat Stress? Veteran and supporter Rich Eburne explains all...

"I served in a TA Signals regiment for four years, mainly running a rebroadcast detachment. I left in the late 90s as my civvy job fixing the millennium bug was taking up more and more of my time and energy.

"I never really thought about my veteran status until my US-based employer Unum decided to create a global veterans network and I put my hand up to build and lead the UK group.

"In 2019, we began a partnership with Combat Stress and encouraged by them, Unum signed the Armed Forces Covenant. Combat Stress reignited the pride I used to feel when I served and inspired me to do so much more to engage with and support our veteran community.

"I've done lots of different challenges for Combat Stress over the years including leading a corporate team for the annual March in March event and taking part in the London Landmarks half marathon.

"Most recently I've run the London Marathon but with a difference – I had a 3kg medicine ball handcuffed to my wrist! At the time of the


marathon, I was taking part in the Medicine Ball Challenge – this involves having a medicine ball cuffed to your wrist for seven days. It may not sound that heavy but being tied to the medicine ball continuously for seven days is a significant burden. The ball becomes a physical, visual and tangible representation of the invisible burden of mental health so many of us can experience.

**“Running has always been my mental safe space so I decided to take this to the next level and run the London Marathon handcuffed to the medicine ball.”**

"It was a painful and challenging experience running the 26.2 miles but the crowd support was incredible and the knowledge that I was raising money for such an important cause kept me going until the finish line."

If Rich has inspired you to go the extra mile, you'll find lots of help and advice on our website.

Visit [combatstress.org.uk/support-us](https://combatstress.org.uk/support-us) or call one of our friendly fundraising team on 01372 587 140.



### MEDICINE BALL CHALLENGE

Created in 2018 by a serving soldier and former officer who had seen their families and friends struggle with mental health, this challenge involves cuffing a 3kg Medicine Ball to your wrist for seven days. The aim of the Medicine Ball Challenge is to raise awareness and encourage people to talk openly about mental health.

The challenge has now raised over £100,000 – a truly amazing sum. What's more, funds raised are split evenly between ABF The Soldiers Charity and Combat Stress.

To register to take on the challenge yourself, please visit [combatstress.org.uk/medicine-ball-challenge](https://combatstress.org.uk/medicine-ball-challenge)

# WHAT IS SENSORY MODULATION?

## Our sector leading work in this area

To improve daily life for veterans, our occupational therapists use sensory techniques to get them doing more of what they want to do by using their senses and working together to find out what works best for them. This is what we call sensory modulation and we use it to help veterans to feel more in control of their arousal levels and therefore be able to do things that they may have stopped doing because of their mental health issues.

For some of the veterans we support, their emotions can be a significant issue due to their traumatic experiences in the military. This is because during a threat or perceived danger, our nervous system switches on our fight, flight or freeze response. This is important to keep us safe, however after a traumatic event, the brain can sometimes trigger this response when there is no threat. Sensory modulation techniques can help someone feel calm, and they can also be

used to increase energy and concentration for those who may be struggling with their low mood, ability to focus or keep to their routine.

Sensory input is especially useful when the brain is not helping, for example when we're upset, distracted, anxious or stressed. By using sensory input, we can send a message to the brain to switch off fight or flight and get the brain back online.

For instance, the power of smell is useful for grounding because strong smells (like eucalyptus, lemon and peppermint) are very alerting. Grounding activities bring people back to reality if they are having trouble with dissociation, panic attacks, flashbacks or even harmful thoughts. Certain smells (like lavender, camomile and vanilla) help us to unwind when stressed, to calm us when we are anxious and can improve our sleep.

We're really proud of our work in this area. In fact, our sector-leading research into how sensory modulation can benefit veterans experiencing complex mental health issues has played a role in the Royal College of Occupational Therapists signing the Armed Forces Covenant and piloting a new community armed forces area of practice initiative for veterans.



Occupational Therapist Emma takes veteran Trevor through the different smells of essential oils.




Veteran Tony with the lavender in the sensory garden at our South Hub.

## £87

is how much it costs to provide a 1:1 session with an occupational therapist, to help a veteran develop strategies to stay in control in stressful and anxiety provoking situations. Please help us provide this to more veterans by making a donation.

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





# GIVING IN MEMORY

Giving in someone’s memory is a lovely way to celebrate their life and to honour what was important to them. We are grateful for the many ways in which our supporters remember loved ones whilst giving and raising funds.



## HOLDING A CORPORATE GOLF DAY

Veteran Jack tragically lost his life at his engagement party last year. His company, Trenchless Solutions Ltd, dedicated their annual golf day to him and, knowing that Combat Stress was a cause close to his heart, chose us to benefit from their fundraising. Jack’s brother also organised a rugby event in aid of us. Jack’s family attended both events and our County Rep for Yorkshire, Andrew Robson, went along to thank them personally for their support. In total over £16,000 has been given in his memory.



## CREATING AN ONLINE TRIBUTE PAGE

After her brother’s sudden death, Sara chose to create a tribute page to remember him and to help others. She says, “Setting up Michael’s tribute page was very easy and, although incredibly upsetting at the time, I was doing something positive out of the sadness and grief we as a family were suffering. Hopefully it will be a lasting memorial to my brother that will continue for many, many years. It will be shared and seen and hopefully bring comfort to all.” [combatstress.org.uk/inmemory](https://combatstress.org.uk/inmemory)



## INHERITING A LOVE FOR CHARITY

Maira’s father was a long-term significant supporter of Combat Stress; when he died, she decided to continue his support and give in his memory with a regular gift. She also often attends our events and bids enthusiastically in our Secret Postcard Auction. We were delighted to include a plaque for her father in our new memorial garden to commemorate his life and passionate support for veterans’ mental health.

If you’d like to know more about giving in memory, please get in contact with Tracey and Sarah who are always available to help. You can contact them on **01372 410 827** or **01372 587 144** or by email at [tracey.martin@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:tracey.martin@combatstress.org.uk) or [sarah.seddon@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:sarah.seddon@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:  
**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 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

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.)

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):

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

DIRECT Debit

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](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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23JH058