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Psychologist Laura explains all



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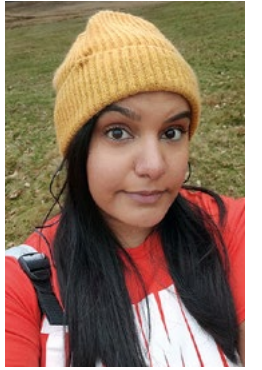
Bid on original artwork from artists, celebrities and veterans



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COMBAT STRESS

REFLECTING BACK LOOKING FORWARD

Autumn 2021

Jeff Harrison, our Interim Chief Executive, takes a look back as well as giving an insight into the future for Combat Stress.

We've all made many changes to our lives since March 2020, with the pandemic forcing us to live in very different ways. Here at Combat Stress, the biggest change was our adaption from in-person to online treatment to ensure we could continue to provide our specialist support to veterans.

Despite this huge shift in our service delivery, we helped almost 14,000 veterans*; over 8,800 veterans called our 24-hour Helpline, more than 3,600 accessed our newly developed online



self-help resources, and over 1,300 directly received support from our specialist staff.

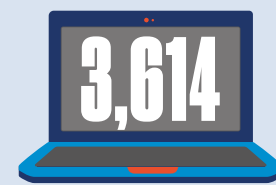
Going forward, when safe to do so, we'll return to offering in-person treatment (outpatient, residential and in the community) to those who need it. However our own research – and our experience of delivering treatment remotely due to the pandemic – has shown us that delivering treatment online can be just as effective as delivering it in person. Many veterans are at ease with receiving treatment in this way. Taking this into consideration, we're significantly increasing our online treatment to help make it easier for veterans to access our services. By providing more online treatment, a larger number of veterans with complex mental health needs are able to access our highly specialist services.

We focus on veterans with complex mental health issues – those who have several severe mental health conditions which often hugely impact their lives. Our life-changing treatment not only transforms lives but saves them too, enabling veterans to tackle the past and take on the future. It's thanks to your support that we can do this, to make a real difference to people's lives.

Jeff Harrison

*This is an estimate as it is not currently possible to identify any overlap between veterans using our free open access online self-help resources and the other ways we support veterans.

Our year in numbers



3,614 veterans accessed our newly developed online self-help resources.



2,000 family members have benefitted from veterans directly receiving our specialist mental health support.



11,000+ calls were handled by our Helpline during the year.

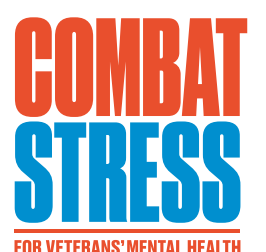


14 YEARS is the average time it takes from leaving the military for a veteran to seek our help for mental health problems.



17 is the number of different conflicts we've supported veterans from this year – this includes Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and the Falklands.

All figures quoted relate to our last financial year (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021).



OUR LATEST NEWS

Supporting the NHS

In partnership with King's College London, our Head of Research Professor Dominic Murphy has co-written a paper looking at the impact of the pandemic on front-line workers, such as NHS staff, to help identify their mental health needs, applying our expertise in military-related trauma.



The paper, 'COVID-19 and experiences of moral injury in front-line key workers' by Victoria Williamson, Dominic Murphy and Neil Greenberg, has been recognised by the journal of the Society of Occupational Medicine, which has awarded it the Esso Prize 2020. The Esso Prize is given to the paper that provides a strong message for those working in occupational health.

Dominic is part of the NHS Trauma Working Group whose role is to develop guidance and support for NHS workers. He is also part of the NHS Check research group who are monitoring the health and wellbeing of front-line staff during the pandemic.

To read the paper in full, please visit the [research section of our website](#).

At Ease Appeal update

Our At Ease Appeal, launched in May 2019, has now formally closed. Thank you to all of you who supported this appeal with a donation.

The At Ease Appeal's objectives were focused on enhancing flexibility and increasing access to our services with online solutions over the longer term. Then last year, in response to the pandemic, we had to rapidly adjust to a new way of working, supporting veterans with our specialist treatment online and by phone. Thanks to your response to The At Ease Appeal, as well as significant funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust in 2020, we were able to develop our online services more quickly. With your help veterans can now benefit from treatment that is available more easily and conveniently than before. Thank you.

Take on the Medicine Ball Challenge

The Medicine Ball Challenge was created by Staff Sergeant Andy Unwin MBE who, after losing friends and colleagues to suicide, felt compelled to make a difference. Designed to normalise the conversation around mental health, the challenge involves cuffing a 3kg medicine ball 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 weight of mental health problems that so many of us can experience.

To take part in the challenge, and raise funds for Combat Stress visit combatstress.org.uk/medicine-ball to register your interest.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2021

As life begins to open up again, we'd love for you to join us at one of our upcoming events:



Clay Pigeon Shoot at the Royal Berkshire Shooting School.



Secret Postcard Auction. Register today for our online Gallery Opening event.



Our annual black tie Supporter Dinner in London.



Armistice Lecture. In conversation with Johnny Mercer. A free virtual event.



Join us in person or virtually for our Festival of Carols & Lessons for Christmas.

For tickets or more information on events, please call 01372 587 148, email events@combatstress.org.uk or visit our website combatstress.org.uk/events.

All events subject to COVID-19 restrictions

Corporate connections

“Over the past year, fundraising for Combat Stress has allowed us to still feel like one company, despite being separated by COVID restrictions.”

We were so pleased to see how much of an impact being a corporate partner has made on one company in particular, CDS Defence and Security, which began supporting us in 2019. The company has a longstanding relationship with the military community with 50% of their current workforce coming from a military background.

They recognise the unique skills that those from the military can bring to a business but also understand the devastating impact that conflict can have. It's because of these reasons CDS decided to support us. Working together, we found partnership opportunities including their sponsorship of our Combat Stress 100 podcast series, as well as employee fundraising challenges during the pandemic.

To find out more about supporting us as a corporate partner, please contact Garry Burns on 01372 587 158 or corporatefundraising@combatstress.org.uk

WHAT HAPPENS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY?

Psychological therapy is a key part of our specialist treatment for PTSD but what exactly is this and how does it help? We got together with Dr Laura Ferrier, one of our psychologists, to find out more.

What is psychological therapy?

Psychological therapy is sometimes referred to as 'talking therapy'. It's a way to help someone understand their difficult thoughts and feelings, often by looking at how past experiences impact them currently.

Who provides psychological therapy at Combat Stress?

I'm part of a team of specially trained professionals who can all provide psychological therapy – this includes clinical and counselling psychologists, cognitive behavioural therapists and art therapists.

Who receives psychological therapy?

Every veteran will take a slightly different journey through treatment. After a clinical assessment we develop an evidence-based treatment plan tailored to each veteran's needs. This means the treatment has been thoroughly researched and shown to work. Most veterans we help will receive some form of psychological therapy during their treatment. For veterans with PTSD, they will receive psychological trauma-focused therapy which has a strong evidence base.

How can experiencing a traumatic event affect someone?

At the time of a traumatic incident, the brain is neurologically hard-wired to focus solely on our survival. It activates a freeze, flight, fight or flag response to survive the trauma in front of us. When this response is activated, mechanisms in the brain which aren't fully essential to survival, including memory development, can become impaired. This can result in trauma memories being stored in a different and often fragmented way compared to everyday memories. And that's why years, often decades later, memories of the trauma come back to us when we don't want them – they are not stored properly and come back to

us in very vivid ways: as flashbacks, nightmares and re-experiencing of the bodily sensations at the time. It's not a process we have conscious control over and can be extremely distressing.

What is trauma-focused psychological therapy and how does it help?

It typically involves speaking in detail about past traumatic experiences with a psychological therapist. During therapy, the person 'revisits' the memory in a safe place and with someone they trust. We think that this process allows the individual to pay attention to what happened at the time of the traumatic event in a more detailed, less frightening way and make sense of what happened. We also think that trauma-focused therapy for PTSD allows our brains to store the trauma memory in the same way that we store more everyday memories, reversing the faulty memory storage. This in turn stops those memories popping up as awful re-experiencing symptoms – overwhelming memories and nightmares. Successful psychological therapy for PTSD helps someone put the past behind them and look to the future.

What happens in a trauma-focused psychological therapy session?

In the first session, I'll spend time getting to know a veteran and will attempt to put them at ease and build a relationship. I'd never go straight into talking about a trauma in detail. We'll discuss the veteran's goals, review symptoms and come up with a therapy plan together.

When the time comes for a veteran to discuss their trauma, I'll work with them to prepare for this, supporting them if they become anxious beforehand. Engaging in this type of treatment can be daunting, but veterans often later report that the benefits of treatment outweigh any initial concerns or anxiety.

There are a range of techniques to help a veteran face their trauma – for example, if talking about what happened is difficult, using maps or photos, drawing or writing things down can help to open up the discussion.



Laura has been a psychologist at Combat Stress since 2019. She was drawn to working with PTSD and trauma-related issues because of the positive, life-changing results that can be seen by engaging in therapy.

It costs £66 for a veteran to have an appointment with a psychologist to help them recover from their PTSD.

**Please help us provide this life-changing treatment to more veterans:
combatstress.org.uk/donate-now**

SECRET POSTCARD AUCTION

Bid on original artwork by some of the UK's leading contemporary artists in our exciting new online auction.

We're excited to announce the launch of our first ever Secret Postcard Auction, with established and emerging artists along with celebrities and veterans providing specially created postcard-sized artwork in support of veterans' mental health.

So how does a Secret Postcard Auction work?

All artists submit their original art anonymously to be auctioned online, only when the auction closes will the winning bidders find out who the postcards have been created by. Could you be the lucky one who picks up an Anish Kapoor, Patrick Hughes or Maggi Hambling piece of art?

Who's taking part?

Over 150 artists, celebrities and veterans (who have developed a passion for art following our treatment) have submitted postcard-sized artwork. Here are a few examples of those taking part.

Maggi Hambling CBE

Contemporary artist, though principally a painter, her best-known public works are sculptures.

Sir Anish Kapoor CBE, RA

A sculptor specialising in installation art and conceptual art.

Derek Eland

Official British war artist for Afghanistan in 2011.

He spent a month on the frontline in Helmand and the resulting work toured galleries in the UK and overseas.

Russell Tovey

Actor Russell is a passionate art collector. He co-hosts the podcast 'Talk Art' with friend and gallerist Robert Diament; they interview leading artists, curators, gallerists and celebrities.

Esme Young

Fashion designer and judge on BBC One's 'The Great British Sewing Bee'. Esme has a particular interest in this project as her father was an RAF fighter pilot in WW2. He was evacuated at Dunkirk and shot down over Belgium.

Joanna Lumley OBE

Actress, former model, author and activist. She is known as 'daughter of Nepal' for her continuing work with the Gurkhas.

What is art therapy?

Art and creativity play a key part in our specialist treatment to help veterans tackle the past and take on the future. An element of this is art therapy.

Veterans have the chance to explore art therapy during treatment to help them express their emotions and find a way to explore their mental health issues.

Combat Stress' Senior Art Therapist Jan Lobban says, "Taking time to pick up a paintbrush or pencil and let an image emerge and develop can be an investment in mental health. Art making can not only be a pleasurable way to distract our thoughts from everyday concerns and pressures, it is also a means of self-expression and a channel for self-discovery.



Sir Anish Kapoor CBE RA



Joanna Lumley OBE



Russell Tovey



Maggi Hambling CBE

“For the veterans we work with, it’s about being able to externalise things that might not be making sense. Many have not painted anything since school but, encouraged by our specialist team, it can be enormously helpful.”

Bid in the auction

For your chance to secure a unique piece of art, simply place a bid in our online auction. The auction launches at 10am on Sunday 10 October 2021 (World Mental Health Day) and will run until 11.59pm on Saturday 23 October 2021. Money raised from the auction will help us provide our life-changing mental health treatment to veterans, including art therapy and other creative sessions to help veterans process their trauma.

FIND OUT MORE

Visit combatstress.org.uk/secret-postcard-auction or scan the QR code below



Veteran Spike now paints regularly at home to help manage his PTSD.

Spike’s story

“Painting enables me to escape from damaging memories and thoughts.”

Martin ‘Spike’ Dunkin joined the Royal Navy at age 17 and served around the world, including in the Falklands.

“After nine years I’d had enough and decided to leave. I always felt a bit different and like I didn’t fit in but I didn’t know why. I eventually came to Combat Stress for help and over time things have become much better for me.

“Art has helped me a great deal. Before coming to Combat Stress, I’d never painted a picture in my life but, with the encouragement of the specialist team at the charity, I tried it out and found I could paint.

“Very soon I fell in love with painting and decided to try it at home. As I continued with treatment for PTSD, my painting improved and as my art improved, my PTSD became more manageable. Painting has given me something constructive to do and takes my mind away from the traumas I’ve suffered.

“I gradually found that the draw of painting was greater than the draw of alcohol – I wanted to paint more than I wanted to drink. Art has given me a confidence that was lacking for so

many years and enables me to escape from my harmful thoughts.

“I’d say to any veteran, when you come to Combat Stress with no hope and don’t know what to do, take all the help you are offered and try everything. Taking part is what matters, not the end result. I know from experience – I would never have thought painting would help me but it has.

“Combat Stress has given me the tools that I need to try and have as normal a life as possible. I feel like I’ve got my life back.”

Artwork by Spike – and other veterans who have benefited from art therapy – will be included in the Secret Postcard Auction.

Spike has kindly shared his story for this article but did not want us to share the trauma that caused his mental health problems.



It costs £45 for a veteran to receive a one-to-one online art therapy session – please help us to provide this to more veterans by making a donation.

LEARNING FROM LOCKDOWN

Robert Marsh is Director of Fundraising here at Combat Stress. Whilst clinical colleagues found ways to continue to provide our specialist treatment to veterans during the pandemic, he and his team tackled the challenge of raising funds whilst restrictions limited usual events and activities.

“Lockdown came as quite a shock and when it was announced a considerable amount of what we had planned to do immediately evaporated. With veterans urgently in need of our help and our clinical colleagues swiftly adapting to providing treatment online, we had to step up our fundraising and we’re so grateful that you stepped up your support.

“When it came to fundraising, our priority was also to make sure we kept our supporters connected with the work of the charity via regular emails and updates. We also adjusted, innovated and developed a number of virtual fundraising events. Our annual walking event, March in March,



actually attracted more people than ever and over 1,000 took part, helping to raise almost £180,000 – the best ever! We’re particularly grateful to the Army Cadet Force, who took part in huge numbers, and also our corporate partners – there were 13 different company teams this year. Added to this success was our Carol Service which was streamed on 16 December 2020 to over 500 people – twice as many as the usual number who attend in person. Many of you told us that the service gave you a real lift at a very tough time and we remain humbled by your feedback. Our virtual open day in April gave us the opportunity to connect once again with our supporters whilst reaching new audiences. Again, we had huge attendance numbers and incredible feedback. Going forward we hope to run hybrid events – more to follow on that!

“Although this has been such a difficult time, I can also say that we have learnt such a lot and we will apply this knowledge to our future fundraising efforts.

“Lastly, and this really is the X-Factor, we have all of you. Generous and loyal supporters who understand the importance of our work with veterans. Combat Stress just can’t do what it does without you – and so from the bottom of my heart, on behalf of all of the veterans that seek our help, I would like to thank you for sticking with us during these extraordinary times: it is wonderful to have you by our side.”



Some of our amazing supporters raising funds during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you’d like to take part in one of our challenge events visit events.combatstress.org.uk and find your perfect challenge

Meet Robert

Robert was commissioned into the Scottish Yeomanry and served with the Light Dragoons, completing an operational tour to Bosnia in 1996. He took up his current role at Combat Stress in 2015.



Robert during his time in service.

A VITAL CONNECTION



Our unique Peer Support Service brings veterans together.

Our Peer Support Service brings former servicemen and women together to share their experiences of mental health issues and receive support and understanding from others who've walked a similar path. The service is run by veterans who have all received our treatment, helping others to see they're not alone in what they're experiencing. It's the only UK-wide service of its kind.

Veterans can attend small group meetings and also meet individually with a regional peer support co-ordinator once a month. Whilst it's always good to talk, our Peer Support Service provides so much more. It aims to help veterans feel accepted and empowered to tackle their mental health problems, adjust to civilian life and ultimately regain their independence. All our peer support co-ordinators have undertaken specialist peer support training, mental health first aid as well as training in risk indicators and how to respond to if a veteran is in crisis.

Who can use the service?

The service is available to any veteran after their initial clinical assessment with Combat Stress and subsequent acceptance into our treatment. It's an informal but invaluable part of our mental health support, running in parallel to our specialist clinical

services. Veteran volunteers work alongside our regional peer support co-ordinators who are all paid employees and veterans, helping former servicemen and women develop and maintain support networks and relationships.

Peer support in the pandemic

Within six days of the first UK lockdown being announced, our Peer Support Service moved online and offered a daily national support group via video conferencing. This provided veterans with a vital connection on a flexible basis and it is something we plan to continue in the future alongside in-person meetings which we are planning to restart once restrictions allow. We've also set up some specialist virtual groups – veterans can take part in a photography group, compete in the regular Monday quiz or join a female-only veteran group.

Meet one of the team

Army veteran Simon West was initially employed as a Peer Support Co-ordinator after receiving our treatment for PTSD. He has subsequently been promoted to Senior Peer Support Co-ordinator, responsible for the service on a national level.

"Because I'm a veteran, because I've been through Combat Stress, because I've been diagnosed with PTSD, I can empathise with all the veterans I meet. A few years ago I was in exactly their position – I was the one knocking on the charity's door, saying I'm a broken man.

"Being involved in peer support has been really great for me – I've got so much out of it, personally and professionally, and I know how much veterans using the service value the opportunity to meet others in a similar position to themselves.



Simon is one of many Army veterans we have been able to help thanks to support from ABF The Soldiers' Charity. Their generous continued donations help us to provide a range of vital services to veterans.

Help us provide our free peer support service – it costs us £35 for a veteran to meet online with one of our peer support service team. To make a donation, visit combatstress.org.uk/donate-now



RACE TO REMEMBER



Find out more at events.combatstress.org.uk/racetoremember

» On Remembrance weekend we honour all our servicemen and women. On Saturday 13 November 2021, show your support by taking on one of our toughest challenges yet.

This exciting winter challenge is a race through the South Downs, beginning at the Home of the British Army in Aldershot and finishing by the Royal Navy's flagship HMS Victory at the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth.

Choose your distance:

» 76km ultra run: Aldershot to Portsmouth

» 36km run or walk: Petersfield to Portsmouth

A LIFE-CHANGING LEGACY

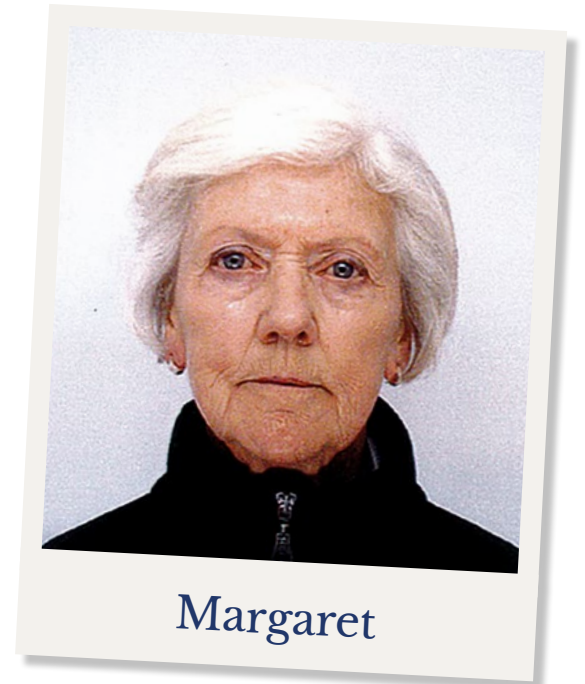
Support for our work helping veterans comes in lots of different forms; from people running races through to collections and regular giving, we're so grateful for all the incredible ways people choose to help.

There's another way we hope you'll consider supporting our work which is with a gift in your Will. This wonderful way to continue your support currently funds one in five of the veterans we help. Here Gill and Margaret explain why they've pledged to leave a gift in their Wills.



Gill

"We used to dance (Scottish country dancing) every year at the Combat Stress fete and I was very impressed by the work that went on there, so I decided to leave the charity a gift in my Will. It's a way of giving something a bit more substantial than the amount I could afford just now, and actually it's fun, because you can speculate about what will be achieved with the cash!"



Margaret

For Margaret, leaving a gift in her Will is for a different, very personal reason, "Having had a husband who served in the RAF who suffered from what I now know is PTSD, I am leaving a gift in my Will to help Combat Stress provide much needed help for veterans."

If you'd like find out more about this kind way of giving (and the impact it has), please contact Sarah Seddon for an informal chat on 01372 587 144 or at sarah.seddon@combatstress.org.uk

Find out more

combatstress.org.uk



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HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

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

Ways to donate:

- Scan the QR code opposite
- Donate online at combatstress.org.uk/donate-now
- Call our team on 01372 587 151
- Complete and return the form below



I would like to give Combat Stress a gift of:

£

- 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

Supporter no. (if known):

Full name:

Home address:

Post code:

- I would like to receive an acknowledgement letter
- I'd like to give regularly, please send me a Direct Debit form
- I would like to receive information about gifts in Wills

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**

Make your donation worth more with Gift Aid

giftaid it

If you are a UK taxpayer, every £1 you donate to Combat Stress could be worth an extra 25p through Gift Aid.

- Yes, I want to Gift Aid any donations I make to Combat Stress. I confirm that I would like all donations to Combat Stress past, present and future to be treated as Gift Aid. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year that it is my responsibility to pay any difference.
- No, sorry I cannot Gift Aid. By ticking "no" we know not to ask you again.

Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or no longer pay sufficient Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax.



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