

# COMBAT STRESS

Spring 2019  
Issue 02



**COMBAT  
STRESS**  
FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

*The Transformation Issue*

The *Transformation* Issue

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**We are Combat Stress.** The UK's leading charity for veterans' mental health. When a veteran is having a tough time, we're there to help them tackle the past and take on the future.

## Combat Stress

We want to say a big thank you to all who contributed to this issue.

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Editor's letter

# WELCOME!

This year is special for us all at Combat Stress, because in May we mark 100 years since our charity was founded. Our centenary year is a time to reflect on how far our mental health services have come and how we can use our experience and expertise to help more veterans in the future.



The way we treat and talk about mental health has changed enormously since we opened our doors in 1919, so *Transformation* is a fitting theme for this issue.

In today's world, change is something we've become used to. But when it comes to ourselves, change can seem daunting. We can often forget that our thoughts and feelings are always shifting according to our circumstances – whether it's something at work, relationship problems or money worries.

For me, transformation is about experiencing good and bad things in my life and using them to help me grow. I find that when I'm not being challenged, I'm not growing as a person. Having a routine and daily comforts are good things, but occasionally I need to step outside of my comfort zone to discover more about what I'm capable of.

On **page 6** we hear from veteran Chris about how, after treatment from us for post-traumatic stress disorder, his life is completely different. On **page 12** TV presenter and interior designer Gabrielle Blackman shares her top home decoration tips to change your mood. And on **page 24** we chat with singer and actor Shaun Escoffery about how he looks after his mental health in a changing world.

I hope you enjoy this issue – once you've finished reading it, why not pass it on to a friend? Here's to the lighter, brighter and longer days of spring!

Sally

**Sally George**  
Editor  
magazine@combatstress.org.uk

P.S I'd love to hear your thoughts on the magazine, so please send any comments to me at the email address above.



Spring

# NEWS & VIEWS



Fundraising for Combat Stress in the 1950s

## Our centenary

In just a few months it will be 100 years since Combat Stress was founded. Originally named the Ex-Servicemen's Welfare Society, the charity was set up in response to the thousands of servicemen who returned from the First World War with shell-shock (what we now call PTSD). Over time we have developed our services, but what

hasn't changed over the last century is how vital this support is to the veteran community. We'll be doing a number of things to mark this special milestone, so keep an eye on our social media channels for updates.

### Help us save lives

Over the last ten years the number of veterans needing our unique mental health treatment has almost doubled. We need your help more than ever before to continue the life-changing services we provide. Donate online at [combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate)



Sometimes the smallest things can make the biggest difference to the way we feel. Here's a list of things you could try over the next few months to help keep your mood in check.



Clear out your wardrobe



Drink a big glass of water



Take something you no longer need to a charity shop



Plant some seeds



Watch a funny film



Tackle a crossword or sudoku puzzle



Eat a piece of fruit



Write down three things you like about yourself



Credit Army Navy Match / © Andy Bonner

## Army v Navy 2019 match

This year we are charity of the day for the annual Army v Navy rugby game. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise further awareness of the specialist mental health treatment we provide. The match takes place on Saturday 4 May at Twickenham Stadium and kick-off is at 2pm. Let the best team win!

## March in March



Step up to a new challenge: take part in March in March.

Run, walk or jog 10 miles during the month of March to help raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans. With demand for our services at an all-time high, taking part in March in March is a fun way to raise funds for us.

March in March is a virtual event – you don't have to physically turn up to a race start line. How and where you complete the challenge is up to you – you could walk ten miles in one day, beat your

personal best by running 10 miles as fast as possible or do it indoors on a treadmill.

It's easy to take part – simply sign up online, complete your 10 miles and then tell us about it afterwards. It costs just £20 to take part – and £15 of this goes directly towards helping veterans with mental health problems.

To sign up, visit [combatstress.org.uk/march](https://combatstress.org.uk/march)



# TRANSFORMATION

Change, growth and learning to adapt are all part of what it means to transform. Transformation is how we evolve because of our experiences in life; it may feel uncomfortable, difficult and unfamiliar at the time, but gradually we grow and become more resilient. It can be a slow process, but a positive one. ➔



# CHANGE OF MIND

## *Chris' Story*

“I’ve changed so much in the space of two years, it’s almost scary. You only realise how far you’ve come when you look back at how things were.” ➔





Wanting to follow in his grandad’s footsteps, Chris joined the Army when he was 22. During his six years of service Chris was deployed to Northern Ireland, Cyprus, America and Canada.

“I started noticing a change in my mental health while I was serving, but at the time I was encouraged to carry on. When I left the Army in 1999 I struggled adapting to civilian life and started drinking heavily, around 30–40 bottles of wine a day.

“For almost 20 years I tried to sort myself out, but it wasn’t working. When I was at rock bottom, the mental health crisis team came to my house and talked about sectioning me.

In desperation, I called the Combat Stress Helpline.”

Chris started having one-to-one meetings with a member of the Combat Stress community team and took part in occupational therapy workshops. It was all in preparation for the six-week PTSD Intensive Treatment Programme, which Chris completed in 2017.

“I learnt about what was going on in my head, and I came away with a better understanding of my condition. I realised the power of talking, and in turn I stopped being ashamed of my feelings. I started feeling comfortable with myself, and I became more ‘me’ than I’d ever been before.

“It sounds clichéd, but it was like I’d finally seen the light. This is when I decided to use my experiences to help others.”

After finishing treatment from Combat Stress, Chris completed a diploma in psychology and trained in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Now, Chris volunteers at Veterans in Crisis, Sunderland by running support groups for former servicemen and women.

“Being a therapist wasn’t something I’d ever thought about before, but it feels like a natural path for me after everything I’ve been through. Having been in a dark place, I know how important a small glimmer of hope can be – and I want to help others find it.



Chris volunteering at his local veteran support group



“ Sometimes, when you’re wrapped up in day-to-day life, it’s easy to become blind to how things have changed.”

“It’s an incredible feeling to know you’re contributing to someone’s wellbeing. It helps me see that I’ve turned something negative into something hugely positive for myself and for others too. This has been a massive part of my transformation.

“Sometimes, when you’re wrapped up in day-to-day life, it’s easy to become blind to how things have changed. Or if you have a bad day it can feel like you’ve taken one step forward and two steps back. But I find it helps every so often to look back at how things were before. Only from where I am now can I see that I’ve gone from a bad place to a much better place mentally, physically and socially. I’m a completely different person now.

“There’s no magic wand that changes things overnight. Transformation is ongoing, and it often involves going down some difficult paths again before

you can move on. It takes commitment and hard work, but when you can look back and see how far you’ve come, it’s a feeling like no other.”

### Help more veterans like Chris

Without our help, lives can become desperate. We’re on a mission to help more veterans like Chris tackle the past so they can take on the future, but we can’t do this without your support. Donate £5 now by texting **PTSD15 to 70004\*** or visit **combatstress.org.uk/donate** to donate online.

\*Texts cost £5 plus your standard network rate. We will receive 100% of your donation. Please obtain bill payer’s permission. Customer care line 01372 587 153.





## *Veteran suicide: the truth behind the numbers*

Dr Dominic Murphy is an expert in the field of veterans' mental health and a clinical psychologist, Senior Clinical Lecturer and the Head of Research at Combat Stress. Here Dominic talks about what the rate of UK veteran suicide means. ➔

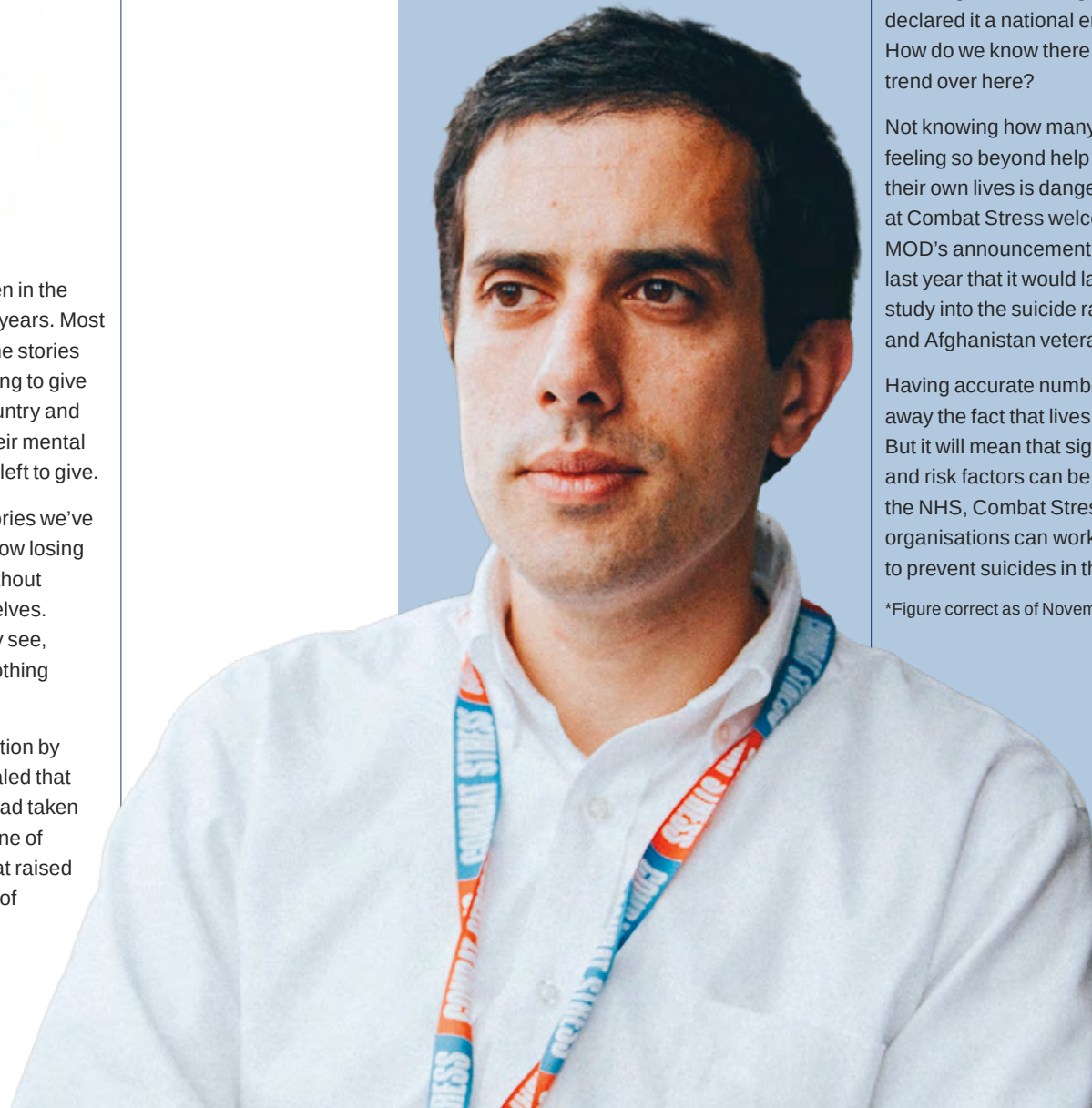
**V**eteran suicide has been in the news a lot over recent years. Most of us will have heard the stories of those who were willing to give everything to protect our country and who, after struggling with their mental health, felt they had nothing left to give.

Regardless of how many stories we've heard, we can never know how losing someone to suicide feels without having gone through it ourselves. Something we can all plainly see, however, is that suicide is nothing short of a tragedy.

Last November an investigation by *The Times* newspaper revealed that in 2018 alone, 56 veterans had taken their own lives\*. It was just one of many headlines last year that raised concerns about the number of veteran suicides in the UK.

“

Not knowing how many veterans are feeling so beyond help that they take their own lives is dangerous.”



Yet despite these concerns, another investigation by newspaper company The Johnston Press found that veteran suicides aren't recorded at all by coroners in the UK. So the real truth is this: there are no numbers that could tell us how bad this issue might be and whether it could be getting worse.

In the US, data shows a spike in the number of young veteran suicides so alarming that the US government has declared it a national emergency. How do we know there isn't a similar trend over here?

Not knowing how many veterans are feeling so beyond help that they take their own lives is dangerous. So we at Combat Stress welcomed the MOD's announcement in October last year that it would launch a new study into the suicide rates of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

Having accurate numbers won't take away the fact that lives have been lost. But it will mean that significant trends and risk factors can be identified, and the NHS, Combat Stress and other organisations can work out how best to prevent suicides in the future.

\*Figure correct as of November 2018.

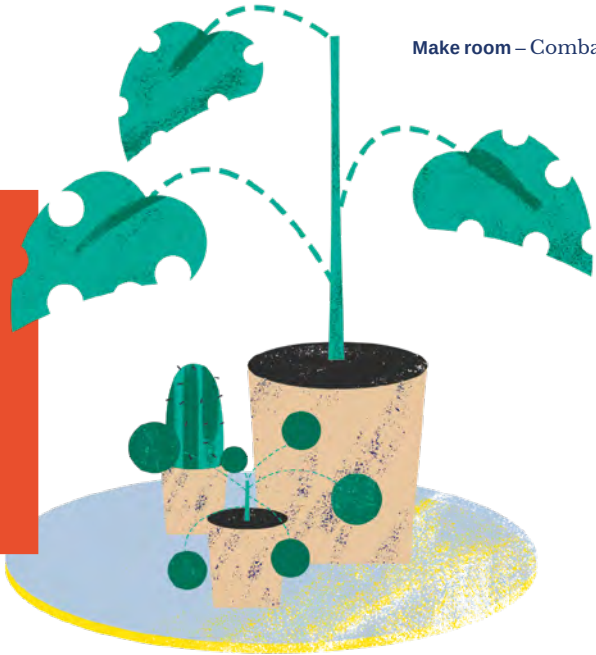
## *Providing the best for veterans*

We conduct high-quality research to make sure we are delivering the best possible services for veterans. Take a look at some of the studies we've carried out at [combatstress.org.uk/research](https://combatstress.org.uk/research)

## *Help us save lives*

Our treatment doesn't just transform lives, it saves them too. With your support, we can be there for every veteran when they're struggling with their mental health. Find out more about the different ways you can help by visiting [combatstress.org.uk/support-us](https://combatstress.org.uk/support-us)

# MAKE ROOM



At Combat Stress, we know how important your surroundings are for your mental wellbeing. So we asked interior designer and DIY SOS presenter Gabrielle Blackman to share her quick fixes for making your home a calmer and happier place to live... ➔

“Our surroundings have an immediate impact on the way we feel and in the long-run, they can affect our mental health and wellbeing. A messy space can make us stressed, while a tidy and organised environment can make our minds feel clear.

For the most part, décor is down to personal taste – but there are some quick fixes we can all try to improve the way we feel in our homes.”



## 1 Natural light

Arrange your seating towards natural light. Sunlight is a mood enhancer, so it's important to take in as much of it as possible, even when you're indoors.



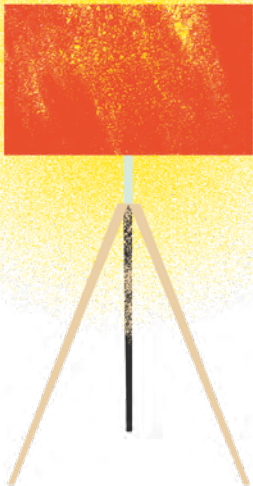
## 2 Peace and quiet

When you're trying to relax, a quiet and peaceful environment is essential. To make your space quieter use rugs and draft excluders to help block outside noise.



## 3 Soft focus

Instead of switching on the main light in a room, try having layers of subdued light by using table lamps, fairy lights or candles. Soft and warm light at head-level will make you feel calmer and happier. And if you do want to keep the overhead light on, consider a bulb that gives off a warmer, more yellow light.



## 4 Declutter to destress

We've all heard the phrase 'tidy house, tidy mind'. When there's mess or clutter, our brains become overstimulated and it can seem impossible to relax. Every once in a while, a good clear-out of the things you don't need can be therapeutic and also gives you an opportunity to re-organise the things you want to keep.

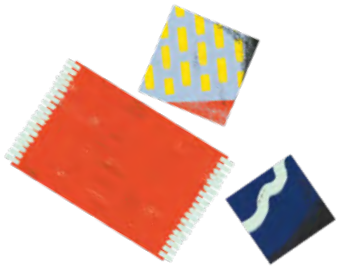


## 5 Admin corner

Whether it's in the kitchen, living room or hallway, have a corner that's specifically for essential 'life admin' paperwork like bills, post and other important documents. Having an admin corner will help you keep and feel on top of the necessary things in life.

## 6 Add more greenery

Buy a small houseplant. Not only do plants help purify the atmosphere, but looking after them and seeing them grow is a rewarding experience.



## 7 Make it cosy

Use cushions and blankets to make your home a comfortable, inviting and cosy place to be. Where possible, use soft furnishings in natural materials like cotton or wool, which feel nicer on your skin.

## 8 Safe place

Make a quiet and comfortable space in your home. Being in a designated 'safe place' can have a calming effect on your brain, and can help you stay grounded when you're feeling on edge.

## Smile as you shop

If you need a few extra bits for your home, you can now support Combat Stress while you shop for them online. **AmazonSmile** donates 0.5% of your eligible purchases to us, at no cost to you. All you need to do is visit **smile.amazon.co.uk** and select Combat Stress as your chosen charity, making sure to go through the same link for your shopping in the future.



# A JAGGED PATH

Writer and mental health advocate Rachel Kelly shares her story of recovery

Sometimes I have to pinch myself. I've gone from being someone who could barely get up in the morning, weighed down by serious depression which left me feeling horrid and hopeless, to someone who on the whole feels calm and well. →



**A** transformation? In a way, yes – but I see it as more of a 20-year journey to manage my anxiety and depression.

Instead of there being a smooth line from being ill to being well, I've found the path to recovery has been more jagged and uneven.

There have been times over the last few years when I seemed to make good progress; then my mood dropped again, the old symptoms seemed to be back, and I felt I was once more in the grip of the Black Dog. My progress has been more like climbing the uneven peaks of the Himalayas rather than following a steady upward path. I would get to the top of one hill, only to find there was another mountain to climb.

But little by little my path has smoothed out and the periods of feeling well have become longer, while the times of feeling depressed have shortened. I haven't had a full-on serious depressive episode – which in the past lasted for as long as two years and left me hospitalised – for several years now.

My way out has involved building up a toolkit of strategies which I turn to as and when. I use mindful techniques, nutrition, therapy, exercise, books, poetry and prayer.

Practising mindfulness every day keeps my mind focused on the present so that my thoughts can't be taken away by negative feelings and worries. Techniques such as paying close attention to my breath or my senses are things I can do wherever I go. Mindfulness helps me see that what's happening around me – whether good or bad – doesn't have to define my mood.

I turn to quotes from my favourite poems to steady me when I feel at my lowest and most unstable. For example, my mum is having chemotherapy at the moment which has left me distraught at times. I turn to lines like 'Grief melts away' or 'This too shall pass' to calm me.

Meanwhile I have adopted a more Mediterranean-style diet: I eat more green vegetables, oily fish and the one I really love – dark chocolate.

I try to do this all the time, not just when emergencies strike.

In short, I manage my own tendency to mental illness. We are all on a spectrum, we all have mental health and I've learnt very, very slowly to look after my own mind.

Am I transformed? Well, I'm certainly a different person now to the one I was. Is there more to learn? Always!

For more ideas on how to look out for your mental health, Rachel's latest book, *Singing in the Rain: A Happiness Workbook* is available to order on Amazon.

## Healing power

We know that stories of recovery have the power to educate, inspire and make others feel less alone. This is why some of the veterans we've helped choose to share their stories of life before and after treatment from us. Take a look at some of these stories by visiting [combatstress.org.uk/liberating-lives](https://combatstress.org.uk/liberating-lives)

## 🕒 Take a minute

Next time things are feeling a bit too much, try one of the following exercises to help reduce stress or worry. →

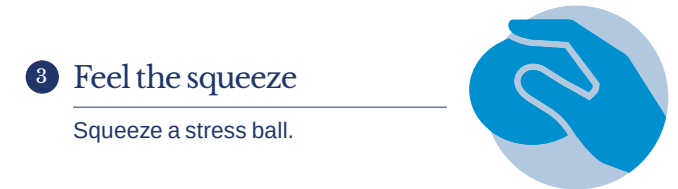
### 1 Pressing issues

Put your hands on top of your head and press down.



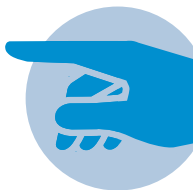
### 2 Put your hands together

Press the palms of your hands together firmly, bringing them in to the centre of your chest.



### 3 Feel the squeeze

Squeeze a stress ball.



### 4 Pressure point

Using deep-touch pressure on parts of your body can have a grounding effect on your brain and can help you feel calmer.

Exercises from **Jolandi du Preez**,  
Lead Occupational Therapist  
at Combat Stress.







Once upon a time, people thought that anyone showing symptoms of mental illness were possessed by demons. While thankfully this is far from how mental health is viewed today, this centuries-old attitude highlights something about human nature that still rings true: it can be difficult to understand what we can't see. ➔

**W**hen we see scars or people with prosthetic limbs, we immediately know they've been injured in some way. But when someone's struggling with their mental health, the difficulties they feel are invisible to others. They can still smile and seem somewhat 'normal' – all in the name of trying to show the world that they're okay.

And the reason people have felt like they've had to hide their mental illness? Because until recently, mental health has been overshadowed by physical health.

Over the last few years, a lot has been done to encourage everyone to talk about their feelings and seek help when they need it. Prince Harry, Lady Gaga, Keira Knightley and Cara Delevingne are just a few of the well-known faces who have spoken openly about the mental health challenges they have faced, helping to make it an everyday topic of conversation.

But now there's a call to further change the way mental health is viewed and treated across the world. In a powerful film launched by the organisation Time to Change Global on last year's World Mental Health Day, actor Glenn Close spoke out about the need for policy-makers, communities and people around the world to put "mental health on an equal footing to physical health." The film aims to raise awareness of the shame, discrimination and mistreatment experienced by people with mental illness as a result of mental health being seen as the "poor relative" of physical health.

Jo Loughran, Director of Time to Change, says: "Our research shows that over the last decade around 4.1

# 1/4

1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health issue each year.

# 97%

We have seen a 97% increase in demand for our services over the last decade.

# 43

The average age of a veteran receiving our help is 43.



Watch the film by Time to Change Global at [time-to-change.org.uk/global](https://time-to-change.org.uk/global)

million people in England have changed the way they think and act about mental health. That said, we know there is still work to do. Even now, many people still don't consider mental health relevant to them. They don't believe mental health problems are likely to affect them or people they know. But the reality is that mental health can affect anyone."

The only difference between mental and physical health is how visible they are. Symptoms of mental illness are, for the most part, invisible to the naked eye. This hasn't changed, and it never will.

What has changed is the way mental health is perceived and the language used to address it. Thankfully there's a much deeper understanding that invisible illnesses can be just as hard to cope with as physical ones. Today everyone is encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and as a result, more people are seeking help. This can be seen in the fact that demand for the services provided by Combat Stress has almost doubled over the last ten years.

Having a conversation about mental health can change a whole life. Mental health can affect anyone and a simple chat can help start the conversation.

## Mental health for all

The shift in mental health conversation means that demand for our services is growing. Help us support every veteran who turns to us by donating today. Text **COMBAT15** to **70004** to donate £3 per month\* or visit [combatstress.org.uk/donate](https://combatstress.org.uk/donate) to donate online.

\*Join the Combat Stress subscription programme for £3 per month. We will receive 100% of your donation. This is a subscription service until you reply with a 'STOP' text. Please obtain bill payer's permission. Customer care line 01372 587 153.



# CHALLENGING MY PERSPECTIVE



Iain, 45, hiked an amazing 100k in support of Combat Stress. We spoke to Iain about how a chance encounter inspired him to turn his life around and raise thousands of pounds for charity. →

**B**elieve it or not, taking on fundraising challenges is a relatively new thing for Iain.

"If someone told me ten years ago that I'd be doing all these challenges for charity, I'd have laughed. I never really focused on other people – I was quite selfish in my younger days."

Things changed massively for Iain three and a half years ago after a heart attack. Having lost his dad to heart failure when Iain was just nine, he knew he had to start doing something for his health.

"My nurse told me I needed to lose weight and, following her advice, I did. But I was feeling quite depressed at the time, so keeping the weight off was tough. And as time went on, my weight crept back up – which made me feel worse."

Iain was at his lowest when he met Paralympian and former Royal Marine Commando Joe Townsend.

"After opening up to Joe about how I'd been feeling, he said something that completely transformed my perspective on what I'm capable of. He said: 'The only person who can change things is you'.

"I was so inspired that I did the 22 Pushup Challenge with him for Combat Stress.

"After this I wanted to do more. My grandad had been diagnosed with shell shock after coming home from the Second World War and loads of my mates who've been in the military have struggled with PTSD. Combat Stress was always going to be a charity I wanted to raise money for.

## Here's where your fundraising goes

**£382**

Could pay for a veteran to have an individual session with a psychiatrist.



**£35**

Could fund a triage nurse for one hour.



**£76**

Could fund a one-to-one session for a veteran with an occupational therapist.



**£460**

Could fund our Helpline for 24 hours.



"I decided to set myself a huge challenge: to hike 100k from Eastbourne in East Sussex to Arundel in West Sussex. Doctors told me I could try, but that I wouldn't be able to do it.

"But I was determined to make it happen. I kept hearing about veterans who were taking their lives because they saw no other way out; I wanted to do something for them.

"I started training and the weight was dropping off me. Ten months later and three stone lighter, the day of the challenge arrived. I was nervous, but also really excited to get going.

"At the quarter-way mark I already had excruciating blisters. At certain points during the night there were moments when I thought I couldn't carry on. But the whole time I kept telling myself that the first 50k was to prove the doctors wrong and the last half was for all the veterans who struggle every day with PTSD.

"As I neared the end it was all very emotional – especially when my three-year-old boy walked with me over the finishing line.

"The support I received was phenomenal; I thought I'd struggle to get a few hundred pounds, but I raised over £3,000.

"There's no better feeling of achievement than taking on a challenge for a good cause. Knowing that I'm helping others has been so good for my own mental health.

"I'd like to do another 100k hike in the future, but I might need to give myself a bit of a rest first!

"When you decide to take on a challenge, signing up and stepping into the unknown is the most daunting part. But if you don't try, you'll never realise what you're capable of."

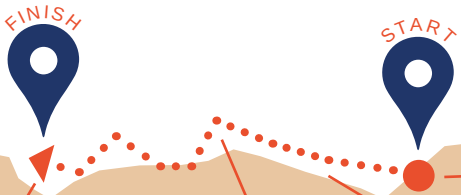
**Turn over to see Iain's amazing journey.**





# Iain's journey

Iain completed his 100k trek from Eastbourne to Arundel in just under 25 hours.



**Eastbourne**  
Iain's children wave him off at the start line.



**Arundel**  
Iain crosses the finish line with the help of his son.



**South Downs, Brighton**  
Iain's route takes him through South Downs National Park.



**Beachy Head, Eastbourne**  
Iain makes his way along Beachy Head.

## Give it a go

If you feel inspired to take on a challenge – whether big or small – here's a list of a few events we have coming up over the next few months. To find out more about how to get involved, visit [combatstress.org.uk/getinvolved](https://combatstress.org.uk/getinvolved), email us on [fundraising@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@combatstress.org.uk) or give us a call on 01372 587 140.

- March 2019  
**March in March**
- 14 April 2019  
**Brighton Marathon**
- May to October 2019  
**Spartan Obstacles Races**

25 – 26 May 2019  
**Edinburgh Marathon Festival**

6 June 2019  
**D-Day 44 Challenge**

5 July 2019  
**Wales Swim**

21 July 2019  
**British 10K**

4 August 2019  
**RideLondon-Surrey 100**

7 September 2019  
**Go! Festival Ayr**

8 September 2019  
**Great North Run**

13 October 2019  
**Royal Parks Half Marathon**

20 October 2019  
**Yorkshire Marathon and 10 Mile**



# SILVER LININGS



*What is post-traumatic growth?*

When you're struggling with your mental health, sometimes the saying 'every cloud has a silver lining' just doesn't seem to ring true. While it might sound worlds away from what you're feeling, there may be a chance that what you're going through now will make you feel stronger, happier and more fulfilled in the future. ➔

**T**here is increasing research to show that people can experience something called post-traumatic growth (PTG), which is when negative experiences in life lead to positive change. A person who experiences PTG will have gained something so positive from their struggle that they'll see it as a big part of who they are today. They'll feel as though their difficult experience has benefitted them in some way, as something that makes them better equipped to cope with challenges in the future.

Hannah Fenwick, a senior occupational therapist at Combat Stress, says:

"While it's not nice to go through at the time, negative experiences can be an opportunity to learn new things about yourself. You learn how vulnerable you are, but you also learn about what can help you cope. And when you do come out the other side, you realise how strong you are for getting through it."

As well as having more self-awareness, PTG involves learning new perspectives that can change your life for the better. Andy Walton, a psychiatric nurse at Combat Stress, has seen this change first-hand during community workshops he leads with Hannah:

"There's a guy called John who was really affected by the stigma of mental health problems. I don't think he wanted to be associated with a mental health charity because in his head, his problems were a weakness. When we'd go out for group walks he'd always trail behind to pretend he wasn't with us. But over the course of a few weeks and after seeing other veterans open up about their stories,

his view changed massively."

The truth is, we're all vulnerable to the things in life we can't control. When horrible and unexpected things happen, our emotions and our mental health are likely to be affected, and that's okay. To be hurt by a negative experience isn't a weakness – it's just part of being human. For John, accepting his vulnerability was crucial to his experience of PTG. It meant that he could talk about his story and relate to those around him better than ever before. In fact, John went on to be one of four veterans who talked openly about their mental health problems in a film by Combat Stress.

People experience PTG in completely different ways. For some, it might be an increase in their personal strength while for others it might be a new job or closer relationships. What's central to any person's experience of PTG is, however, a feeling that they wouldn't be where they are today without the difficult things they've been through.

So in the moment of struggle, it can feel awful. It can also be difficult to think that there might be a time when you feel you have grown from what you're experiencing right now. But PTG is a very real possibility; your cloud might just have a silver lining.

## Watch our film

Watch the film that veteran John features in at [combatstress.org.uk/liberating-lives](https://combatstress.org.uk/liberating-lives)



# LOOKING AFTER ME

Shaun Escoffery plays Mufasa in the London production of The Lion King. We chatted to him about calming his pre-show nerves and why he wouldn't change a thing about his past... ➔



**What always helps to change your mood?**

I've been doing the martial art Brazilian jiu-jitsu for about 16 years now; having a good ruck and getting out some of my energy in training has been one of the best ways for me to get rid of tension. I go to the gym as well – during any sort of physical activity I forget all about the stresses or pressures that I might be under.

**How do you like to relax?**

I like to go for a long bike ride or a walk in the forest with my wife. Being outdoors clears my head.

**Do you get nervous before a performance? If so, how do you calm your nerves?**

I do, but not anywhere near as nervous as I used to get! I always give myself five minutes of complete alone time before each performance to gather my thoughts and think only about the show ahead. It's a way of preparing myself mentally and getting myself in 'the zone'.

**How different are you on stage to how you are in real life?**

I see performance as a kind of therapy for me, because when I'm on stage I explore parts of myself that I wouldn't normally in everyday life. On stage I show my vulnerabilities and tap into my deeper emotions; in a way I become a truer version of myself.

**What's an important life lesson you've learnt?**

Always be true to who you are – people will respect you for it.

**If you could go back in time, is there anything in your life you would change?**

There's nothing I'd change. I look back at difficult times and think, "that was the best worst time of my life." Why? Because having come out the other side, I know how strong I am: I wouldn't know this if I hadn't been through what I've been through. So now when I'm faced with a tough situation, I remind myself that I've got to swim to the deepest depths to get to the biggest pearls.

**What's one thing you do to take care of your mental health?**

I fit in time to regularly meditate and reflect on what's going on in my life. It's a time for me to take stock and identify the things that might be making me feel anxious or stressed. Then, in a measured way, I work out what I need to help me feel a bit better – whether it's having some alone time, watching some Netflix or eating some comfort food. It's about listening closely to my body, my mind and my situation and working out the best course of action.

Shaun will be taking a night off from The Lion King to perform his music live in concert at Subterania, London on Friday 29 March 2019. Tickets are available at seetickets.com

# HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

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

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£1 raised  
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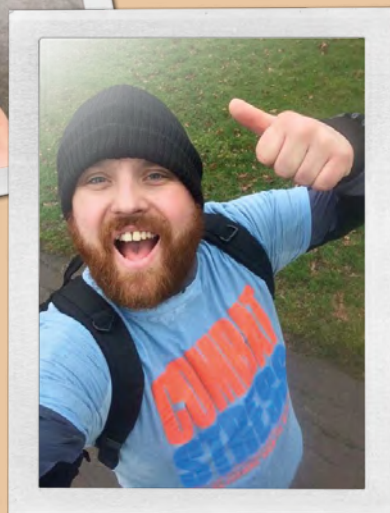


# MARCH IN MARCH

Run, walk or jog 10 miles during the month of March to help raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans.

Join **#TeamCombatStress** and run, walk or jog 10 miles on any day in March. How and where you complete the challenge is completely up to you – walk ten miles in one day, beat your personal best by running 10 miles as fast as possible or do it indoors on a treadmill.

To find out more and to sign up visit [combatstress.org.uk/march](https://combatstress.org.uk/march)



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