

COMBAT STRESS



FLOWER POWER

Find out why gardening boosts your wellbeing



ON THE BUSES

Creative fundraising with a free bus pass!



IT TAKES TWO

How our research is helping veterans and their partners

NEVER BEAN BETTER

Veteran Nigel's unique coffee initiative

**COMBAT
STRESS**

FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

Spring 2020 – Issue 04

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Thank you!
The last issue of our magazine raised over £32,000. Thank you if you made a donation – big or small. It all adds up!

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Combat Stress

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Editor's letter

WELCOME!

Welcome to the latest issue of our magazine, which is packed with features covering everything from our inspirational Combat Stress 100 veteran film project to our gardening expert's top tips on how the outdoors can boost your wellbeing.

You can also read about veteran Nigel's inspirational Combat2Coffee programme and the reasons why he wants to help other veterans access the support he has benefitted from. And we share John's Great Bus Pass Challenge which saw him travel from Land's End to John O'Groats on his free bus pass and raise money for us!

And talking of fundraising, donations from supporters like John are vital to fund our work. Thank you so much if you're one of the many people who provide much-needed support to Combat Stress. If you're considering giving for the first time, this magazine will give you a great insight into how your donations make a difference.

We know that everyone manages their mental health in different ways. That's why we fund a range of occupational therapy support including gardening, photography and woodwork to give veterans the time and space to recover.

Personally, I have used meditation over the last couple of years to help me get through some of my own difficulties. Being present and aware of my breath gives my mind space to rest, rather than getting caught up in spiralling thoughts.

I hope you enjoying reading this issue.

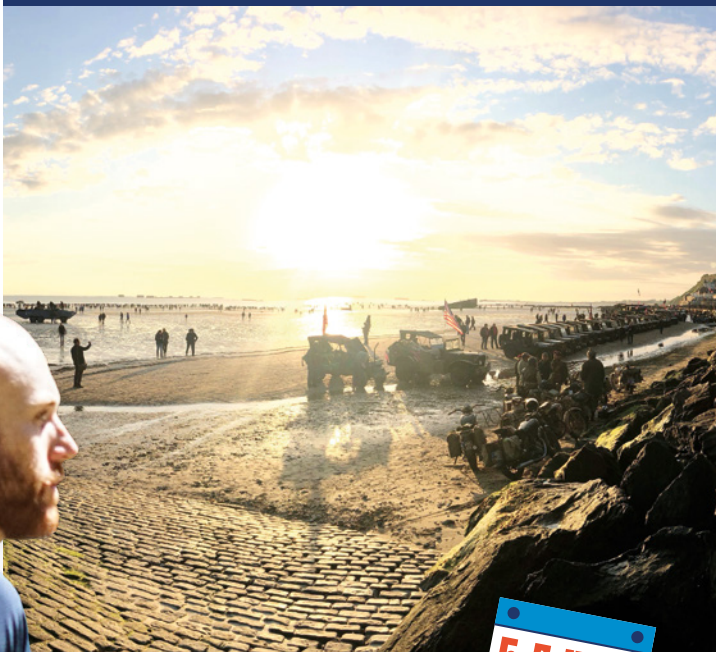
Sally George
Editor
magazine@combatstress.org.uk



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.

LET'S GET INVOLVED

» Interested in supporting us? Here's an update on our latest fundraising, plus some ideas for how you can get involved with Combat Stress this year.



5-7 JUNE 2020

CAN YOU TAKE ON THE D-DAY CHALLENGE?

This year, the extraordinary D-Day Challenge offers a 22-mile walk, a 44-mile ultra-run or an 88-mile cycle! The route hugs the Normandy coast, taking in four of the famous D-Day landing beaches and finishing at the historic Pegasus Bridge.

Places are limited so sign up on our website now: combatstress.org.uk/dday



TIME TRAVEL

Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we have recently digitised our collection of historical items. We have also created a new archive room at our Head Office in Surrey. This fascinating archive is open to anyone – simply make an appointment with Archivist Clare Flanagan on 01372 587 185 or clare.flanagan@combatstress.org.uk

TOP FORM

For the third time Wincanton and The Jockey Club hosted the Combat Stress Race Day in October 2019 for us and we are delighted that this latest race day raised more than £65,000! Thank you to Andrew Johnston MBE and the Wincanton Race Day committee for organising such a great event. Also thank you to everyone who came along and donated.



DONATIONS WITH A DIFFERENCE

amazonsmile

Did you know you can donate to Combat Stress when you're shopping online? Just go to smile.amazon.co.uk, sign in and select Combat Stress as your chosen charity. Shopping is the same as the regular site – and Amazon donates 0.5% of every eligible purchase to your charity.

ebay

You can also donate to Combat Stress on eBay. When you're next selling an item, you can choose what percentage of the sale price you want to donate to Combat Stress.

We can also collect money from your used postage stamps! Simply send your stamps to: **Fundraising Team, Combat Stress, Tyrwhitt House, Oaklawn Road, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 0BX**. We can then swap them for funds.

To find out more about how to make a donation with a difference, email fundraising@combatstress.org.uk or call on 01372 587 140

So far we've received an amazing

£32,160.09

Now that's something to smile about!

COMING UP...

We have a busy season of events coming up – why not join us for one of the following:

19 MAR

Supporter Dinner

Join us at One Great George Street, London for this annual event. For tickets call 01372 587 148 or email events@combatstress.org.uk

24 APR

Royal Military Academy tour

Our guest speaker at this event is General the Lord Dannatt GCB CBE. Find out more: combatstress.org.uk/sandhurst

by Nicola Hudson – PR and Communications Officer

VETERAN

VOICES



» A ground-breaking film project between Combat Stress and reminiscence charity Age Exchange has led to more than 60 veterans sharing powerful stories of military service, combat, the impact on their mental health and life after leaving the forces.

In 2018, we were approached by David Savill, Artistic Director at Age Exchange, a reminiscence charity, about collaborating on a project to mark our Centenary. Now, with a really remarkable film that takes a frank and unashamed look at what serving in – and coming out of – the armed forces really means to veterans, we've seen this project have an extraordinary impact on everyone.



“

Chatting on a film that might end up in a museum one day has been incredible. If I can help anyone, even just one person who thinks 'I feel like that' and they come and get help, then it's been worth it.”

Davina, veteran volunteer interviewer

Sharing the legacy of conflict

The partnership between Combat Stress and Age Exchange, made possible through funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, saw the project launch in April 2019 and since then the project team, made up of the two charities and veterans, has worked extremely hard to capture compelling accounts from former servicemen and women across the country.

Combat Stress 100

The result of this collaboration is a remarkable film and archive – Combat Stress 100 – in which veterans from a wide range of conflicts talk about their time in service, their experience of combat and the various ways they have coped with the personal difficulties their experiences have raised.

Fifty hours of footage were recorded from more than 70 interviews with veterans and Combat Stress staff. The interviews took place across the UK in locations ranging from Queen's University, Belfast to the St. Helen's Rugby League Club in Merseyside. All the interviews were carried out by Combat Stress veterans, who received training from Age Exchange in interview and filming techniques, and who travelled the country meeting veterans like themselves. All spoke candidly about their experiences.

The archive, available soon on the Combat Stress website, will be accessible to current and future veterans and their families seeking mental health support.

The film had its first screening at the National Museum of Liverpool in November 2019 as part of their Armistice commemoration. It's had several other showings since then, and you can catch it throughout the year as we take it on a tour around the country. For the latest list of screenings visit our website combatstress.org.uk

“

They gave profoundly moving accounts of their experiences of being deployed to war zones, the devastating impact on their mental health and their courage and determination to rebuild their lives.”

Nicola Hudson,
Combat Stress

The power of speaking aloud

For many of the veterans we interviewed, this marked the first time they had spoken out publicly about their experiences. Talking to other veterans helped to build a bond that enabled trust and sharing, and interviewees moved from being nervous of the camera to just talking very naturally – and movingly – about their struggles and how they managed difficult times.



Urging others to get help

Of the veterans who shared their stories, many talked about the impact that working with Combat Stress had on their lives, and encouraged anyone who recognised what they were talking about to get help too.

David, a veteran interviewee, said: “When I self-referred to Combat Stress I was desperate. I had no-one else. I had nothing else to turn to. I think things are pretty highly likely that I wouldn’t be here today if Combat Stress hadn’t been there. A while ago, in my darker moments, I had such a specific [suicide] plan that I was walking around with a letter for the coroner, explaining what had happened. I don’t have that letter any more, thank goodness. I don’t carry it because I’m not in such a dark place.”



“When I self-referred to Combat Stress I was desperate. I had no-one else. I had nothing else to turn to.”

David, veteran interviewee



“

PTSD is one of the worst things you can have. The other day, a little girl fell over and burst out crying. Just that one trigger – a screaming kid – took me straight back to combat. I was straight up into survival mode. It took me six days to calm down.”

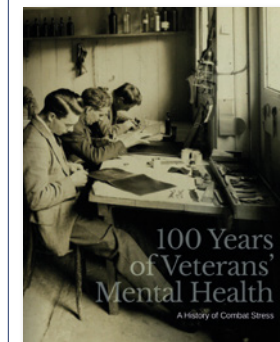
Brian, veteran interviewee

100 years of veterans’ mental health

We have published a history of Combat Stress to mark 100 years of supporting veterans’ mental health. *A Hundred Years of Veterans’ Mental Health: A History of Combat Stress* has been compiled by Dr. Rachel Duffet, an expert in the social history of war in twentieth century Britain.

It is a fascinating insight into the original need for Combat Stress and the pioneering work we have done to support veterans from all conflicts who struggle with mental health issues.

You can buy the book from our online shop for just £10 combatstress.org.uk/shop



CAN YOU SUPPORT OUR LIFE-CHANGING WORK?
A donation today will help us provide our vital services to veterans.
Call us on **01372 587 151**, or visit combatstress.org.uk/donate

COMBAT STRESS 100

50



Hours of footage recorded

70



Veteran interviews

800



Limited edition history books printed as part of the project

NEVER BEAN BETTER!

» When Nigel called us, we were his last resort. Now, building on the confidence he's gained from our treatment, he's started a unique coffee venture that encourages other veterans to find the support they need.



Nigel tells us in his own words about how life has changed.

I joined the Army when I was 18, serving in Northern Ireland and Bosnia. I left in 2004 and had a successful 10-year career with the prison service as well as being a retained firefighter and an active rugby player.

In late 2014, everything changed. I had a shoulder replacement, took voluntary redundancy and my father passed away – all within a short period of time. I went from being the busiest man in the world to a recluse.

I started ruminating about an incident during my time on operations in Northern Ireland. For the next year it totally took over my life – I suffered from depression, anxiety and flashbacks. It had a huge impact on my family, but I was in complete denial about the cause – I told myself I was angry about my dad's death.

I started gambling and eventually sought help from a gambling counsellor.

She suggested I contact Combat Stress, but I said I didn't need that kind of help.

Four weeks later I was doing some DIY at home and I had a total meltdown. I ended up ripping the floor up – it caused a lot of stress and anxiety for my wife and kids.

I phoned the Combat Stress Helpline – it was a difficult call to make. When I came for an assessment, I broke down – it was the first time I'd been able to talk about what had happened. I felt I was sharing with someone who understood.



“Combat2Coffee is a way for me to try and give something back to those who helped me but also support others who may need the help I was so lucky to receive.”

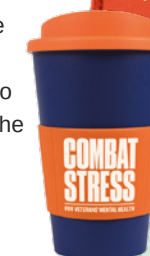


Make your cup matter

Are you a coffee shop regular? Why not give up a couple of coffees a month and help veterans.

Set up a £5 monthly gift today and we'll say thank you by sending you a reusable cup.

Sign up at combatstress.org.uk/coffee



I was recommended for the two-week Anger Management programme. During the course I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and then I went on to do the PTSD Intensive Treatment Programme.

I put it off twice though, coming up with every excuse not to go, but now I'm so glad I did it. It helped me understand myself and how I'm feeling.

I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Combat Stress. I've been able to be open with family and friends. My kids now understand how PTSD affects me and know that it's not targeted at them.

I wanted to continue my recovery journey, so I did a business course through Help for Heroes and it was then I came up with the idea of 'Combat2Coffee' – a way to provide rehabilitation, training and support to armed forces veterans.

So, alongside my full-time job, I give barista training in prisons and in the community to help veterans get back

on their feet. I also take one of my 'coffee shops' – either my converted horsebox or my caravan – out and about to events. I want to spread the word that it's OK to talk about mental health and share the journey I've been on. I just want to help others to get the help I've had.

I've even got my own coffee, 'Recovery Blend', a unique blend made from Brazilian coffee roasted in Suffolk by Freshpac. It's available to buy with some of the proceeds going to Combat Stress.

Before I sought help from Combat Stress, I was an angry, horrible, bitter and confused person. I'd avoid family situations and stay in bed all weekend. I still have bad days now but, thanks to Combat Stress, the big difference is I know how to help myself.

Combat2Coffee is a way for me to try and give something back to those who helped me but also support others who may need the help I was so lucky to receive.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

HOW CAN WE DO BETTER BY OUR VETERANS?



» We met Tobias Ellwood MP at his Westminster office to discuss veteran mental health and his previous role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence.

With a military background and a strong commitment to the Armed Forces and veterans, Tobias was instrumental in promoting veteran mental health support during his time in the Ministry of Defence.

“When I came into my ministerial job there were some immediate things to look at. Finance was one – I’ll continue to claim that if Britain wants an international role, our defence spending must increase. And it’s always the things away from the theatre of operations that get cut first.

“In my role as Under-Secretary for Defence, I was very involved with the veteran community. I think we did good work – there is a sense of purpose and direction, promoting coordination amongst veteran charities and raising awareness of mental health issues.

“We know that the biggest reason people leave the forces is because the welfare and support that we give to the family isn’t always there. Often, people join the forces when they are single – ready for adventure around the world. But while they’re serving, they get married, have children and those people need to be looked after – if we don’t look after the whole family, we lose the serving soldier, sailor or airman we invested in in the first place.

Raising awareness of mental health

“We have to get away from the fact that service personnel can present with a physical injury without fear that it will affect their career, but they wouldn’t dare suggest that there is something wrong with their mind.

“The armed forces need tough characters, but they have to stay tough and that means having the ability to let off steam – to clear the mind.

“As soon as you join the armed forces now, you’re made aware of the places you can get help – like the Combat Stress 24-hour Helpline. This means that when people are in their darkest place they don’t have to hunt for contacts or telephone numbers.

Life after the armed forces

“Service personnel come out with unbelievable skills, training and, resilience. They are team players with good communication and management attributes, and they go into great jobs or back into education. But the public’s perception is that if you go to war, you’ll come out damaged. And if an employer believes that, he or she may reject perfectly good and valuable people with military experience – skills that you often don’t learn in civvy street.

The Office for Veterans’ Affairs

“The creation of The Office for Veterans’ Affairs stemmed from outside pressure to put the concerns of veterans at the front and centre of government. I wish this new project well.

“What charities like Combat Stress do is absolutely invaluable. The role of the charitable sector in the UK is perhaps unique and, along with the Armed Forces Covenant, will continue to offer incredible support to people when they need it most.”

You can talk to us

If you’re currently serving or have served in the UK Armed Forces, you can call the Combat Stress 24-hour mental health helpline. Veterans and their families can call **0800 138 1619**. Serving personnel and their families can call **0800 323 4444**.



ELLWOOD’S ADVICE TO VETERANS

“

You’re not alone. There are people in exactly the same position as you.

Make that call to Combat Stress – no one’s going to judge you for wanting to talk.

If you’re worried about someone, encourage them to talk. Sit with them while they make the call.

You are part of an amazing community that you joined when you signed up and you never really leave it.

The help is there. Please use it.”

by Sarah Goodman – Occupational Therapist

FLOWER POWER



» Our gardens and allotments are a haven for veterans, allowing them to get hands-on with growing, and giving them valuable space to process their thoughts.

Sarah Goodman is an Occupational Therapist at our Hollybush House treatment centre in Scotland. She tells us about the benefits that gardening brings.

What's special about gardening?

Working in a garden has physical and mental health benefits, including increased relaxation, lower anxiety and lifting your mood. It can also improve alertness and cognitive abilities, build self-esteem and skills, and restore belief in your own abilities. It gives you exercise – sometimes without you realising it – and connects you to nature which is restorative when stress levels are high.

“It helps you get that little bit of yourself back.”
Veteran, Hollybush House

At Hollybush House, veterans, alongside our own garden team, have been working on a garden project since June 2018. Together we have built raised beds, planted vegetables and herbs, and constructed a seating area and planted shrubs. For some, it's enough to sit outside and take in the view; for others, the physical work of digging, building and planting, along with planning what to grow, really helps to manage mental wellbeing.

From trowel to table

One of the great things about our gardens is that we grow a lot of produce. That means veterans can be involved in every step – from choosing what is planted to harvesting the fruit or vegetables and learning about healthy eating and cooking. They are more likely to continue their interest in gardening once they get home, having learned some key skills, enjoyed being out in the sun – which boosts serotonin levels – and working as a team with other veterans.

As with any garden, the Combat Stress gardens are continuously evolving projects that will need attention and care from whomever is here. At Hollybush House we are planning a further vegetable growing area built out of recycled tyres and more new sensory elements for this year.

The power of gardening

- 1 It supports our clinical therapy
- 2 It's a good place to come after an intensive group or 1-2-1 sessions
- 3 The garden is always there – no need to make an appointment or wait in line
- 4 It has sensory benefits – scent, taste, texture, visual
- 5 Helps with acceptance – plants don't judge
- 6 Gives veterans caring and nurturing responsibilities

FEELING GREEN FINGERED?

Sarah shares five ways you can start gardening right now.



Find an area you can create a garden, this may even be indoors, or on your balcony.



Ask what you want from a garden – flowers or produce or both?



Start small – don't set yourself too big a challenge.



Get help from friends and family – it may be a way to spend time with kids.



Enjoying your garden, don't feel you always have to work in it – just sit and relax!

by Dr Dominic Murphy – *Head of Research*

COME

» Over the past five years, thanks to funding from The Royal British Legion, we have worked on projects to understand the needs of veterans' partners and test the best ways to support them.

In 2014, we started a study in the UK looking at the mental health needs of the partners of veterans diagnosed with PTSD.

The study showed that partners living alongside veterans with mental health problems are at high risk of developing mental health difficulties, including having symptoms of PTSD themselves.

We wanted to give those people the opportunity to talk about their own experiences, worries and stresses, away from their partner and in a supportive and safe environment. So we developed a pilot project: *The Together Programme*.



TOGETHER

The initial programme was offered at city-centre locations at eight sites across the UK, with five face-to-face group sessions over five weeks. It focused on teaching partners how to recognise the symptoms of mental health issues. We provided a space to discuss concerns with peers and highlighted the mental health services in their area.

Those who took part felt that they had been able to concentrate on their own feelings and wellbeing, and that they could understand their partner's mental health more clearly.

After realising that full-time work, family demands and caring responsibilities had meant some partners were unable to take part in the face-to-face sessions, we adapted *The Together Programme* into a six-week group that can be delivered via webinars. We are currently piloting this project and will have some results later in the year.

No longer alone

Feedback from the initial programme showed that participants found it helpful to see that they were not alone, and learned how they could look after themselves and their partner in the future.

94% said they were extremely likely to recommend the programme to friends and family.

And our own evaluations showed that *The Together Programme* improved the mental health of partners.

Participants also reported that the programme helped them to gain coping strategies for themselves, a greater understanding of PTSD and the opportunity to talk to people having similar experiences.

This has been a positive programme and we are looking at whether we can develop a dedicated partner's programme as part of our overall services in the future.

“

I realised that I am part of a wider community where others are going through similar experiences to me.”

A veteran's partner who took part in *The Together Programme*

Talk to us if you're a partner or a veteran

Our Helpline is open 24/7. Call **0800 138 1619**, text **07537 404 719*** or email **helpline@combatstress.org.uk**

*(Standard charges may apply for texts, please check with your provider.)

A TRAVELLER'S TALE



» Retired soldier and police officer John Hadfield took on an intrepid expedition from one end of the UK to the other – using his bus pass – in aid of Combat Stress and the Household Cavalry Foundation.

In 2009, John turned 60 and got his bus pass. "I thought 'I could go anywhere!' and wondered about how easy it would be to get from Land's End to John O'Groats on a bus pass."

Closer to his 70th birthday, the plan started to take shape. "My wife Ann and I were having a drink and we got chatting about things we have always wanted to do. I mentioned the journey Land's End to John O'Groats with my bus pass – Ann said 'why don't you?' It was decided then to do it for charity and the two charities were chosen that night."

Starting by buying a huge map of the UK to plot out his journey, John, who has suffered from PTSD for many years, began to look at timetables and planned a route which took around eight days to complete.

Life on the road

The journey itself was a bit of a revelation. John enjoyed the company of chatty bus drivers, the bus passengers who were interested in his story, people pointing him in the right (and sometimes the wrong) direction for his next bus, and received lots of donations along the way!

"I wore branded Combat Stress clothing and lots of people asked about my journey. When I told them, they gave me donations there and then, which was fantastic. At John O'Groats, I met a guy who had served in 1 Para. He took me to the famous signpost and took my 'finishing' photo before giving me a really generous donation – it's the kindness of people like that that's made the whole journey worthwhile.

"The nicest driver was on the long route from Inverness to Wick – he was so chatty and told me all about the area and the history – it was a real pleasure to ride with him. It was an amazing experience, and I'd encourage anyone to go a bit out of their comfort zone for a good cause."

THE GREAT BUS PASS ADVENTURE

Inspired by John?

If you would like to organise your own unique challenge for Combat Stress, contact our fundraising team on 01372 587 140 or fundraising@combatstress.org.uk. We'll send you a free fundraising pack and give you all the support and advice you need.

JOHN'S TOP TIPS

Thinking of taking on your own extreme or unusual challenge for Combat Stress?



Have a plan – get as many people on board as possible.



Keep fundraising – John is still raising money even though the challenge is complete.

Don't be shy – brand yourself!



Nothing is too silly – in fact, the more ridiculous the better!



Just do it!



8

DAYS



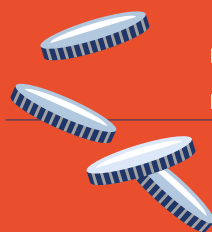
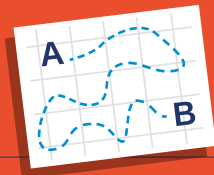
29

BUSES

876

MILES

(plus extra for windy bus routes)



£2,700+

RAISED

You can still donate to John via his Virgin Money donation page at virginmoneygiving.com/JohnHadfield

by Sarah Seddon – Senior Supporter Care Officer

PAY IT FORWARD



Sarah Seddon works in our Fundraising Team looking after gifts in Wills. Here she talks about the positive impact legacies make.

» One of the best parts of my role is talking to supporters who are thinking about leaving a gift in their Will. It's such a kind and thoughtful way of giving and I always highlight that every single pound donated as a legacy will make a positive difference to veterans who come to us for help.

Currently a huge 90% of our funding is from voluntary donations with gifts in Wills funding one in five of the veterans we help. This really helps us provide our vital services to veterans. Our work saves lives and turns lives around; it brings families back together

and looks after the very people who risk everything to keep us safe.

That's why it means so much to us when someone is thinking about leaving a gift in their Will.

It's a lovely reminder that supporters want to continue their help into the future and are standing with us, they want to give something back.



Combat Stress is uniquely capable of equipping veterans with the tools and techniques they need to handle the effects of PTSD. I am delighted to help the work of Combat Stress by leaving a legacy in my Will.”

Carolyn, Combat Stress supporter



4 in 5 of the veterans we support have already tried to get help from the MoD or NHS before contacting us



1 in 5 of veterans we help are completely funded by gifts from Wills



£147 could pay for a veteran to have an individual session with a psychologist



£3,220 could allow us to run our 24-hour Helpline for one week

Please do think about supporting us in this important way. You can call me for an informal chat on 01372 587 144 or email me on sarah.seddon@combatstress.org.uk

THE BEHIND THE SCENES

Our Board of Trustees plays a vital role in the management of Combat Stress. They're hugely supportive of the work we do and often have a very personal reason for getting involved in this way. Here three of our trustees give an insight into why they have decided to devote their time to us.



Giles Peel

CHAIRMAN

What made you decide to become a trustee of Combat Stress?

After 20 years in the Navy and leaving in my late thirties I understand how tough it can be to start afresh. Anything I can do to help others to live their lives after a Service career I will do.

What do you think you will bring to the charity as a trustee?

I've had a lot of jobs in the corporate world and I'm still working full-time, which I hope helps me to identify with the changing needs of veterans and their families. I have also spent over 20 years sitting as a trustee for a number of Service charities. So I hope this expertise will benefit Combat Stress.

What, in particular, do you hope to achieve for Combat Stress during your time as Chairman?

To continue to promote the vital work of this charity in these difficult times, keeping Combat Stress as the leading mental health charity for veterans and working closely with other organisations to deliver seamless care for veterans.

Describe yourself in three words.

Husband, father, extrovert.

Tell us something surprising about yourself?

I play the drums! Just at home for fun but I love the rhythm and beats.



Sally Goldthorpe

VICE CHAIRMAN

What made you decide to become a trustee of Combat Stress?

After doing a degree in Psychology, I started my career in the Royal Navy and then spent many years in the Royal Navy Reserve. As I reached a point in my career where I could dedicate the time, I wanted to take on a meaningful role to use my experience in a charity aligned to my interests in the Armed Forces and mental wellbeing.

What do you bring to the charity as a trustee?

Experience in senior management, working in a multi-disciplinary team with expertise in people and culture topics and effective organisations.

What do you hope to achieve for Combat Stress during your time here?

To support the team in building effectiveness for the benefit of veterans and their families as well as the employees.

Describe yourself in three words.

Optimistic, curious, trusted.



Mickey Morrissey

HONORARY TREASURER

What made you decide to become a trustee of Combat Stress?

Coming from a family with a long history of serving in the armed forces and having spent twelve years in the Irish Guards I thought getting involved with Combat Stress would be a good way of helping those that were less fortunate than me either during or after their time in the military.

What do you think you will bring to the charity as a trustee?

Since leaving the army I have spent the past thirty years in finance in my civilian life and I therefore believe that some of what I have learnt would be helpful to the smooth financial running of Combat Stress.

What do you hope to achieve for Combat Stress during your time here?

I believe a military background is an important, but not pre-requisite, factor of being a trustee of a military charity and I hope that I will have been able to contribute to the service that the charity offers veterans in their time of need.

Describe yourself in three words.

Honest, reliable, humorous.

LOOKING AFTER ME

» Cliff Parisi has been on our screens in a variety of roles, from Minty Peterson in EastEnders to Fred Buckle in Call the Midwife. We caught up with him at a Combat Stress treatment centre, where he was supporting our Egg Banjo breakfast fundraising campaign.



Why are you supporting Combat Stress?

A paratrooper school friend told me about the charity several years ago and since then, whenever I've been able to do something for Combat Stress, I have. This amazing organisation rescues people at the lowest points in their lives. So I will always support the work you do.

You've been filming a new series of Call the Midwife – how do you manage the stress of filming?

The most important thing is not to get sucked in by it all. In our industry, it's not the end of the world if you get it wrong – it's only telly. I've learned that none of it is worth the stress and once you get to that point, it's all a lot easier to do.

Are the pressures different for stage acting than TV acting?

Theatre blows and TV sucks: in TV you draw the audience in; on stage you have to blow them away. It's a completely different technique. And you have a one-shot opportunity with a theatre audience – but they're never going to come back so they'll never know whether you got it right or not!

There can be real pressure with lines for TV – scripts get edited right up to the minute you film, so you're often coming in early and having to learn new lines at the same time as being in costume and make-up, but it's part of the job and you learn to take it as it comes.

Have you had a particular challenge you've needed to overcome?

For the next job I'm doing, I had to experience a therapy session for myself to see what it was like. I found it incredible – once you open that cupboard, there's quite a lot of stuff



Cliff with a veteran when he visited Combat Stress

in there that you should probably do something about.

We talked about a particular incident in my life that I didn't really pay much attention to at the time, but as I talked about it, I realised it had had more of an effect on my life than I realised. It made me think about what the veterans at Combat Stress have to cope with every day.

What's your top tip for when things get on top of you?

I don't use it like I used to, but I always used to find a simple exercise of just controlling your breathing, which slowly starts to empty your mind and you can give your brain a bit of a holiday. Even if it's just five minutes to take a break and give yourself time.

Call the Midwife is currently on BBC1 on Sundays at 8pm.

There's still time to take part in our Egg Banjo breakfast fundraising campaign. Check out combatstress.org.uk/eggbanjo

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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 Tyrwhitt House, Oaklawn Road, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 0BX
 Or call **01372 587 151**
 Or visit combatstress.org.uk/donate

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