

Giving Something Back: A Veteran's Reward

Venetia Taylor of PTSD Resolution explains the vital work the charity undertakes.



PTSD and mental health are today's big issues, brought into sharp focus by the pandemic as the population has been exposed to unprecedented stress, anxiety and isolation. These experiences, however, were not new for many UK Veterans, Reservists and their families.

PTSD – or post-traumatic stress disorder – is the term for a cluster of symptoms, psychological and physical, that may be exhibited by someone adversely affected by a powerful emotional event – a trauma. This trauma is often associated with a threat to life, or extreme danger to themselves or others.

PTSD symptoms include substance addiction, nightmares, anger and violence, which can lead to job loss, family breakdown and even suicide.

The term 'combat-related PTSD' is often used to describe traumatic symptoms derived from military combat. While there is a perception this affects only a small percentage of people, there is increasing awareness that trauma symptoms exist on a spectrum. Even without an official PTSD diagnosis, trauma is often the underlying reason for depression, anxiety, alcohol dependence or more.

Events in the past 10 years have brought PTSD to the fore, particularly recent developments in Afghanistan. But while distressing footage and media coverage can have a profound effect on Service personnel, Veterans, and their families, less high-profile triggers can have as big an impact. For those suffering from PTSD, a car

backfiring or the smell of smoke can bring the past hurtling back, often with devastating consequences.

Meeting the need

In 2009, we established PTSD Resolution to fill a gap that clearly existed between many Veterans and the help they needed. Co-founded and run by Veterans – Colonel Tony Gauvain (retired), Malcolm Hanson, Charles Highett, Lorne Mitchell and Jim Woolley – it provides one-hour therapy sessions – one-to-one, in person or online – for UK Veterans, Reservists and dependents, for free.

Treatment consists of an average of six sessions, with 78% of cases seeing an improvement in reported symptoms. For clients who engage with the process and meet their

appointments, outcomes are good, even when the trauma is complex. The aim is to reduce trauma symptoms and help the adjustment to normal work and family life.

Importantly, clients do not need to have an official PTSD diagnosis to get support and help can be accessed quickly. We do not have a waiting list. Our therapy is designed to be:

- Prompt – the Veteran has a response within 24 hours of calling and a first appointment within a week
- Effective – a high proportion of clients show significant improvement
- Local – 200 therapists across the UK mean a Veteran can see a therapist nearby
- Brief – six sessions is the average, with more available if required.

Richard's story

In 2014, Richard ended up in an ambulance, where his heart had to be restarted twice. Richard recalls that in the years leading to this crisis, his anger had spiralled out of control. "My mental health had gone downhill before I left the Army. I served for nearly 20 years, including a tour of the Balkans. Up until then I'd seen some things... but this was a totally different ball game. There were times when I'd come off patrols and just sit there and cry my eyes out.

"I lost a lot of friends after that because they couldn't handle my

anger. My relationship with my partner broke down. But the most painful thing was my daughter. She said: 'Daddy, you've let me down. You said you'd always be here for me.' That just destroyed me. It ripped my guts out. I just can't explain how it felt.

"I wanted to make my life better – for her – but I'd been asking for help for a decade. One mental health group wouldn't touch me because they said all ex-Forces were violent. Whenever I did get to see somebody, I felt like they didn't know how to ask the questions, or didn't listen. Or didn't care..."

PTSD Resolution therapy is, above all, pragmatic - which underlies our status as a charity that will treat clients with existing drug and alcohol addictions, providing they are sober at the time of treatment.

We consider withholding treatment as punitive, and recognise substance abuse can be a refuge sought from pain. This is why there are no limitations on the help we deliver.

We have treated clients in prisons for more than six years. To date, PTSD Resolution has provided treatment to 104 ex-Servicemen and women in 21 UK prisons, with good results. We have stepped up to confront a problem others ignore: PTSD is, unsurprisingly, on the rise among imprisoned ex-military personnel.

Chairman and CEO Colonel Tony Gauvain (retired) describes the origins of the charity, which recently saw its 3,000th referral. "I have seen first hand the effects of post-traumatic stress. Ten years ago, my colleague Piers [Bishop, Clinical Director] ran a pilot treatment programme for some Veterans revisiting the Falklands. Based on its success, we started PTSD Resolution. We continue to receive an average of seven new referrals a week, from Veterans, Reservists and families. We refer clients only to Human Givens therapists across the UK, to ensure a consistent, high standard of treatment that is fully proven and accredited."

The Human Givens Institute regulates the charity's network of 200 therapists across the UK.

PTSD jumps up and bites you like a dog when you least expect it

This therapy is confidential (no GP referral needed), non-invasive and compassionate, and clients need not talk about events in their past.

Our therapists work at a subsidised rate, giving something back to the community and ensuring as many Veterans as possible get the help they need. Each course of therapy, free to the client, costs the charity £750.

The pandemic has ushered in a new way of working and, with the help of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, we transitioned to remote therapy in 2020, with treatment available online or by phone. It allows us to provide lifesaving therapy more directly, immediately and cost-effectively than before, though we continue to offer our clients the option to receive therapy in the privacy and comfort of their homes.

Call for trustees

We have a 'lean' operation – we pay no salaries and own no assets, with some hourly paid staff for core tasks and support from volunteers. This ensures funds are focused on

our charitable purpose of providing therapy. But PTSD Resolution is in search of trustees and much needed funds to continue providing our service. Tony Gauvain says: "It needs a further injection of funding and energy to enable it to continue to meet the needs of Veterans, Reservists and their families in this coronavirus era."

We'll leave the last word to Richard, one of the many UK Veterans to benefit from PTSD Resolution's approach (see box, facing page). "The Human Givens approach is designed to put your mind at ease – and it did," he says. "[My therapist] put me so at ease with the 'rewind' technique... and after that, everything changed. We built a bond, like a friend but different. Like having an angel watching over you, actually listening... People tell me my attitude's improved, how responsive I am. Even my daughter said: 'Daddy, you've changed'. And that's coming from an eight-year old!

"PTSD jumps up and bites you, like a dog, when you least expect it. Now I can recognise when that feeling's coming and I know what to do.

"I'm saving money at the moment to swim with sharks. They put you in a perspex cage so it looks like there's nothing protecting you. But there is. You're safe." 

For free, one-to-one treatment sessions, in-person or by phone / internet, contact www.ptsdresolution.org - ring 0300 302 0551 or email contact@ptsdresolution.org

