



With many armed forces veterans suffering from PTSD and using substances to self-medicate it's vital to find the right approach to help them rebuild their lives, says Patrick Rea



FORCE FOR GOOD

UK veterans who served in military operations are likely to report a significantly higher prevalence of common mental disorders than non-veterans (23 per cent versus 16 per cent), as well as alcohol misuse (11 per cent versus 6 per cent), according to a 2020 King's Centre for Military Health Research study *Mental health disorders and alcohol misuse among UK military veterans and the general population*.

In 2009 the charity PTSD Resolution was created to support the mental health of forces veterans, reservists and their families across the UK. It offers a 'clear, compassionate pathway to resolving trauma and addiction, to restore mental well-being and stability', according to retired colonel Tony Gauvain, co-founder and chair of the charity.

PTSD Resolution delivers therapy free of charge, offering prompt, local access through its network of 200 therapists

nationwide. With more than 4,000 referrals to date, the charity's approach can resolve military trauma and other issues within an average of seven sessions, with the client and therapist both agreeing that no further treatment is required.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Since 2009, PTSD Resolution has recorded and analysed the results of every therapy session and client programme and also conducted independent studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of its pathway. It has also gained accreditation from the Royal College of Psychiatrists' quality network for veterans mental health services.

'PTSD Resolution supports all veterans contending with a range of mental health issues, including those who have an addiction,' says Gauvain. 'We only require that the client is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol during the therapy session. This contrasts with many other service providers who insist that veterans

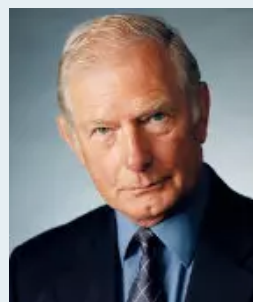
must first resolve their addiction before starting therapy for mental health problems. But the addiction is probably a symptom of the underlying trauma or other mental health issue, so we have a holistic approach to therapy and recovery and will help all veterans, whatever their issues.'

The charity's policy of inclusion extends to the provision of help to veterans in prison, providing a lifeline to members of the ex-forces community frequently left behind. This inclusivity extends to families, acknowledging the ripple effect of trauma and offering much-needed support to partners and children affected by living with a traumatised person.

HUMAN GIVENS

At the heart of PTSD Resolution's approach to addiction lies human givens (HG) therapy, a method that offers a refreshing lens through which to view and address the complexities of addiction, says Malcolm Hanson, director of therapy at the charity and a veteran himself. 'HG therapy stems from a fundamental understanding that human beings have innate needs and resources, collectively referred to as the human givens,' he states. 'When these needs are unmet, or when resources are misused, individuals may spiral into addiction as a misguided attempt to fulfil these voids.'

Vivien Kent / Alamy



'The charity operates within a lean model, channelling donations directly into therapy and essential research, avoiding the need for salaried staff, premises or other physical assets... This operational efficiency ensures that funds are maximised for the benefit of those in need.'

Retired colonel Tony Gauvain, co-founder and chair at PTSD Resolution.

Statue 1101, affectionally known as 'Tommy', in Seaham, County Durham, stands over nine feet tall and was created by artist Ray Lonsdale in 2014. As well as referring to the first minute of peace as the armistice came into force at 11am on 11 November 1918, Lonsdale also intended the sculpture to represent post-traumatic stress disorder, which many returning soldiers endure.



substances or behaviours to numb their pain or gain a semblance of control in their turbulent lives.

'The therapy doesn't merely focus on the addiction itself but addresses the root causes by ensuring that the individual's emotional needs are met in balanced and healthy ways,' says Hanson. 'It emphasises the importance of security, attention, emotional connection, and a sense of achievement among other needs. By fulfilling them properly, the reliance on addictive substances or behaviours diminishes.'

Human givens therapy equips individuals with the resources to rebuild their lives. These include the ability to develop memory, build rapport, employ imagination constructively, and harness the power of their emotions and instincts in a positive way. The therapy sessions aim to empower individuals to find fulfilment and meaning in life beyond their addiction, using their innate capacities to heal and grow.

A VETERAN'S JOURNEY: JAKE'S STORY

Jake is a veteran of Afghanistan who completed the PTSD Resolution therapy programme

'I was in a dark place, drinking, drugs, not answering the phone or door. I had been treated for PTSD at a clinic, but it didn't work. I was an addict. I was violent to my wife. I was suicidal. I went to PTSD Resolution. After the third session, I felt more positive straight away. A few sessions in I started seeing a big difference.

'So did my mum. She said I was much calmer, and I drove on the motorway – in the rain – for the first time without having a panic attack. I got a job on a building site, only temporary but better than nothing. And I got a girlfriend. I was smoking less too, slowly. Coming off weed after years is hard. The best thing I learned in therapy was this technique that stops you from spiralling out. Turns out I needed it.'



Bumbledee / Dreamstime

The human givens approach recognises the past and sets positive, achievable goals, activates innate resources, and rehearses successful outcomes.

Human givens therapy is based on the premise that addiction – whether to substances like alcohol and drugs or behaviours such as gambling – is often an unhealthy coping mechanism for underlying emotional distress. This can frequently be traced back to trauma, with affected veterans turning to addictive

STRONG STRUCTURE

Central to the human givens approach is the premise that therapy should swiftly move individuals from a state of distress to one of empowerment and autonomy. The therapeutic journey begins with establishing a strong rapport between the therapist and the client, ensuring a safe and trusting environment, says Hanson. 'This foundation enables effective information gathering, where the therapist finds the unmet emotional needs and misused resources contributing to the client's addiction. Crucially, this stage also involves information giving, where clients learn about the human givens approach and how it applies to their situation, fostering an understanding of their own behaviour and its underlying causes. It's practical and makes sense to clients.'

Goal setting then directs the therapy towards tangible outcomes, with goals defined by the client's aspirations for recovery and wellbeing. These goals are not distant ideals but

immediate and achievable steps towards overcoming addiction.

Accessing resources taps into the client's innate capacities – such as memory, empathy, and imagination – rekindling skills and strengths that had been overshadowed by their addiction. This empowerment phase is critical for building the client's confidence in their ability to change.

Finally, agreeing on strategies and rehearsing success involves planning practical steps towards meeting goals and envisioning a future free from addiction. This not only prepares the client for challenges ahead but also solidifies their commitment to a healthier lifestyle.

REGAINING BALANCE

Unlike many other therapies, there's no requirement in human givens therapy for clients to explore or even talk about past events that may have traumatised them. Therapy is conducted confidentially and in private – just the client and therapist, either in person or by

phone or online.

'Neither verbal recounting of the traumatic memory nor group therapy sessions form any part of the programme,' says Gauvain. 'They may just reimprint the trauma and reinforce the problem. Instead, the human givens approach recognises the past and sets positive, achievable goals, activates innate resources, and rehearses successful outcomes. Veterans are guided towards regaining balance and satisfaction in their lives by assimilating past events into their life experience, rather than continuing to rely on addictive substances or behaviours to block out painful memories and associations.'

As more veterans like Jake find their way to recovery through PTSD Resolution's therapy programme, the charity's impact will only continue to grow, offering a path to healing and hope for those who have served their country.

For further information visit www.PTSDresolution.org
Patrick Rea is trustee director at PTSD Resolution