

# **YEAR 1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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## Evaluation of the John Paul Project

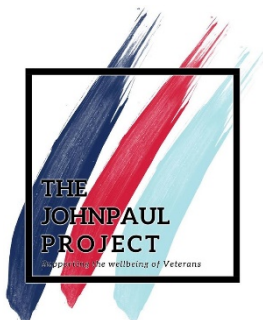
### Background to the project

John Paul Finnigan, from Huyton was a rifleman who completed an 8 month tour of Iraq in 2007 during Operation Telic 9, which saw some of the toughest fighting of the war. He was medically discharged from the Army in 2010, as a result of hearing loss caused by a mortar bomb landing only yards from his head.



John Paul took his own life after struggling to adapt to civilian life and suffering from mental health and trauma issues and PTSD.

Following John Paul's tragic death, a new charity was launched in his name to give advice and support to veterans on how to adapt to civilian life after leaving the army. The John Paul Project is a project of Charity Caring Connections, along with the Barbara Bettle Foundation, that supports people who have been bereaved from suicide.



The two projects offer complementary support to each other tackling bereavement, complex grief, suicide and social isolation in Knowsley's communities. The suicide rate, particularly amongst men, is really high. People are 3 times more likely to have a recurrent suicide in family after a suicide.

“Suicide is a complex problem, and it requires co-ordinated, evidence based solutions that reach beyond the traditional medical model of prevention. Ensuring access to quality mental health services for those in need is one part of a broader solution, but not sufficient on its own”.

## The John Paul Project

The John Paul Project has secured over £20,000 of financial support from a number of external funders including Awards for All, Medicash, Armed Forces Covenant.



John Paul's family has actively campaigned for more support to the veteran community, which led to the establishment of the John Paul Project charity in 2018. Consultation was also undertaken by Caring Connections.

The project was set up to improve the emotional well-being of veterans and their families and decrease suicidal prevalence in this community. Veterans are committing suicide at a rate of one a fortnight.

John Paul's family realised that more needed to be done to help soldiers to return to civilian life. Often they don't feel ready. This project has attempted to put a community in place so that they can open up and start to talk and be willing to get the help that they need.

“More needs to be done at every stage to help our soldiers. It's not enough to have a support mechanism in place after they have the problem.”

## Prevention Strategies

The John Paul project has introduced One to One Counselling Provision and targeted psychological support therapies and support programmes.

The therapists are trained in a wide-range of therapies including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), specialising in supporting clients bereaved through suicide. All therapists are registered with the BACP Professional Body.



Support is free and fully funded by the project. GPs refer people to the project through the veterans access scheme. People can also self-refer to the programme.

There are no waiting lists. Veterans are seen quickly once they have gone through triage. The project has a policy to contact any client that same day. The person is risk assessed and the opportunity is given to see the person in their own home if they are struggling socially and with integration issues.

The counselling session can take place at a venue that suits them and at a time that suits them. Appointments are Monday – Friday. Wide availability morning, afternoon, evening.

Counselling is provided at a number of sites including Kirby, Bootle and Liverpool City Centre. There is a dedicated John Paul office at the community centre in Bootle. The project makes use of the British Legion building in Wirral.

1 veteran is in situ at the moment. The two counselling staff have seen 8 veterans over the 12 months, over and above their cohort of bereavement counselling.

### **Support for families who are suffering from bereavement from suicide**

When death is by suicide, the process of grieving can be difficult which can lead to complicated grief. Caring Connections bereavement counselling is free on a weekly basis to anyone bereaved by suicide within the local area. All counselling is provided by a trained BACP registered counsellor. You can self-refer to service and do not have to come through health services.

This service is offered in memory of Barbara Bettle who took her own life by suicide in 2015.

Importantly the John Paul project has had a much wider impact in that more people who have been bereaved through suicide have started to come forward and access support. This has led to counsellors/CBT therapists supporting up to 15 people per week.

### **The approach to counselling**

There is a person-centred approach to counselling. People can bring to the session any life issue where they would like to experience change, including feeling blocked, feeling unworthy, emotional distress, longing to move forward with life.

The focused counsellor asks at the start of the session what issue or area of life they want to experience change in. They are not asked to give details about their life situation. Equally the counsellor does not give any advice or analysis.

### Signposting strategies

The project is not a crisis line. If the veterans have further needs the project makes referrals and signposts to specialist support e.g. drug or alcohol addiction. There are strong with health centres and hospitals.

The need for an EMDR specialist was explored but not taken up.

### Wrap around support – physical health and well-being

#### 5 a side football

The project set up 5 a side football for veterans and their families.

#### Jiu-Jitsu: Partnership with Aspire Combat Sports

Aspire Combat Sports is a Martial Arts Academy that offers a variety of training in MMA, Muay Thai, K-1, Boxing, Olympic Wrestling and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu for ALL levels.

As part of the John Paul Project Aspire Combat Sports offered to train all veterans as part of an 8 week programme in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, fully funded.

8 WEEK PROGRAMME / 2 HOURS PER WEEK

**FULLY FUNDED BEGINNERS BRAZILIAN JU-JITSU PROGRAMME FOR VETERANS**



ASPIRE COMBAT SPORTS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE JOHN PAUL PROJECT HAS DEVELOPED A NEW PROGRAMME SUPPORTING VETERANS WITH PTSD / EMOTIONAL HEALTH ISSUES THROUGH BRAZILIAN JU-JITSU.

- Develop new skills, improve fitness and improve your emotional wellbeing
- Develop a hobby that can last a lifetime
- Build a new social group in a friendly environment
- Develop effective self-defence skills taught by experts

Contact: 01512892761  
Email: paul.growney@caringconnections.org.uk



The project wanted to trial working with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu after reading about the impact this had had with veterans in US.



50 people had shown interest in the programme initially.

6 veterans had attended the Brazilian Ju Jitsu programme (by end July 19). This was a specific intervention for veterans on a Saturday morning, once a week.

### Difficulties with engagement

The lack of take-up both of the psychological therapies and the activity programme has proved disappointing. The project team had expected a much bigger response, a lot of work had gone into communications and engagement through a dedicated website [www.johnpaulproject.com](http://www.johnpaulproject.com) , press and social media presence.

A video was also made to promote the project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4h8aEPJhks&t=25s>



Caring Connections specialise in the delivery of care and support services across Merseyside. Their remit is health, care and well-being, improving lives of local people through their community projects and charitable arms. Whilst they wanted to support the Finnigan family Caring Connections never intended to establish a veteran support agency as they do not have the specialist skills or infrastructure.

After 5 months Caring Connections joined forces with Sale Sharks. Craig Monaghan started to work with the project from Sale Sharks Community Development Team.

## Partnership with Sale Sharks



Sale Sharks were already running an extensive veterans programme across Greater Manchester and they were looking to expand the service into Liverpool City Region. The Sale Sharks programme is the highest funded veterans programme in the North.

This has brought additional knowledge, resource and capacity to the project for which they are paid a management fee.

Since Sale Sharks took over the management of the project 35 veterans have gone through the programme. 5 have gone through counselling, 3 into new housing, 1 person was homeless and has now been signposted to a housing placement.

Craig does Armed Force work one day a week in Liverpool, normally on Wednesdays.

The project started again from scratch in line with Sale Sharks procedures and timetabling. It now offers comprehensive support, rather than being predominantly health led. Interventions include 1-1s, pastoral care, a range of activities best suited to the civilian – e.g. photography, walking rugby, walks along Crosby or Formby beach. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu will be reintroduced in January. Craig has granted food vouchers in the past for those in severe economic difficulty.

Craig has worked hard to create a military community within a civilian setting, where veterans can feel comfortable. Interestingly Craig has found that the veteran community in Merseyside is significantly more complex than that in Manchester.

The average age of veterans using the programme is 35. 48 is the eldest person in Liverpool. 95 is the eldest in Manchester. Their circumstances range from being unemployed, claiming incapacity benefit, disabled or using a military pension.

## Problems with reintegrating back into the community

The John Paul video talks of soldiers being 'like brothers but you didn't know why'.



It has an incredibly powerful message;

"In the army living with these people and they are your life for so long  
You have structure around you  
When you leave and you have the uniform took off your back  
You feel like there is a thousand people moving around you but you are standing still".

There are deep and complex needs specific to veterans. They experience culture shock. They are no longer a soldier but neither do they feel like a civilian. Soldiers can experience a loss of identity, social networks and camaraderie. 6 months after leaving the army is the real crunch point where they risk slipping into depression, aggressive and violent behaviour or crime.

The soldier has become used to a world of structure, routine and hierarchy and often without realising it has become 'indoctrinated'. When they come out of the army they can struggle with respect, suddenly there are no rules when their band of brothers is not around them. Accountability and trust can be difficult.

"You are wearing the uniform and you don't really know what you are getting yourself into. Weeks go by and you are moulding from a civilian, you don't really know what it is you are moulding into, but by the end of the training you are a full blown soldier".



## **Mental health and men**

Both counsellors commented about male pride and mental health, and particularly within the veteran community, they do not like to be seen 'not being strong'.

"It's okay to talk". "You never have to be alone".



Many prefer to struggle but deep down they are not okay. The Army situation encourages this mindset and often there is a psychological mental block to seeking help. Veterans can see this as weakness. They have been trained to be strong physically and emotionally and do not like to be seen as vulnerable.

The veteran lifestyle can be chaotic. 80% of veterans end up in prison. PTSD is prevalent, however whether this is a result of time served or whether the experience has triggered formative mental health issues is unclear.

The characteristics of the veteran means that they often present to the John Paul project with multi-complex needs, that are totally unique to this client group.

Safeguarding is paramount and all veterans have to have gone through robust triage prior to accessing counselling, to minimise risk and to protect both the veteran and the counsellor from aggressive behaviour. The WEBWS questionnaire is used. Triage is useful in establishing a baseline position, for example veterans cannot access talking therapies if they are under an existing psychotherapist for example.

## **Agency support to veterans in Liverpool**

Interestingly both Caring Connections and Sale Sharks commented on veterans and agency politics in Liverpool, where people clearly do not want to work together and create barriers to accessing support.

One veteran travels from Birkenhead to Manchester just to use the Coffee Hub.

One of the most successful elements of the project has been the link with the British Legion in Wirral. The British Legion has referred a number of veterans to the John Paul project who have successfully gone onto use the counselling service. Intrinsic to this success is the role of the British Legion themselves and the veteran infrastructure they have in place.

Trust has already been built between the John Paul project, the British Legion and the Wirral Veterans Co-ordinator. Wirral veterans also had stronger family networks and some stability and support, which has made the next step to John Paul Project counselling somewhat easier.

### **The need to bridge the care pathway**

The referral process is a complex procedure. Veterans need the right venues, activities and interventions to get them to engage.



The research found that in any future project a preliminary or pre-counselling stage should be considered. Moving straight to counselling has proved traumatic for some veterans. Appointments are made but often they don't turn up, despite being a free service. Clients have proved unreliable. The counsellors have followed this up and tried to rearrange, clients are eager at the time, but then continue to disengage.

There are clear barriers not in accessing support, which is clearly available, but psychologically, as many have not been ready or in the right place to open up to counselling and talking therapies. Timing of interventions can be a factor as can other interdependencies, such as alcohol and substance abuse.

Some education may need to take place first so that there can be greater understanding of what counselling is. Clients have turned up and the session hasn't been what they expected. Often they don't know what counselling is and what it means.

People have to understand that therapy is a personal choice and it is the responsibility of the person themselves to fully engage.

A 'hub' or safe space can help to break down barriers. Somewhere where they can go and not feel under pressure. Just space to feel themselves. Veterans are trying to function in a world that can feel threatening and unfamiliar to them which can be overwhelming.

Some period of time needs to be put to building up trust and self-esteem first. Just going for a coffee can make milestones.

Trust is paramount. "Veterans buy into the person rather than the brand".

Having a counsellor presence on-site, within a drop-in centre or hub and away from a clinical setting, can help to get people to a place where they might be more amenable to opening up and talking.

## **Summary**

The John Paul project was a pilot set up with the mission of supporting John Paul's family and to give army veterans the right support they need.

There is a clear need for support and there needs to be a way of meeting the needs of the veterans community. However the right organisation needs to lead this as it is not just a health issue, comprehensive support is required, as is the necessary infrastructure. The issue is too big and costly to tackle piecemeal.

This project would carry more weight with Sale Sharks, working alongside Caring Connections support, however a longer term trajectory is needed. Some veterans that Craig is working with could take 2 or 3 years before they are in a position to think about counselling. One person that Craig is working with won't even go into a café because there are 'normal people' in there.

How to connect is an issue. Real insight into the veteran psychology is needed. The reason the project has worked so successfully with Sale Sharks is that it has been led by a former soldier, who knows what it is like to serve in the forces.

For example some veterans have reacted badly to the Tri-colour logo of the John Paul project, because of its multi-affiliation to the forces rather than the Army.

Veterans don't want to be glorified or feel used or broadcasted. They prefer anonymity. Privacy works for them. Whilst 5 people have been referred across to counselling, 2 have since disengaged completely.

Barriers need to be broken down, with the strong message that there should be no stigma attached to saying that you need help. The right mechanism needs to be found. Veterans need to buy into the person first.

"Giving choice, giving structure, giving opportunity"

40% of the veterans that Craig has worked with have managed to turn their life around, moving people out of their comfort zones, with strong family networks and support from partners. Emotional resilience is an important part of the journey. Finding a place where they feel part of something again is essential after so many years of service.

Another important outcome from this project is the link to the Barbara Bettel Foundation and their pioneering work providing niche counselling for those bereaved of suicide. Many families and individuals have felt able to access the vital support they need thanks to the intervention of the John Paul Project.

