

The Combat Veteran Players (CVP) are an award-winning Shakespearean theatre company, built upon what has now become a nationally recognized rehabilitative model of Applied Theatre, and comprised entirely of ex-Service members who have been living with and overcoming moderate to severe mental health difficulties, social isolation, and or transitional difficulty. The CVP contributes to the rehabilitation of ex-Service personnel through professional standard rehearsals and performances of Shakespeare's texts in high profile mainstream theatre venues.

The model of the CVP provides an opportunity for predisposed conditions, as well as difficulties stemming directly from military service itself, to be advanced and overcome. The CVP debuted their first production, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', at the Old Vic Tunnels in 2012. They have since performed annual professional standard showings of 'Henry V', again at the Old Vic Tunnels, at the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Dell Stage in Stratford-Upon-Avon, and throughout the West End; and 'Hamlet' in July of 2014 on the mainstage of Shakespeare's Globe. They recently returned to London's West End with their fourth production, 'Twelfth Night', and are soon to begin rehearsals for their fifth production, 'Richard III', which will return to Shakespeare's Globe in 2016.

The high quality of their performances and the inspiration of their previously hidden talents have touched audiences, achieved an award for 'Innovation in Classical Theatre', and spawned partnerships and support of the model with the RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, Arts & Minds, Combat Stress, Stoll, Never Such Innocence, Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans and Family Institute, and a number of West End theatres and other professional venues. They have also led to the opening of a US branch of the company, whose members have begun rehearsals for their first Shakespearean production as of summer 2015.

The CVP is unique in its approach in that the rehabilitative model of the company deliberately avoids any emphasis on storytelling of personal traumatic experience. Deeply buried emotions are instead explored distantly through the safety of Shakespearean characters and verse, while performance skills are developed and strengthened and self-confidence is enhanced. Participants are taught to move beyond past traumatic experiences in the rehearsal room, and are trained as Shakespearean actors who happen to be Veterans. Working with the CVP is an ongoing, skill-building process with several current participants in London having maintained involvement for nearly five years, performing a new Shakespeare play annually. The approach is one of longevity and commitment and it has enabled a wider understanding of a rehabilitative methodology that is not frequently seen. The underlying core of the CVP is that of a well trained cast working together to perform high quality Shakespearean plays, and bowing proudly as a solid cast of highly trained actors at the end of each performance.

The Founding Director of the CVP, Jaclyn McLoughlin, and a long-term actor within the company, Shaun Johnson, will discuss the company's history and inception, its struggles and successes, and its significance as a model in impacting lives, opening eyes, and breaking through stigmas.