



**Nicky Clarke, Chair of Trustees**

**Points to raise at Arts and PTSD Round Table  
House of Commons, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

**1. Funding for arts therapy/programmes**

We believe that arts therapy/programmes are often overlooked for funding, particularly in NHS settings where the focus over recent years has been primarily Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). At the MWCF, we have statistical evidence that demonstrates the significant value of singing in choirs on mental health and wellbeing for women in the Military community. Quotes\* such as those below highlight the impact:

- *I have been diagnosed with PTSD and it [the choir] has had a huge impact on my recovery and acceptance*
- *I was suffering from post traumatic stress due to two [serious events]. It encouraged me to step out of the house. Especially when my husband was away*

**2. The often late diagnosis of PTSD**

In my experience, the actual diagnosis of PTSD often comes at a point of crisis – such as a marriage breakdown, alcohol problem – as many of the symptoms of PTSD have been masked by self medication – e.g. alcohol. By this point, the problems are often complex and compounded and it will take further time (ie addressing the alcohol issues) before the trauma can be addressed. Encouraging anyone with mental health difficulties to support themselves – particularly using arts based activities, may help them to both express themselves in more healthy ways (than alcohol for example) and may avoid reaching crisis points in the future (there is quite a bit of evidence now for ‘social prescribing’ being effective in treating mental health difficulties). Further quotes demonstrate the value of singing on general mental health:

- *I started with a lack of confidence, anxiety and depression, this has helped immensely and feel like a total different person now because of it*
- *Having suffered from depression, I have found that singing really helps boost me*

**3. The stigma attached to mental health in the military community.**

Much work has been done in recent years within the Military, such as the Trauma Risk Management programme (TRiM). However, as a population and particularly in the military, talking about mental health difficulties is still not an easy thing to do. Arts based activities can be a very accessible way of helping those struggling to express themselves and help them to build their confidence. It could help to avoid the situation described above where those struggling, avoid all ways possible to address their mental health difficulties. Additionally, we are aware that the increased confidence that comes from being part of our choirs can help with other factors such as the confidence to get a job which may have been difficult if a woman has been off work with young children and has had to move frequently.

- *I have been on the verge of depression but meeting weekly to sing with other women gave me a boost*
- *Certainly improved my mental health by allowing me time away from home as me rather than wife or mother*

\*All quotes from The Work of the Military Wives Choirs Foundation - An Evaluation in Partnership with Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health. 2014.