

# Home Front Project - Points for the APPG on Arts & Post Traumatic Stress

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*“Because of humour we are less overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life”* Charlie Chaplin.

**1. Comedy is a popular/trendy art form. Our evaluations have shown it can “promote health by stealth”: it is a useful tool to both get messages about mental health heard –**

*“If you can make them laugh, you can make them listen”* John Ryan;

**AND get people talking and learning about mental health –** breaking down barriers and stigma that surround this topic in the general public and military. Our comedy show led to a statistically significant reduction in the military stigma scale and increased awareness of mental health issues<sup>i</sup>.

The performance element of our comedy shows - in prisons and the military - involved a series of workshops where inmates and Armed Forces personnel were encouraged to discuss their experiences of prison life, military life, tours and combat; and their knowledge and attitudes towards mental ill health and help seeking. These workshops provided the basis and anecdotes for the show. Some inmates and Armed Forces personnel also performed their pieces - as ‘social contact’ is effective in reducing stigma.

**2. PTSD and mental health issues tend to isolate/divide people; whereas comedy connects them- laughter is contagious. Audiences benefit not only from bonding in a safe, shared environment;**

John Cleese said *“I’m struck by how laughter connects you with people. It’s almost impossible to maintain any kind of distance, any sense of social hierarchy when you are just howling with laughter.”*

**but also from the mental and physical wellbeing effects of laughter<sup>ii</sup>:**

(eg reduced blood pressure & stress hormones, increased: blood & oxygen flow, memory & learning- Johns Hopkins University Medical School study-humour during instruction led to increased test scores)

**3. Follow up and Evaluation –** Our comedy shows in military, prison and community settings have shown short term benefits<sup>iii</sup>. Yet as it can take years for PTSD to develop, it is important that arts interventions are reinforced/followed up over time and that longer-term evaluations are also conducted.

We are not looking at processing trauma through a short comedy show, however, as part of a multi-disciplinary approach, comedy is a useful and popular tool. It can be used to help broach the sensitive topics of mental health and PTSD; and to raise awareness of symptoms and sources of support with both people at risk and their friends/families/colleagues. Comedy can be part of a preventative approach.

Maya Twardzicki(Surrey County Council) in partnership with John Ryan at [www.liffthelidproductions.com](http://www.liffthelidproductions.com)

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<sup>i</sup> <http://betterhealthforall.org/2014/10/10/heard-the-one-about-comedy-and-mental-health-stigma-in-a-military-population/>

<sup>ii</sup> Sondra Komblatt (2009) A Better Brain at Any Age: The Holistic Way to Improve your Memory, Reduce Stress and Sharpen your Wits. Conari Press

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/publications/assetfiles/2014/Jones2013a.pdf>

[https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/evaluation-of-a-comedy-intervention-to-improve-coping-and-helpseeking-for-mental-health-problems-in-a-womens-prison\(aefc3e91-03b3-4c27-a6f0-8aa0674b2207\).html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/evaluation-of-a-comedy-intervention-to-improve-coping-and-helpseeking-for-mental-health-problems-in-a-womens-prison(aefc3e91-03b3-4c27-a6f0-8aa0674b2207).html)