



Living with PTSD 2023



10 Years On

Exhibition Document - Living With PTSD
2013

Villayat 'SnowMoon Wolf' Sunkmanitu
19th May 2023

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Exhibition: Living with PTSD 2023



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Villayat 'Wolf' Sunkmanitu
Presents

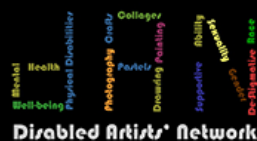
An exhibition of photography
& videography celebrating
his 20th year of creativity.

20th May - 5th July 2023

Venue: Tesco Extra,
Jennison Street, Nottingham.
NG6 8EQ.

7am - 10:30pm.

The venue has free car parking and facilities for people with mobility difficulties and can be reached by trams and buses. The nearest Motorway junction is 26, M1.



Introduction

I still use creativity to cope with living with PTSD. Please look the condition up.

Living With PTSD 2023 (LWPTSD 2023) is my follow-up exhibition to Living With PTSD (which took place in 2013). The first exhibition's aim was to raise awareness of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the perspective of a Veteran.

This exhibition celebrates 20 years in the arts industry but also looks at what has changed for Veterans in the last 10 years with regards to support and treatment of PTSD.

I have some new works on display as I've branched out into videography too now. You have photo art on display on screens 1-6.

The original LWPTSD exhibition is on screens 7 & 8.

Screens 9 & 13 are displaying videos I've made using various cameras including drones.

I have some new poems up on screen 10.

Screens 11 & 12 are displaying a variety of photographs taken over the last 20 years.

The other reason for the exhibition is to see what's changed from 2013 to 2023 with regards to Living With PTSD for Veterans and to provide some awareness.

Conditioning

Veterans were conditioned, moulded, converted into a particular mindset. This began from day 1 of their basic training across all the elements of the UK's Armed Forces when they were regulars.

The primary role of any member of our Armed Forces is to kill a perceived enemy, should it become necessary and there is no other alternative where lives and property are at risk.

People are then sent to trade training, where appropriate, to learn additional skills. That's where life changes for different parts of the Armed Forces. Generally speaking, Army units take in fresh recruits but they all stay together. The Navy's the same. Apart from the Regiment, RAF personnel generally get posted to a station for about 2 years and then get moved on to another unit, so you don't have the same unit cohesion that you have in other parts of the Armed Forces. Some people, from all 3 services progress to work in our Special Forces units.

Issues that some Veterans with PTSD are living with as a result of military service:

- Feeling suicidal
- Homelessness
- Difficulties adjusting to civilian life
- Inability to access any and/or relevant benefits
- Alcohol and substance addiction
- Problems fitting back into civilian life
- Ostracised by family, friends, organisations through stigma
- Subjected to miscarriages of justice
- Symptoms of PTSD leaking into daily life
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Employers not understanding their daily challenges
- Isolation



When they left the Armed Forces and came back to civilian life, they weren't deprogrammed. Some Veterans have never received any form of support. The transition back to civilian life itself can be very difficult if the forces were your only family ... add service-related PTSD into the mix and you can have a veteran in a very difficult scenario that can lead to very serious problems for the Veteran ... sometimes ending in suicide.

Veterans are human beings. When they come home, it takes a while for the effects of the military conditioning to lessen. I don't think it ever completely leaves us.

We react differently to the change. We adapt differently, at different speeds, in different ways.

How many soldiers committed suicide after the Falklands War?

The South Atlantic Medal Association (SAMA82), which represents and helps Falklands veterans, believes that some 264 veterans had taken their own lives by 2002, a number exceeding the 255 who died in active service, although no estimate is available for the expected number of suicides that would have occurred anyway.



41 years later and politics has come in to play again with regards the death of Veterans by suicide. The British Empire cared little for those it sent into battle to further its aims ... there's no evidence to suggest anything is different now, irrespective of which way you vote. Only Veterans understand this because we

talk to each other in groups where civilians are barred. There are daily posts from fellow Veterans asking for help or advice, numerous posts where Veterans are circling the drain, some on the brink of suicide; Beacon Alerts are issued to help find them. Some are successfully found ... but not always alive.

GPs just want to pump drugs into me.

This shouldn't be their first response.



I waited for 3 years before I got an appointment with the NHS. Then I was told that they could only offer me 20 sessions of support.

After that - nothing.



Veteran Suicide

The government have systematically downgraded Adult Mental Health Services across the board in the UK by not adequately funding the NHS. The Pandemic added to the pressures faced by the NHS.

Many Veterans feel that the PTSD that we (and members of the emergency services suffer with) is different to the PTSD many civilians suffer with. This is not to say that the symptoms are more serious for one group over the other, it's more a recognition that the majority of people will run away from danger but we're conditioned to move towards it as a necessary part of our duties and this creates complications, as the 'fight or flight' response is negated for us. There is no flight. We fight until we drop ... and even then we'll still be fighting in any way we can.

Veteran suicides were not recorded prior to 2018.

According to Veterans United Against Suicide, since 2018, 350 Veterans have committed suicide and the figure continues to rise.

The University of Manchester recorded that between 1996 and 2018, 1,086 veterans took their own lives. The inference of their report has angered many Veterans, including myself, because they've likened Veteran Suicide to general suicide, intimating that it's no big deal...it's the same as the civilian population.

Those of us that actively support Veterans in different ways see this report and the government's response as nothing more than an attempt to shrug off the the State's responsibility of support and aftercare towards its Veterans. Who cares about the fodder when the cannons have ceased firing?

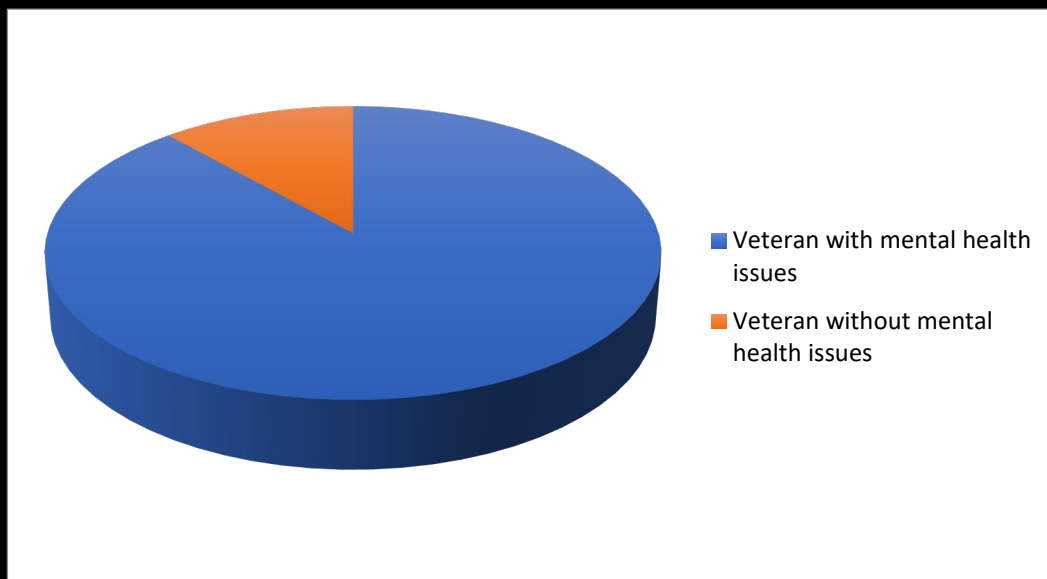
Survey:

Veteran with mental health issues

Poll conducted via 4 confidential Veterans' Networks May 2023

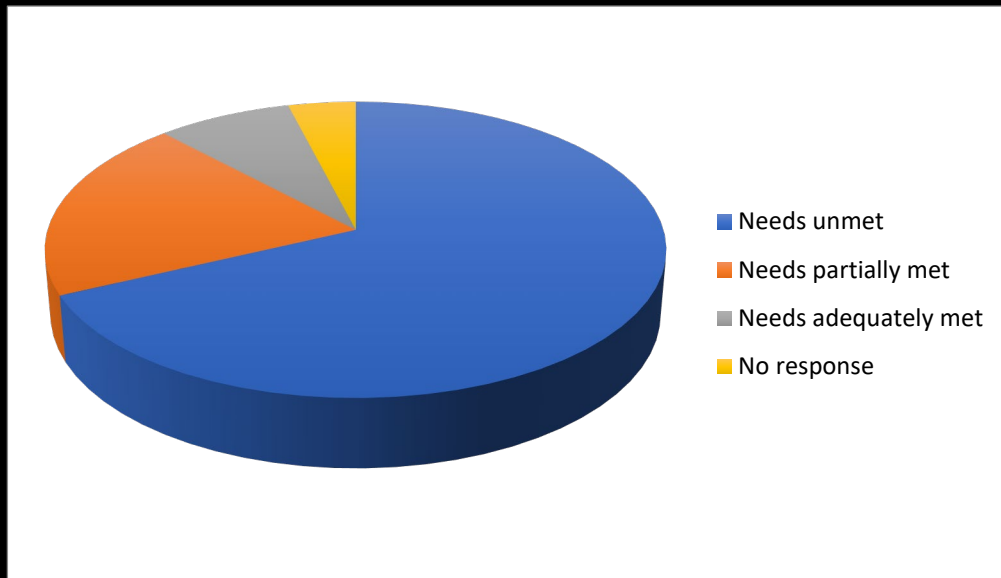
All responses have been anonymised to ensure confidentiality of those who participated in this survey.

Veteran with mental health issues	275	88.42%
Veteran without mental health issues	36	11.58%



1	Needs Unmet	187	68.00%
2	Needs Partially Met	55	20.00%
3	Needs Adequately Met	22	8.00%
4	No Response	11	4.00%

Total number of responses 275



Why are there so many Veterans suffering from PTSD in isolation?

Some are so isolated, they don't know about PTSD

Some don't want to open up the scars by talking about their experiences in the Armed Forces

Some have a severe negative reaction to treatments

Some don't want to end up on medications

Some feel ashamed of the stigma of having a mental health issue

Barriers To Accessing Support

There are many reasons Veterans don't access support. For me it was my ignorance of the condition. I was still working in uniform but I was afraid to talk about what was going on. I was afraid that I'd end up losing my job and that I'd end up in a secure mental health unit somewhere.

There was a lot of ignorance about PTSD in the 80s (and before). The first lads to get a diagnosis of PTSD were some of the people that served in the Falklands War and that was following the recognition of the Condition by the USA following the Vietnam War. I think that happened in the late 80s to early 90s.

Our conditioning also stops us seeking support – though that's being addressed nowadays with currently serving members of the Armed Forces.

A bigger issue is that treatments aren't wide enough in nature to suit the differing personalities emerging from their transition to civilian life ... and you can't put a time limit on treatment and support. We're all different and we all move at our own pace, particularly when it comes to addressing mental health issues.

The main therapies available are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) and good old sitting and talking with someone.

There's also Psychopharmacology which refers to the use of medication in treating mental health conditions...but this mustn't be the first option and the Veteran must be advised that this route will alter the chemistry of their brain – which could be irreversible and may have serious side effects.

What we mustn't do is broadcast what didn't work for us because we risk rendering a treatment that may work for a different personality useless and thereby do the Veteran a disservice.

Many Veterans fall by the wayside because of waiting times to access appropriate services.

Any period of time is a long time when you're living in hell and fighting to get from day to day.

Another complication is that it takes time to build up trust with your therapist. Speaking for myself, an incident was buried so deeply that it didn't surface until after 5 or 6 years of therapy. When it did, it shocked me.

I have PTSD.

It took me 2 years of talking to my therapist before I could open up about the incidents I was involved in during my military service.

The therapist retired and I couldn't face the thought of starting again with a different therapist.

Trust is built up over time.



When you read about some of their experiences and put yourself in their boots, how would you see yourself dealing with the incidents they've been involved in? Could you have done their jobs? How would you have reacted to approaching a stranger for help/support?

Why is combat related PTSD different?

We were conditioned to run towards danger by suppressing our fear.

We either went through it or over it - not around it.

We hit an IED. I held my mate's broken body. He died in my arms.

We fought until we dropped.

Other people were relying on us to save them.

We pile in while others run away.



Coming Back To Loved Ones

What are the implications for loved ones and relatives when Veterans come home?

Our experiences change us. You may hear the words, 'Going there has changed you. You're not the same lad I knew'. We had to change though because it was necessary to do the job. Your relatives may not understand this by just doing a simple search about PTSD online.

Without going into the incidents, you're going to have to see if you can explain how you feel...don't risk losing relationships by building a wall around yourself. Some agencies have started offering care for partners and relatives of people affected by PTSD. It's a good idea to be clued in to what's going on...rather than risking a relationship ending.

What's it like to live with someone who has combat related PTSD?

He never talks about what happened.

We'll be watching telly and he'll see something and go very quiet but I'll see tears streaming down his face.

He doesn't like noise and hates fireworks; they're so loud nowadays.

The drinking got so bad that I had to leave him.

He doesn't know how to fit in now he's home.

I can't reach him when he's been triggered.



Racism & Veterans With PTSD

Some of us joined up at a time when there was much distrust for anyone serving in a uniform from our various communities. Even as a cadet, I remember an Asian Elder asking me what I was doing in a White Man's uniform. I was 13 at the time and I'd decided that I was going into the Armed Forces and this was my route in.

When I joined the Royal Air Force, I was ostracised by my community. I was treated with suspicion. During regular service and meeting people through different scenarios, it seemed clear to me that a third of the people I came into contact with on the units I served on, didn't want me in their uniform either.

From my experience of discussions with some Veterans, racial abuse is still deemed acceptable as banter by a good percentage of people...even though it can affect service/support options for people suffering with PTSD.

I used to be able to get respite care at Combat Stress.
I was subjected to racism from one of the lads there.
His ethnicity is White English.

The other lads in the room stuck up for me.

My Combat Stress Welfare Officer never got in touch with me again.

Combat Stress never invited me back for respite care again.

Living With PTSD – Book Details

For those of you interested in the book about the first exhibition, you can order it from any bookstore or online. The exhibition was funded by the Arts Council England and the National Lottery.

ISBN: 978-0-9564885-4-1

www.wolf-photography.com

Challenging disability and raising awareness through Creativity



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

My exhibition 'Living with PTSD' has taken six years to plan and put together. It couldn't have happened without support from the Arts Council and the National Lottery. This book is an accompaniment to the rolling exhibition, offering further insight and shared experiences.

From my own perspective, it's an important piece of work because it shines a light into a much misunderstood condition.

People living with PTSD and related mental health conditions are often misunderstood, subjected to stigma, discriminated against and ostracised.

In the case of Veterans, they're often people that have survived traumatic incidents, having risked their lives to do their duty - only to come home to shattered lives and a society that is, at best, misinformed of their plight.

Wolf Photography is a 'Not-For-Profit' therapeutic work project. For more details please visit www.wolf-photography.com.



Living with PTSD Journey of a Veteran

Accompaniment to the exhibition



Villayat 'SnowMoon Wolf' Sunkmanitu

Living with PTSD - Journey of a Veteran - Accompaniment to the exhibition

Seeking Support

The easiest way to seek support to cope with PTSD is to do a Google search as it will target organisations nearest your mobile phone first. If you don't find an organisation or therapist that you get on with, don't quit! Ask to be referred to someone else. You will have to involve your GP at some stage, especially if you're going to be putting in a claim for a War Disablement Pension or to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).

If you don't have access to a mobile phone, go to your nearest library, tell them you're a Veteran trying to find some support and ask them to do a search for you on one of their computers.

If you desperately need to speak with someone, ring The Samaritans on:

116 123

Calls are free from any phone, 24/7.

I'll leave you with a couple of exercises to try:

Do you get a lot of mind chatter and find it hard to find silence within? Go to YouTube and follow the instructions on this video:

<https://youtu.be/KFi7E8z1Z34>. Leave a comment if it works.

Before you go to sleep tonight, look into a mirror, into your own eyes and tell yourself 3 positive things that you know about yourself. Do this every night and then every morning. Value yourself. You're worth the effort.

Nottinghamshire Veterans & Families Partnership

Owing to my exhibition and complaint about the service received from the NHS Adult Mental Health Team in my area, I was contacted by Nottinghamshire Veterans and Families Partnership in 2013 to help work in improving services to Veterans.

I had transferred to the area with up-to-date reports from everyone that was providing me support at my previous location (psychiatrist, psychologist, Therapist and Social Services). The local trust insisted on doing their own evaluation. Having worked in the NHS and been a Union Rep to get people through Agenda for Change, I couldn't understand why they were insisting on putting me through yet another evaluation that would waste resources (as the professionals in Cornwall held the same or higher credentials) ... but most importantly, would put me through yet another traumatic experience that would leave me feeling suicidal. At the interview, the psychiatrist hadn't even bothered to read my file and had acted unprofessionally during and after the interview.

I worked with this group for about 14 months on the following issues:

Looking at a policy to accept up to date reports for people moving into the area

How to set up an interview environment that Veterans may feel more comfortable in.

Dos and don'ts when interviewing Veterans

(The above was done with 2 managers in the group)

I ran a workshop to come up with Terms of Reference for the working group. It transpired that the working group would have no autonomy and everything had to go through the main group anyway, thus creating an unnecessary level of repetition. One of the internal problems with the group was that nothing ever got progressed; they were just a talking shop.

Sadly, it came to light that the only things the group leaders were interested in were identifying funding streams – hence the networking.

It was clear to me that improving the way the NHS in this part of the UK support Veterans wasn't this group's priority. At that point the group was led by an NHS Manager. I actually felt that all the Veterans representing various groups in the room were being ignored. I left the group at this point as I didn't want to waste my time any further.

When I look at the way the government is trying to downplay relevant statistics, I wonder if they're afraid of not being able to recruit enough people into the Armed Forces to fulfil the defence role.

I also wonder whether they're getting ready for yet another illegal/immoral war and are afraid of not having enough people to do their fighting for them.

I feel that politicians, in the main, are cowards. It's okay for them to send us to war while they stay safe at home. I feel it's time that politicians advocating for any war were dropped on a desert island and told to settle their differences themselves without killing innocent people. The most effective advocates for peace are Veterans that understand the futility of war. War does nothing more than feed the arms industry and the other vultures associated with it.

The 'bigger picture' that managers and politicians aspire to is seldom beneficial to the masses.

Poppy Wearers

Many of you wear poppies for a week or two a year and feel that you've done your bit. You've remembered the fallen.

You need to remember the living too. The men and women, boys and girls that keep getting sent to foreign lands to fight in illegal or corrupt wars. They don't have a choice. They follow orders. The survivors that come home with PTSD die a little every day; imprisoned in memories of service, sometimes subjected to injustice ... sometimes homeless.

Do more than wear a poppy. Get actively involved. Don't shy away from someone because of a label related to mental health. If you're their boss, try and understand the difficulties they live with.

I know there are many of you out there that do care and look out for Veterans. Thank you.

If we could stop involving ourselves in wars that are not ours and spend that money on services, care provision, education, housing, the NHS, Social Care and decent rates of pay for our citizens, we'll start to flourish as a nation again.

We also need to stop using 'Democracy' as an excuse to conduct wars, especially as our democratic process, freedom of speech and right to protest are under attack by our own government.

We need to start investing in peace.

2 Minutes

During the 2 minutes you'll, maybe, remember some of us.
The years of silence our memories still sentence us to,
You'll forget.

The unspoken wound that can't be seen,
Carrying the memories of service,
You won't hear.

Standing tall, we'll walk by you,
Never showing the open wounds,
That cut like knives.

2 minutes later, You'll be back to your life.
2 minutes later, We'll still be trying to make sense of ours.
2 minutes later, another November morning will be forgotten.

I wish you well and hope that this document can be used for some good
somewhere. Please feel free to circulate it as is.

Respectfully

Villayat 'SnowMoon Wolf' Sunkmanitu

18th May 2023