

BBC Somerset

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Charity helps ex-service personnel cope with stress

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have undoubtedly impacted the mental wellbeing of those who have served.

Many have left the forces with post traumatic stress disorder and have struggled to cope with civilian life.

But now a charity which helps ex-service personnel deal with the traumatic effects of war is returning to Somerset.

The Warrior Programme is to hold its first residential programme at The Chalice Well in Glastonbury.

The three-day programme will help 20 ex-servicemen and women deal with the effects of their experiences of war including depression and homelessness.

Phil Collins, 28 from Toxteth in Merseyside, took part in the programme after his experience in the army left him out of control of his life.

He lost his partner and job and was made homeless.

He said the programme changed his life as it taught him how to cope with stress.

"I went through a lot of difficulties when I left the forces - I'd seen a lot of things which messed up my mind and when I came out of the forces I had loads of personal issues to deal with outside and I absolutely destroyed my life."

Phil said he left the armed forces because something happened to one of his children so he went from "fighting one war to fighting another war" which he wasn't prepared for in a physical or mental state to deal with.

"When you're in the armed forces, you don't get the support that you should do so when you come out, you do find it hard to...from being a robot and then going on to Civvy St and being a normal person, it is so hard to adjust."

Although initially sceptical, Phil attended the Warrior Programme which then helped him turn his life around.

"I used to say if a counsellor can't help you, how can a three day course?"

"But when you get the tools to learn how to deal with your anger, sadness, fear, guilt and hurt; when you're actually realising how to deal with those emotions and how you control them it's special because instead of feeling down, you can actually take a step back and look at the problem



Adrian Anderson, an ex-soldier for the Rifles, with course founder Eva Hamilton

and re-evaluate the situation and know how to deal with it and that's why it's been amazing.

"This time last year I was going to hell and back. Now I've got a nice three bedroom house, two beautiful kids, I've got a partner that I love and she loves me - everything is going in the right direction."

'Ticking time bomb'

Although a study of 10,000 personnel found post traumatic stress disorder rates are low, founding director of the Warrior Programme, Eva Hamilton MBE from Butleigh, said service personnel needed more support for when they leave the forces as it was a "ticking time bomb".

"With the problems in Afghanistan and the intense combat, what these men and women are seeing... some of them are not going through the easiest of times and my feeling is we really need to prevent these problems from happening. We need to go back to the institutions where these problems are emerging.

"What I've seen time and time again is that you can give someone a job and a home but if you haven't dealt with the underlying causes of what made them homeless in the first place, the problems will re-occur."

She said some of them have issues stemming right back to their childhood which needed addressing.

"With the ex-service men and women they are in a shocking state when we find them. To be honest they are sceptical to begin with and I think the people who coax them on and influence them are the people who have been through it all already."

People like Phil who, after successfully completing the course, now helps out as a volunteer on the programme.

"If I can help someone else now, then I know I have made a difference," he said.