

Celebrity chef leads ex-Army team on hunt for mushrooms

# Cooking up bright future for soldiers

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A GROUP of ex-servicemen joined celebrity chef Antonio Carluccio for a morning of mushroom picking on a countryside estate.

The forage for fungi at the Marquess of Abergavenny's estate in Eridge Park, Tunbridge Wells, was run by the Warrior Programme, a charity to help emotionally traumatised former members of the Armed Forces.

"The main aim is to help them feel integrated into society," Mr Carluccio said. "To feel well, you cannot do better than confronting them with nature. "Having suffered depression myself, not for the same reasons, I know that for someone to take care of you and show you something different is important."

The founder of the Carluccio's Caffès chain of Italian restaurants, which includes one in Mount Pleasant Road, said the hunt on Wednesday was fantastic despite it being the end of the mushroom season.

Mr Carluccio, who is no longer a director of the company but still consults on menus and chef training, said cooking was a good way to soothe the mind and soul.



**CAP THAT:** Antonio Carluccio was joined by eight ex-servicemen to hunt mushrooms

Many of the ex-servicemen supported by the charity ended up homeless after they left the military, some also suffered from addiction, depression, anxiety and stress disorders.

After the hunt, they helped Mr Carluccio cook a meal using their finds and eggs.

Eight ex-servicemen took part in the outdoor event, all had heartbreaking stories of how their lives had been turned upside down.

They included Nick Eccles, who served in the Army for 15 years. He left after a tour of the Falklands and felt unsupported. He then spent three years sleeping rough.

Patrick Lyster-Todd, a former Principal Warfare officer, chose to leave the Navy in 1992 because of his sexuality. His partner died two days before he left and although he later became the marketing director of a television branding company, in 2001 he had a breakdown, which cost him his job and home.

James Louis, 23, from Essex, joined the Army aged 16 but left only three years later after he was involved in a car crash.

"My life went downhill after I left the Army. I did not even do an operational tour," he said. "The Warrior Programme helps all sorts of people from different backgrounds.

"The car crash damaged my leg and my back. I had a lot of problems with anger after I was released from duty."

But since taking part in the programme, which says it helps former servicemen "release their unresolved feelings of fear, guilt, sadness and anger", he said his life was back on track.

Eva Hamilton, the founder and chief executive of the charity, said: "I set up a homelessness campaign to get people back to work by getting them placements.

"But time and time again you would get someone a job and they would stay in work for three months but then their demons would come back. It was treating the symptoms but not the cause."

She said the programme addressed the cause of people's suffering and pain and rebuilt their confidence and helped them take responsibility for their lives.

See [www.warriorprogramme.org.uk](http://www.warriorprogramme.org.uk).

