

SUMMER 2024

NEWSLETTER



Your Story Matters

Telling stories is a fundamental human activity that transcends cultures and eras. It is through storytelling that people communicate experiences, express emotions, and share knowledge. ***The power of storytelling lies in its ability to give people a voice, which is particularly transformative for those caring for individuals with poor health or injuries.***

Here's how storytelling can empower these caregivers, break down barriers, and create meaningful change, including influencing policymakers.



Empowerment Through Storytelling

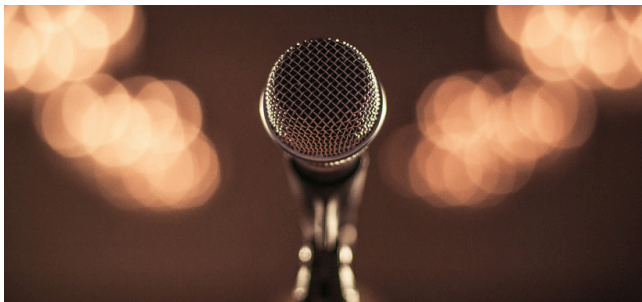
Building Confidence and Agency:

When caregivers share their stories, they often experience a sense of validation and recognition. Acknowledgement from others can significantly boost your self-esteem and confidence. For those who are constantly giving care, storytelling can shift their perspective from seeing themselves as secondary to seeing themselves as vital advocates and individuals with their own hopes, needs, and expectations.

Moreover, storytelling empowers caregivers by fostering a sense of agency. By narrating your own experiences, you can influence how your story is told and understood. This control of the narrative is crucial for mental and emotional well-being by helping to reclaim parts of a life that a carer may feel are dominated by the health conditions of those they care for.

Fostering Connection and Support:

Sharing personal stories creates connections. For caregivers, finding others who understand and empathise with their situation can be profoundly comforting. These connections often lead to the formation of support networks, where individuals can share advice, encouragement, and resources. For example, The Ripple Pond online Peer Support Forums provide a platform for members to share their stories and offer mutual support.



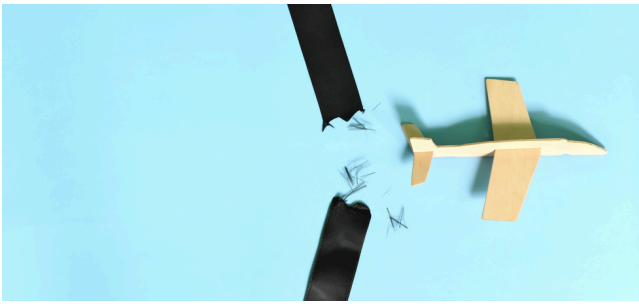
The Power of Storytelling

Giving Caregivers a Voice:

Storytelling allows caregivers to articulate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. For those looking after loved ones with health challenges, this can be incredibly therapeutic. It enables them to express their fears, hopes, and struggles in a way that is both personal and relatable. When caregivers tell their stories, they assert their identity and humanity, which can often be overshadowed by the needs of those they care for.

For instance, a caregiver of an injured veteran who shares their journey through a blog or social media finds a platform to voice their daily struggles and achievements. This act of sharing can transform their role from a background supporter to an active participant in the narrative of care. Their story becomes a testament to their resilience and dedication, rather than just an auxiliary to the patient's journey.





Breaking Down Barriers

Challenging Stigma and Misconceptions:

Caregiving, especially for those with mental health issues or other severe injuries, is often surrounded by stigma and misconceptions. Personal stories can play a pivotal role in breaking down these barriers. When caregivers share their lived experiences, they humanise the role and dispel myths.

Promoting Empathy and Understanding:

Storytelling fosters empathy by allowing listeners to see the world through the caregiver's eyes. For healthcare providers, listening to caregivers' stories can enhance their understanding and empathy, leading to better patient and caregiver support. When healthcare professionals understand the personal context of caregivers' lives, they can offer more tailored and compassionate care.



Creating Change

Inspiring Advocacy and Action:

Stories have the power to inspire change at both individual and societal levels. They can galvanise people into action, whether it's advocating for better healthcare policies, funding for research, or greater accessibility and support for caregivers.

Influencing Policymakers:

On a broader scale, storytelling can influence public policy and medical practice. Advocacy groups often use personal stories to highlight the real-world impact of health policies and the need for change. These narratives can be powerful tools in lobbying for legislation that supports healthcare reforms and caregiver rights.

When policymakers hear compelling personal stories, they are more likely to understand the human impact of their decisions. This understanding can drive legislative changes and the allocation of resources to better support caregivers and those they care for.



Importance for People Caring for Those with Poor Health and Injuries

For caregivers, storytelling is not just a means of communication—it is a lifeline. It provides a way to make sense of their experiences, connect with others, and find strength in vulnerability.

Emotional and Psychological Benefits:

Telling their story can be a form of therapy for caregivers. It allows them to process their experiences, find meaning in their struggles, and build resilience. The act of sharing can also reduce feelings of isolation and helplessness, as it connects them with others who understand their journey.

Creating a Supportive Community:

By sharing their stories, caregivers can create a community of support. This community can provide practical advice, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. For example, a person caring for a loved one with a chronic illness might find others in similar situations through storytelling platforms, leading to a network of mutual support and understanding.



In conclusion, storytelling is a powerful tool that gives caregivers of those with poor health and injuries a voice. This voice empowers them by building confidence and fostering connections, breaks down societal barriers by challenging stigma and promoting empathy, and creates change by inspiring advocacy and influencing policy.

Now is the time to tell your story. Whether privately in support groups or publicly through blogs and social media, your experiences can make a difference. As Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Share your journey, inspire others, and be a catalyst for change.

Your voice matters, and your story can change the world.

Rodger Cartwright
Chief Executive Officer

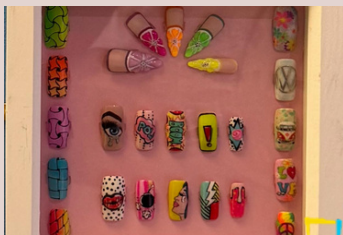
Members Art Celebrated at St. Pancras Hospital

This summer in collaboration with Op COURAGE and The Arts Project a new exhibition has been launched at St. Pancras Hospital.

This exhibition celebrates the contributions of Veterans, Family Members and Carers.

We are proud to see the work of some of our members represented.

The exhibition opened on the 27th June 2024 and is open for 3 months over the summer.



Art for Wellbeing



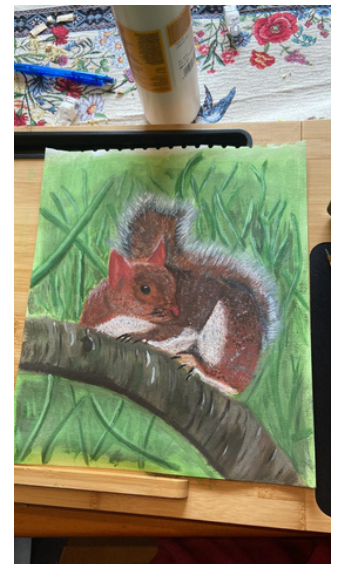
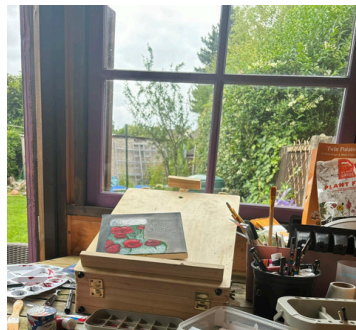
One Members Story:

I always hated art, I thought it had to be perfect. So when someone bought me a paint by numbers last year I felt beholden to complete it. As I did, I noticed that the kitchen mess didn't bother me and I found myself absorbed.

I have been Wife and Mother for the past 16 years and had slowly forgotten that I am a person too. We spend so much time and effort supporting everyone else that we rarely get time to find who we are. I was reminded that as spouses and parents we hold it all together and if we go down it all falls down. I was so close to letting it all fall apart.

Having 5 mins alone felt like a betrayal of my family. If the house wasn't spotless I was a bad mum. I had to be able to cope and to be honest I was struggling. Someone explained to me what self care was, so I picked up a brush and tried to capture the feeling I had when I did the paint by numbers.

Since then any time I feel overwhelmed or that I just need a break I escape to my shed and make the biggest mess I can because I can and it's okay. Through doing these arts and crafts I have discovered that I don't have to be perfect. My art is just for me. No one has to like it or think it's good. It's just me messing around in the shed having some peace and quiet and bolstering myself ready for what life throws at me.



For more details: [theartsproject
https://www.theartsproject
london.com/](https://www.theartsprojectlondon.com/)



Our CEO, Rodger Cartwright, facilitated an exciting strategic planning day for Op Courage London Midlands.

The meeting involved clinical and service leads from across the partnership, including our NHS colleagues, Walking With The Wounded, Tom Harrison House, and Mental Health Matters.

It was evident that this partnership is driven by a shared commitment to support Veterans, their families, and the broader community of staff and volunteers involved in delivering Op Courage Midlands.

partnership, there is always room for improvement.

"Our discussions highlighted the need to enhance not only the treatment phase but also the entry points to Op COURAGE and the discharge process. We all agreed that ensuring a smooth transition to community-based support is essential for sustained recovery.

"It was clear to see the strength of bringing the NHS and charities together to deliver effective care, showcasing the power of collaboration.

"Personally, I found the strategy day to be extremely motivating and exciting. It reinforced my belief in our collective dedication and our ability to drive further advancements in veteran mental health care. As we look to the future, our ambition to refine and expand our services remains strong, and I am confident that together, we can achieve even greater success in the years ahead."

Rodger Cartwright
Chief Executive Officer

www.theripplepond.org

"Chairing the Midlands Op COURAGE strategy day was an incredibly rewarding experience, providing a vital opportunity for leaders across our partnership to reflect on the past year's achievements in enhancing mental health care for veterans and supporting their families. Over the last 12 months, we've made significant strides in delivering tailored mental health services, demonstrating our commitment to improving the lives of those who have served our country.

"It was wonderful to see how families and loved ones of veterans featured prominently in our conversations throughout the day. Their inclusion highlighted the comprehensive nature of our approach and underscored the importance of a support network in the recovery process. The day allowed us to take stock of our accomplishments and address the challenges we still face. It became evident that while we are a highly motivated and effective



Soldiering On Award Finalists:

We are absolutely thrilled that the Midlands Op COURAGE Partnership is a finalist at this year's Soldiering On Awards in the Working Together category. We are proud to be part of the partnership and work alongside our delivery partners to offer support to the adult family members caring for a loved one who's been injured in their time in the British Forces Congratulations to all!

Midlands Op COURAGE is proudly delivered in partnership by: Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LPFT NHS), Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust, @St. Andrew's Healthcare, Walking With The Wounded, The Ripple Pond, TOM HARRISON HOUSE and Mental Health Matters

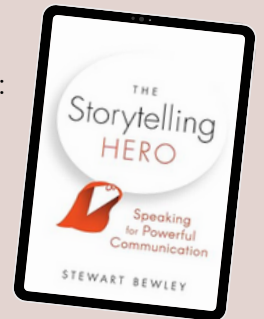
Telling Your Story



In the last few weeks we recorded an interview with Stew Bewley. Stew founded Amplify and has coached people internationally from multi million pound corporations to individuals and now here for The Ripple Pond Members. Stew encourages us in the profound journey of how to tell your story.



Watch a clip of that conversation here at: <https://youtu.be/mU9yJAbO80Y>



In response to the above interview we are hosting a Virtual Member Meet Up where we can practically explore our stories together.

Carers Week - A Reflection



At The Ripple Pond we support many members with diverse caring responsibilities. There is not one story, but every member has their own story. Our members support those with physical injuries, psychological injuries, they are young and not so young, they are parents, spouses, partners, adult children and friends... but here is one story from one of us who cares for a loved one with complex PTSD from their time in the British Armed Forces. .



What it's like being a carer

When PTSD crept into our home, at first it came slowly, from time to time. A moment of anger, a shadow, a retreat... but before long it was the uninvited guest that turned up day after day changing our home.

My role as a wife slowly became more, the person who held his hand when it trembled, the one who saw the shadow descend and tried to manage the darkness, the one who tried to stem the rage when it leaked out unexpectedly. As medical appointments increased learning a whole new language from medications to therapies, coping strategies and triggers. Foreseeing a crisis or containing a crisis I hadn't seen coming. Recognising that day to day tasks had become a team effort and what had been normal was no longer accessible. Realising we had changed, and I had to change.

I don't know when I became a carer as well as a wife. Somewhere along that road, it just happened.

Being a carer doesn't make me more or us less, it's just the reality of living with a partner with complex PTSD. An amazing, wonderful man who is sometimes lost under a cloak of mental illness.

It's not an easy journey and it's been lonely many times. But despite that I also know I'm not alone, there are many like me on that road to discovering that they are a carer, not more than another or less, it's just who they are. And together we can be a support when normal feels out of reach; when their loved one is shrouded by darkness or anger that just won't stay away, when their loved one forgets for a while who they are, and they stand there reminding them they aren't lost and we aren't lost when we stand together.



Professional Information Sessions

In April and June we had the privilege of hosting Professional Information Sessions to nearly 100 professionals from a range of different organisations. We really believe that by working together we will get the best outcomes for our family members. So thank you for working together.



Next Date: 5th September, 1pm



Professional's Information Session

Thursday, 5th September 2024

REGISTER NOW

1pm



Join us for a short presentation about The Ripple Pond detailing who we support and what membership looks like, and how to refer to us. There will also be time at the end to answer any questions you may have.

If you are a professional working with, or in contact with serving or veteran families and would like to find out more about who we are and what we do, join us on Thursday 5th September for a short virtual presentation on Microsoft Teams.

Please feel free to share with colleagues and anyone within your network who may benefit from the session.

To register your place



GUEST ARTICLE:

Four Steps Towards Courageous Storytelling

In Hollywood the hero always finds courage to save the day, slay dragons and jump over buildings. We don't live in Hollywood. We live in the real world, where you might not jump over buildings, but—at some point—you will have to speak courageously.

Step 01. Ask these four questions

My wife, Liz, was once faced with a daunting audience. To make sure she stayed fully present to them and to her message she asked herself the following four questions. They are brilliant and I regularly do this on presentations that really matter.

i) Who is in the room? It removes the fog of presenting into a vacuum and gives you razor sharp focus on your audience.

ii) Who am I trying to impress? If you are trying to impress someone you will focus too much on them. You will try and say things that sound impressive...but they will sound shallow.

iii) Who am I trying to avoid? Choose to look that person directly in the eye and own the space. If you are trying to avoid someone your presence will be reduced and you will become a shadow.

iv) Who is this really for? For the customer, the end user, your own self esteem? Will this presentation potentially make the company more successful and bring something to the world? Having that bigger perspective gives you courage to tell bold stories and be bold in the room.

Step 02. Visualise the entire presentation.

Your brain is amazing. If you can imagine something, your brain thinks you have done it. So let's harness that. Stand up or sit down, plant both feet on the floor, close your eyes and spend five minutes imagining yourself delivering your presentation. See yourself speaking the beginning sentence, the middle section and the end. Visualise your audience responding and see yourself taking them on that journey. It means when you are presenting you will already have been there, your brain will be more comfortable and you can present more confidently.



Step 03. Be physical.

Another phrase for courage in storytelling is: be deliberate. Choose deliberately how you are going to sit or stand. Don't just fall into it.

The most important thing is that you anchor yourself when you can whatever you do, be deliberate. Smile—deliberately, sit—deliberately, use your hands—deliberately.

Step 04. Silence your gremlin.

You can read about this in my book [The Storytelling Hero](#), but in short: name your gremlin. Mine is called Ken. He is 65, short, fat, bald, white, wears a brown tie and off-white shirt. He is always rude and says things to me like, 'Calm down'. He is my inner critic. I have named him. Now I silence him. When he says to me, 'Calm down', I say, 'I have a lot of energy and I love bringing it to my clients.' My courage to name my gremlin, courage to recognise what he says and courage to speak truth means I am more present as a storyteller.

The outcome of these four steps will be vastly different. It may be a difficult conversation you need to have. It may be turning your camera on. But one thing I have learnt when it comes to storytelling—you have to behave your way into those moments. You have to actually do it. So go and do it!

So, here are some thoughts to put these two disciplines into practise:

Take 10 minutes to sit in a chair in your home and focus on what is in front of you. If you can see bricks, pay attention to the bricks. Train your brain to be still. When 10 minutes is up, see how you feel. Next week take this up to 15 minutes. In the words of Aslan "No one is told any story but their own". Allow your story to be told and see what it feels like to be living in it, not commenting on it.

Stewart Bawley

Stewart founded Amplify back in 2011 from an acting background, believing that if you unlocked people's voices you would unlock their story and their businesses would thrive.

Summer Wellbeing Tips

Heather McKewen



Here are some tips to enhance your mental health and well-being this summer:

Get moving! Getting active this summer offers numerous benefits for your physical and mental well-being. Regular exercise helps reduce anxiety, boosts serotonin levels, and improves your overall mood. Physical activity also enhances cardiovascular health, increases energy levels, and promotes better sleep. Summer provides a perfect opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities, soak up vitamin D, and experience the refreshing effects of nature.

Hydrate!

It is suggested we drink 6-8 glasses of water each day. Drinking enough water is something we all know we should be doing more of but often forget or struggle to do. If water doesn't appeal then try infusing your water with fruits and vegetables such as with berries, slices of lemons, or add some cucumber and mint.



Set a goal or start a new hobby Starting a new hobby this summer can be a refreshing and rewarding experience. Whether it's painting, gardening, learning a musical instrument, or taking up a new sport, a new hobby can help reduce stress, improve your mood, and provide a sense of accomplishment.

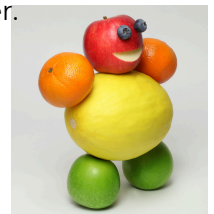
Connect with others Connecting with friends and family is a great way to boost our mood. Why not take the first step and have lunch with a colleague, visit family members or arrange to meet up with friends?

Practice meditation and mindfulness! By dedicating time to be present and mindful, you can reduce stress and anxiety, allowing yourself to fully enjoy the season. Whether you choose to meditate in a quiet room, on the beach, or in a park, incorporating these practices into your daily routine can help you stay grounded and centred.

Find somewhere peaceful! Start by choosing a quiet area in your home or garden where you can retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Decorate this space with calming elements such as soft cushions, gentle lighting, and perhaps some plants or flowers to bring a touch of nature. Incorporate soothing colours to promote a sense of calm.

Go for a walk in nature – whether you prefer a stroll along the beach or walk in the woods, make the most of the nice weather.

Get your 5 a day! Summer is a great time to eat more salads and take advantage of locally grown fruits. Why not try out a new recipe? Look for dishes that include your favourite ingredients and experiment with something new. Enjoy the season's produce while boosting your health with fresh, nutritious options.

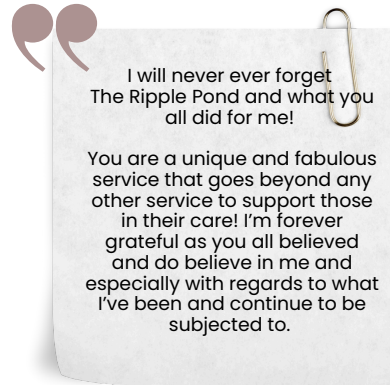


Make time for YOU! It can be really easy to forget about yourself during the summer months. Prioritising self-care also improves relationships by preventing burnout and promoting a positive mindset, leading to a more balanced and fulfilling life.

With all these tips in mind, the most important thing you can do this summer is to engage in activities you truly enjoy. Regularly taking time to check in with yourself will help you actively prioritise your mental health and overall well-being, ensuring a happier and more fulfilling season.

VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

Every single day, something comes up that reminds us of the contribution that our volunteers make to The Ripple Pond. It could be a Member who is receiving one to one support sending a message to thank their Buddy for their time or a suggestion they have made that has made a huge difference to their life; it could be one of our Regional Coordinators responding to a new Member within the peer support network in the kindest and most caring way that immediately makes them feel safe and part of the community, or it could be recognising the work of the Trustees.



One Member's Feedback from Receiving Volunteer Support

"I enjoy volunteering at The Ripple Pond as it's great to be able to support people and see the difference it makes to them. It's amazing watching their confidence grow."



Our Volunteers are an important and integral part of the team; their generosity with their time, their skills and their loyalty are what helps make TRP a unique, safe and respected charity within the much wider military community.

To all our Volunteers – a huge THANK YOU for all you do, for you who you are and for what you give to The Ripple Pond.

As well as helping others, volunteering has been shown to improve volunteers' wellbeing too. It's human nature to feel good after helping someone out, and volunteering can also help individuals gain valuable new skills and experiences themselves. If you would like to hear more or discuss further, please contact help@theripplepond.org.



Funded & supported by
BOUNCE FORWARD
THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUND TRUST

Anxiety Unravelled

Supporting military parents and children

A three-session online course

The world around us can generate plenty of uncertainty and affect the way we go about our daily lives, even more so for military families.

As the summer approaches and you begin to prepare for a move or watch those you have connected with post out, it can feel hard. You may be feeling more worried than usual or perhaps you are stuck in a growing cycle of worry and concern. **You are not on your own!**

The skills you will learn in Anxiety Unravelled will help you deal with your own anxiety and help you to help your children manage theirs.

"Learning about the strategies to help us deal with anxiety was particularly useful and I am using these to help manage my own anxiety as well as my son's."

Join Bounce Forward for a series of three 60-minute sessions to explore anxiety. The sessions will provide a space to think about your own responses and provide practical tips and advice that you can use to help your children develop their mental resilience.

Register your **FREE** place, course starting on October 8th

Our friends at Bounce Forward have the next intake of their Anxiety Unravelled course for military parents and carers, funded by The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

The Course starts on the 8th October.

The course is being delivered in response to what parents tell us they need, both for themselves and for their children. We know that there are more than 100,000 children with parents actively serving in the British Armed Forces, and the number of children seeking support for mental health problem is rising.

Wellbeing of the adults impacts children, if adult wellbeing is poor, then it can pass on through to their children. Children are often the forgotten service members with limited research into the impact they feel, so they are often left to struggle alone. This course helps parents to understand and recognise how best to develop resilience in their children.

Places are **FREE** of charge, and there are 1,250 funded places.

Registration link [here](#).



Upcoming Dates for the Diary



We love opportunities to get together online and host regular Virtual Member 'Meet Ups'. These are a brilliant place to meet and connect with other people in a safe and friendly environment hosted by a member of the staff team.

- Monday 29th July - 7.30-9pm
- Wednesday 14th August 7.30-9pm
- Tuesday 27th August 7.30-9pm
- Thursday 12th September 7.30-9pm
- Tuesday 24th September 7.30-9pm



We also offer specific Virtual Member Meet Ups for our members who are new in the last 6 months, recognising that our newer members may value the opportunity to meet separately.

- Thursday 8th August 7.30-9pm
- Wednesday 18th September 7.30-9pm

A one off Virtual Member Meet Up with a difference! Together we are going to have a go at learning to tell our story in 2 minutes!



Open to all our members, drop us an email to find out more: help@theripplepond.org