

I'M NOT ALONE:
FINDINGS FROM REFLECT
AND RENEW,
A GROUP INTERVENTION
FOR MORAL INJURY
ACROSS FRONTLINE
PROFESSIONS

Moral Injury Partnership,
April 2025



Considering the spiritual, existential nature of moral injury, and the acknowledged limitations of a purely psychological or cognitive approach (Litz, 2023), there is growing recognition of the need to consider the value of less traditional approaches which address recovery from a more holistic perspective (Williamson et al, 2021).



MORAL INJURY PARTNERSHIP

Three Churchill Fellows: common theme across our research was the power of community and having our stories witnessed.

Sophie Redlin is a GP, trainee medical anthropologist and emerging Film-maker. Alison O'Connor is a therapist, theatre practitioner and clinical supervisor. Simon Edwards has been a soldier, social entrepreneur and leadership consultant.

www.moralinjurypartnership.com

“...*recovery happens only in community.* We are habituated to the assumption that injuries or illnesses can only be treated one on one in a professional’s office...two people (no matter how well trained, well-meaning and caring one of them is) are not a community. I believe this one on one assumption is responsible for how frequently we have failed in the treatment of severe psychological injury, especially when it had damaged character.” (Shay, p4, 2002, original italics)



REFLECT AND RENEW

3 Day Retreat in peaceful rural setting, evaluation in partnership with International Centre for Moral Injury, Durham University

8 participants per retreat from mixed frontline professions – health, social care, military, humanitarian sectors

Self-referred due to experience of moral injury and/or burnout

Ongoing community of support through whatsapp group and zoom sessions

HOW WORK HAD HURT

I deployed to Kabul in 2021 to establish and run the UK's passenger terminal for the evacuation of UK passport holders and entitled Afghans as the government collapsed and Taliban took over. I found myself making daily decisions about who could fly and who could not, all the time knowing that many of those put back out of the airport were being executed by the Taliban. We would put them in the vehicles to the gate and then hear the shots... This has had a massive impact on me.

It has made me question who I am as a person – why did I save some and not others? What sort of a person makes a conscious decision which leads people to their deaths? Who gave me the right to decide when I should and shouldn't follow the rules? Whilst I have been able to get over the trauma of the general situation, I can't move on from these questions and remembering the people I interviewed and then chose to help, or not.

'I work in a high-pressure environment where we deal with very traumatic events on a regular basis. There is still a culture of needing to just cope and get on with it. There is a huge amount of moral injury when you know you should be delivering a certain standard of care, and you just can't because you're being pulled in so many directions.'

'When you have to tell a child and their parents that they have a brain tumour but then can't stay with them to comfort them or answer their questions because you are the only one available to treat the next unwell child (this happened to me two days ago), it brings with it a lot of worry, sadness, guilt and anger, and it affects your home life as well.'

I have spent 36 years in frontline child protection work. The cumulative impact of exposure to human suffering has left me with a profound sense of sadness, particularly in relation to the impact of austerity on vulnerable parents making it hard to morally justify the removal of children.

I found myself overwhelmed with grief and a sense of complicity in an abusive and harmful system whilst writing a research paper on neglect and poverty and was unable to complete the work...I have spent my whole life working for the welfare state and my whole belief system is based on socialist ideas of common good. My belief in myself, my profession and in the prospects of a caring society and world have felt undermined.

RETREAT PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Who am I and making sense of my experience

Day 2 – Letting go of the past, self-forgiveness, self-compassion

Day 3 – Post Traumatic Growth and a new future



THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

'I'm not alone'

Unburdening and letting go

Increased self-compassion

New perspective on work and the future

Greater understanding of moral injury

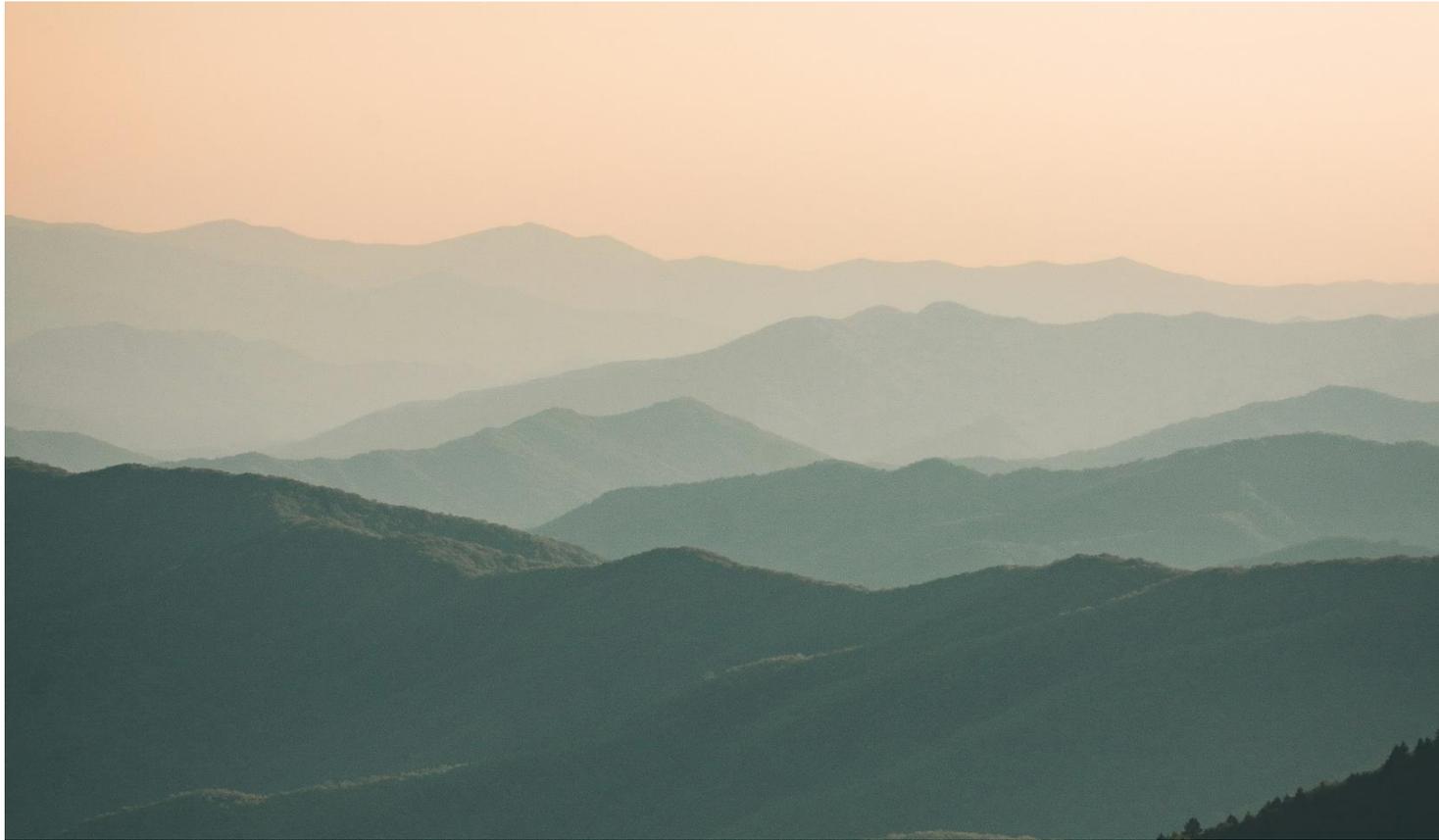


‘I’M NOT ALONE

‘I found the total acceptance from the sharing of personal experiences liberating. The lack of judgement and the shared humanity was a breath of fresh air. It was a time to empathise with my own suffering and that of others and realise that I am not alone.’

‘I have found comfort in knowing that I am not alone in how I am feeling.’

‘I felt part of a group that accepted me. I could share my vulnerabilities and know that I would be held safely while exploring them.’



UNBURDENING AND LETTING GO

'I felt able to leave the issues behind at the retreat and this has had an enormous effect on my wellbeing. Nothing is leaking out anymore. I can choose to look at my issues in a different way now and forgive myself for past issues.'

"Once I started to speak about some difficult past experiences I realised how much hurt I was carrying. Having space to discuss this was enormous for me and I was able to process these feelings, heal, forgive myself and let go.'

'I am beginning to accept that it was an extreme situation, and I did the best I could.'



INCREASED SELF-COMPASSION

'I am more gentle with myself, I realised the harshness of my upbringing and that expectations placed on me were tough, and I did the best I could. I am more forgiving of myself now.'

'When something went wrong in 2021 it floored me, and I became my own worst critic and punished myself. I give myself a hard time and found it hard to show weakness and was angry with myself and didn't listen when others said that it was okay to make a mistake. I don't do that now. I am more compassionate towards myself and see that making a mistake means that I am human.'

'I realise that I have shouldered organisational burdens that were 'bigger' than me and I have suffered as a consequence.'



NEW PERSPECTIVE ON WORK AND LIFE

'The retreat was helpful beyond expectations and even hopes. I feel heard, validated for my feelings, understood, supported and valued. I felt as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I have a sense of being more carefree and able to re-negotiate my relationship with work and the place I was willing to grant it in my life.'

'I feel a renewed sense of enthusiasm and purpose. I am more able to recognise the reasons for the difficult decisions that I had to make and feel more pride in my working life. I feel more confident that I am still interested in the work that I do and have more to offer. I feel less defeated, disenchanted and cynical.'

'I appreciated the extent to which my sense of moral failure at work had profoundly affected my sense of myself as a person. My professional identity is central to how I feel about who I am.'



GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF MORAL INJURY

'I gained a new understanding of the concept of moral injury and how it related to me, giving me new ways to think about my work and the impact on me.'

'It has helped me understand the difference between PTS and MI. I had done a lot of work on the events and the trauma, but not on the moral injury that followed. I feel unburdened and relieved of that emotional hurt and feel loved and supported.'

'It has reinforced my sense of calling to be involved in supporting people with moral injury.'

ONE YEAR ON

One participant had run 4 reflective days in the NHS on moral injury, cascading knowledge and opening up space for further stories to be shared.

Another had contributed to awareness raising of moral injury within senior leadership in the RAF.

One described it as the missing piece, getting to moral injury and thanked the group for facilitating this, *'I very much saw it as a collective thing, not an individual'*.

"it's been a good productive year. The retreat helped me let go of some things to do with my family, and work. and it's helped me come back again. To activism, to helping others. As the year progressed, I understood moral injury more and more. Thank you everyone (the group) for giving me the courage to move forward."

'If I'd had the opportunity to talk about what happened soon after coming back (from Afghanistan), I think certainly the moral injury wouldn't have developed in the way it did.'



What is the HopeFull Future Programme

We train together, we fight together and yet we are left to heal alone

HopeFull Future uses a peer led Group-as-a-Whole methodology developed by Bion and Foulkes during World War 2 adapted using the indigenous North American Talking Circle approach used by MIP.

Servicemen understand the concept of camaraderie and mutual support. HopeFull Future creates a safe and trusted environment within which active participation leads to healing and growth

Moral Repair

Recovery from moral injury requires great emotional courage. We must risk trusting others to receive our testimonies and confessions without judgment, and we must be prepared to hear stories of atrocities with compassionate hearts and quiet minds, without reacting with horror, disgust, or dismay.

In transforming memory from inner tormenter to external witness through writing or speaking, we discover that we are not just our trauma or our moral confusions, that there is more to us than solitary suffering. Then we can integrate moral injury experiences into our lives and our communities as sources of information, resilience, and wisdom.

Rita Brock

HopeFull Future - Progress

In just 4 months, we have:

- Created, test-run, and established a concise, culturally adapted, and easily replicable local rehabilitation programme.
- Established partnerships with multiple local rehabilitation centres.
- Secured key stakeholder support from central and local authorities and industry experts.
- Developed extensive localised materials tailored to Ukraine's needs.
- Trained the first 18 local facilitators and peer mentors, laying the foundation for sustainable, peer-led recovery.



MOVING FORWARD

Our aim is to develop and further test out Reflect and Renew over the next three years, integrating learning from the peer-led programme in Ukraine.

Seeking funding and partners to take this forward.

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