

Stand-up comedy course for men at risk of suicide

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. These abbreviations are found in the text. What are the missing words?

1. NHS National _____ Service
2. PTSD Post Traumatic _____ Disorder
3. ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity _____
4. ICS Integrated Care _____
5. NW North _____
6. GP _____ Practitioner

b. What do you know about PTSD and ADHD?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

autism counselling fine line issue
pilot postnatal refer resilient
stand-up trust vulnerable wellbeing

1. _____ is a form of comedy in which one person stands in front of an audience and entertains them by telling jokes.
2. If a person is _____, they are weak and easy to hurt physically or mentally.
3. If you are _____, you are able to quickly become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, disappointment, or other problem.
4. _____ depression is a condition that happens during the time after the birth of a baby.
5. _____ is a neurological condition that makes people communicate and relate to other people differently, and develop deep interests in specific subjects.
6. If you _____ something, you try it with a small group of people to find out if it will be successful or popular.

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7. _____ is the satisfactory state that someone should be in, involving things such as being happy, healthy and safe.
8. If you _____ someone, you send them to another person or place in order to get help or advice.
9. A/An _____ is an organization that manages money or property in order to help other people or organizations.
10. A/An _____ is a problem.
11. _____ is advice and help that you give someone with their problems, especially as your job.
12. If there is a _____ between two things, they seem very similar and it is difficult to see a difference between them.

Stand-up comedy course for men at risk of suicide wins NHS funding

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Comedy On Referral will help vulnerable adults in London after successful course in Bristol for trauma survivors

Amelia Hill

9 May, 2022

- 1 Stand-up comedy is regularly listed as one of the toughest jobs in the world, featuring heavily in 90% of people's top-ten fears. But a course helping some of the most vulnerable people in the country by teaching them to be comedians is proving so successful that it is being socially prescribed by NHS trusts and private practices across the UK.
- 2 "I've taught comedy for ten years, and students often told me how much stronger, more resilient and happier they were after exploring their personal histories through stand-up comedy," said Angie Belcher, founder of Comedy on Referral and comedian-in-residence at Bristol University.
- 3 "That inspired me to prove that the models, exercises and games used in a stand-up comedy course can help people to recover from emotional problems such as mental illness, postnatal depression, PTSD and anxiety disorders," she said.
- 4 After completing a highly successful six-week NHS course for trauma survivors in Bristol, Comedy on Referral has now won NHS funding to help men at risk of suicide in London. Belcher is also in discussions with a private practice to extend the course to young people with autism and ADHD.
- 5 "My course for trauma victims encourages them to process their trauma in a different way, so they can change who the victim is and choose the narrative. They can actually go right down into 'This is what I was thinking and then this thing happened to me,'" said Belcher.
- 6 "This enables survivors to consciously use comedy to change their perspective of their experiences, but it also puts them in a physically powerful position because being on stage is very powerful," she said. "You can speak directly to an audience about important things, which means you have the opportunity to change their lives. As a comedian, you could be the reason why someone in your audiences does something differently."
- 7 Belcher's course, initially piloted with Spear, the Wellspring Social Prescribing for Equality and Resilience team in Bristol, is the result of a year-long research project on the effects of comedy as a therapeutic device on people's wellbeing and mental health.
- 8 The course takes clients referred by the social prescribing team through the writing, performance and analysis of their personal stories to create a five-minute stand-up comedy set, using games, and both group and one-to-one work.
- 9 Recently, Belcher won a grant from the North West London Integrated Care System (NW London ICS), one of the largest health and care partnerships in the country working across ten NHS trusts and eight London boroughs, to achieve a national 10% reduction in suicides.
- 10 Belcher will work alongside psychologists, and men who have experienced suicidal events, to help up to 20 men aged 18 and over to take part in a comedy event at the end of the course for an audience of at least 100 people.
- 11 "We've never done anything like this before and we're very excited about it because we're hoping it will reach men who, even though they've been diagnosed as at high risk of suicide, don't think they have an issue and won't go to counselling or attend anything signposted 'suicide prevention'," said Lourdes Colclough, Head of Suicide Prevention at Rethink Mental Illness, which is distributing the NW London ICS grant. "This is a different way of engaging with this hard-to-reach group."
- 12 Belcher said she is conscious of the fine line between telling personal stories and triggering former traumas. To prevent this, psychologists support participants during their introduction to therapeutic writing techniques while local services, GPs and Samaritans are signposted throughout the course.

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3 Understanding the article

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How does the text describe stand-up comedy?
2. What can the models, exercises, and games in a stand-up-comedy course help people to do?
3. What is *Comedy on Referral* doing with the funding it has received from the NHS?
4. What can being on stage do to help survivors of trauma?
5. How can this type of comedy help people in the audience?
6. How long did the Bristol research project take?
7. What did it research?
8. How long is each comedy set that the course participants prepare?
9. Who will work alongside Angie Belcher to prepare the group of men for a comedy event?
10. How many people will be in the audience at this event?

4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. stand-up | a. victim |
| 2. private | b. risk |
| 3. postnatal | c. prevention |
| 4. trauma | d. practice |
| 5. therapeutic | e. comedy |
| 6. high | f. adult |
| 7. suicide | g. depression |
| 8. vulnerable | h. device |

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Laughter is the best medicine.”
- “Building confidence is the key to recovering from trauma.”
- “Speaking to an audience is terrifying.”

6 In your own words

- a. Open an internet search engine and enter ‘stand-up comedy therapy’ into the browser. There are several personal accounts of how stand-up comedy has helped people with their general wellbeing. Choose one person’s account and summarize their experiences. Report your findings to the class.