



Healing Arts in Times of War

UK Parliament
Roundtable

The roundtable was organised by the **Jameel Arts & Health Lab** in collaboration with the **World Health Organization** Regional Office for Europe

Roundtable Date:

Monday, 9 March 2026

Roundtable Location:

UK Parliament
House of Commons
Committee Room 6



Roundtable & Brief Lead:

Stephen Stapleton

Founding Co-Director,
Jameel Arts & Health Lab
CEO, CULTURUNNERS

Roundtable Co-Chairs:

John Slinger MP

Member of Parliament for Rugby

Christopher Bailey

Global Policy Lead,
Jameel Arts & Health Lab

Brief Co-Authors:

Dr. Angela Kennedy

Consultant Clinical Psychologist,
King's College London

Dr. Henry Redwood

Department of War Studies,
Kings College London

Brief Design:

CULTURUNNERS

Executive Summary

The **Healing Arts in Times of War Roundtable** at UK Parliament convened a cross-sector group of defence and cultural policymakers, WHO officials, military personnel, NGOs, researchers, clinicians, and artists to discuss arts' role in supporting **military health, veteran recovery and civilian resilience** during and post-conflict.

With a central focus on innovative case studies emerging from Ukraine, the discussion bridged the gap between grassroots initiatives and government policy, demonstrating how the arts can function as **“critical human infrastructure”** in times of war.

This brief outlines **key insights** and **actionable recommendations** resulting from the roundtable.

War doesn't just destroy infrastructure, physical safety and national security. It also impacts on the psychological welfare of soldiers and civilians experiencing danger and hardship. Addressing mental health in such contexts requires a mobilisation of ways to sustain social bonds, sooth emotional collapse, find ways of co-creating meaning, and bringing hope.

Arts and culture have played a key role in navigated adversity throughout human history, but this is now being backed up by a robust scientific evidence base. This research gives us key learning about the vital role the arts in times of war, which is transferable to other humanitarian settings, and traumas.

It is of great significance that senior UK policymakers are focusing attention on this topic, as it signals an important motivation to address issues of stability, safety and wellbeing in ways that extend beyond our current standard practice. In discussing the rapid deployment of arts in wartime Ukraine, we also reflect on what the cultural and health landscape in the UK can learn from them.

The roundtable provided potential leadership and direction in constructive arts and war networks. Specifically, it launched Healing Arts Ukraine, a bi-lateral initiative spanning research, training and implementation, that aims to support and learn from creative health in Ukraine's frontline and homefront.

Selected Visual References

shared during the roundtable



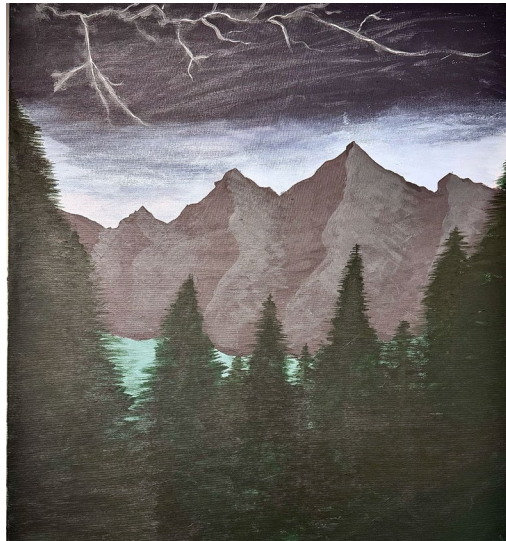
Cultural Forces project on the frontline in Ukraine © Gera Gubanov



UK Parliament Roundtable © CULTURUNNERS



Patient painting at the Unbroken Rehabilitation Center © Unbroken



Patient Painting © Unbroken



Patient with his ceramics at the Unbroken Rehabilitation Center © Unbroken



Patient making ceramics at the Unbroken Rehabilitation Center © Unbroken



Soldier performing © Cultural Forces



Patient painting © Unbroken

Key Insights

1. The scale of need requires a systems-level rethink for war-related trauma recovery

In Ukraine it is estimated that 93% of the population have experienced trauma, and only 24% of those trying to access trauma care services succeed.

Dr Angela Kennedy outlined the need of addressing trauma holistically to combat long-term individual and societal effects. When unaddressed, trauma can lead to:

- PTSD for 1 in 4
- Depression for 1 in 3
- Suicidality / Substance dependency for 1 in 10



Image credit caption:

The numbers of mental health professionals required to address such a demand in the ways currently outlined in NICE guidance are too great and even then, those therapies do not lead to significant recovery in almost half of those willing to embrace them.

There is a need to create new models for trauma care, that stretch from the individual to community and nation and create ways of working with trauma which alleviate over-stretched healthcare services.

2. The arts are underutilised as an effective, low-cost treatment for trauma care

Dr Angela Kennedy and Dr Henry Redwood of King's College London highlighted growing evidence that the arts are an effective and scalable response to trauma among soldiers, civilians, and frontline responders—improving engagement and retention while creating new, whole-of-society care pathways aligned with systemic, trauma-informed practice.

John Slinger MP argued that despite gains made in art and health policy in the UK, the arts were still being under-utilised and remained insufficiently integrated into health care infrastructure including for veteran support and recovery.

Participants highlighted the cost-effective nature of arts in response to systematic questions of health and wellbeing:

- £11.08 return for every £1 invested by the Arts Council of Wales in multi-year funded organisations
- £15 billion a year health saving from UK arts (Fancourt, Art Cure)

Engaging in the arts and cultural heritage boosts quality of life and productivity, adding £18bn in economic value to the UK annually.

We need to support and facilitate the integration of art and health programme development to grow trauma-care capacity in times of war and peace.

3. Ukraine's art and health innovation provides transferable learning to other humanitarian settings

Ukraine has positioned arts and health at the centre of its war response, spanning government, civil society, and veteran communities. Dr Ameer Shaheed presented findings from the WHO Europe-led BACH Project mapping 86 arts and health initiatives across Ukraine.

Christopher Bailey (Jameel Arts & Health Lab) shared promising early-stage results from Ukraine's UNBROKEN hospital, where POWs with severe trauma and non-functional prefrontal cortexes saw brain activity return to normal ranges within six weeks of art therapy.

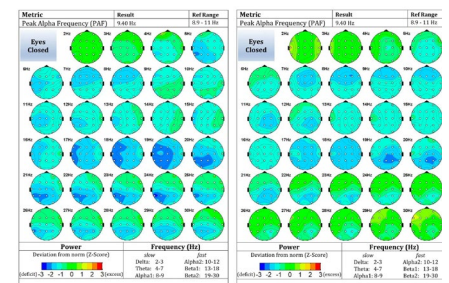


Image credit caption:

Veronika Skliarova (Art Therapy Force) described the evolution of art therapy in Ukraine from informal basement workshops in 2022 to a large-scale, multi-sector system. Through Art Therapy Force, she has institutionalized training for practitioners, ensuring they can work safely and effectively in high-intensity clinical environments.

This is an opportunity to learn from this extensive practice and integrate findings into UK policy planning for working with trauma and responding to an increasingly uncertain work.

Voices from the Roundtable



The work that you are doing here and the therapy you are providing to military personnel through the arts is an important way of looking at things...I wanted to attend this roundtable to show that the Defence ministerial team support what you are doing and to recognise it.

Rt Hon, Lord Vernon Coaker
Minister of State for Defense



The war in Ukraine is impacting our minds, our bodies, and our social fabric every day. Arts-based approaches are allowing people to process trauma in ways that conventional approaches often cannot. Integrating the arts into health systems is not a luxury in wartime - it is an essential part of recovery and resilience.

Iryna Holubetska
Unbroken Foundation



Today's roundtable demonstrates that the arts can be an effective treatment for mental health conditions including trauma, depression and anxiety. This could become a crucial avenue of support for veterans and civilians in an increasingly hostile world.

John Slinger MP
Member of Parliament for Rugby



The statistics estimating post traumatic consequences during war are sobering. But the numbers also distance us from the emotional reality of what people may experience. We are protected from these costs by the arts that help us connect with others and the world, explore new and difficult meanings and rebalance our neurophysiology.

Dr. Angela Kennedy
Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Innovation & Wellbeing



Culture is a wartime resource that offers support across frontline and homefront experiences. The programs that Cultural Forces delivers are not mere entertainments; they are targeted clinical interventions to reduce combat stress and prevent the onset of acute PTSD.

Ostap Ukrainets
Artist / Soldier, Cultural Forces

Actionable Recommendations



UK-Ukraine Art and Health Partnerships

Action: Convene roundtables, workshops, seminars and briefings to support sustained, whole-of-society knowledge exchange between UK and Ukrainian governments, defence institutions, health systems, universities, and civil-society organisations to advance understanding of the role of arts and culture in responding to trauma and related health and social harms.

Outcome: Co-produce integrated, trauma-informed models of care that expand system-wide capacity for prevention, recovery, and resilience—reducing pressure on overstretched clinical services while improving access and engagement.

Build robust evidence base for art/health efficacy

Action: Undertake joint UK-Ukraine research to rigorously assess the outcomes of arts-centered recovery and resilience initiatives in Ukraine, including:

- a) A randomised controlled trial examining UNBROKEN's combined use of arts-based interventions and neurofeedback for formerly captive soldiers; and
- b) Systemic evaluation of civil-society-led arts programmes contributing to population-level mental health resilience, and social cohesion.

Outcome: Translate findings into revised NHS and Ministry of Defence (MoD) PTSD and rehabilitation pathways, repositioning arts-based interventions from “alternative” to standard components of care in both Ukraine and the UK.

Capacity Building in Ukraine

Action: Work across UK-EU-Ukraine partnerships to develop both accredited and non-accredited training pathways enabling artists, cultural workers, and community practitioners to engage with trauma safely, ethically, and effectively.

Outcome: The creation of replicable, scalable training models that can operate across different trauma contexts and levels of need, strengthening Ukraine's workforce while generating transferable learning for the UK and other allied partners.

Healing Arts Ukraine

Action: Support the growth of arts-based trauma recovery and resilience in Ukraine through a multi-year Healing Arts Ukraine programme, combining:

- national and regional networks
- cultural and therapeutic programme delivery
- coordinated research, evaluation, and policy development
- regular bilateral learning forums with UK partners

Outcome: A resilient, self-sustaining arts and health ecosystem that strengthens Ukraine's resistance to war-related trauma, supports veteran and civilian recovery, and provides enduring infrastructure for peacebuilding—underpinning democratic values, social cohesion, and long-term national renewal.

Appendix

Jameel Arts & Health Lab

The Jameel Arts & Health Lab is a global initiative leveraging scientific evidence, artist-led advocacy, and a global 'Healing Arts' campaign to drive the integration of the arts in clinical and public health across 193 UN member states. The Lab was co-founded in 2023 by WHO Regional Office for Europe, NYU Steinhardt, Community Jameel and CULTURUNNERS.

jameelartshealthlab.org

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

[WHO Europe](#)

Ukraine Projects

Healing Arts Lviv

[Find out more here](#)

Unbroken

unbroken.org

Art Therapy Force

artherapyforce.com

Cultural Forces

culturalforces.org

The BACH Project

[Find out more here](#)

Roundtable Speakers

John Slinger MP

Member of Parliament for Rugby

Christopher Bailey

Global Policy Lead, Jameel Arts & Health Lab

Veronika Skliarova

Founder, Art Therapy Force

Iryna Hlubetska

Representative, Unbroken National Rehab

Ostap Ukrainets

Writer & Member of Cultural Forces

Stephen Stapleton

Founding Co-Director, Jameel Arts & Health Lab

Dr. Angela Kennedy

Consultant Clinical Psychologist

Dr. Henry Redwood

Senior Lecturer, King's College London

Prof. David Cotterrell

Research Professor & War Artist

George Richards

Director, Community Jameel

Dr. Ameer Shaheed

Project Manager, BACH Project

Lord Coaker

Minister for State Defence

Sir Gregor Smith

Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

Selected Resources

WHO Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 67 (2019)

Fancourt, D. & Finn, S. The definitive meta-analysis of over 3,000 studies on the role of the arts in improving health.

[Download Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

Art Cure

Dr. Daisy Fancourt's book looking at the role arts play in supporting our 'health'.

[View Research via UCL](#)

BACH Project: Ukraine Asset Map

A mapping of ~100 organizations working in arts and health across Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia.

[Access BACH Project Info](#)

Art Therapy for PTSD: Randomized Controlled Trial (2016)

Campbell, M., et al. Demonstrates the high retention and 100% completion rates for art therapy.

[Read on PubMed](#)

Reduction of Cortisol via Creative Activity (2016)

Kaimal, G., Ray, K. & Muniz, J. Evidence of a 22% reduction in stress hormones after 45 minutes of art-making.

[Read on TandF Online](#)

Remission of PTSD through Neurofeedback (2020)

Nicholson, A. A., et al. Showing over 60% remission rates through "whole-brain" sensory interventions.

[Read on Biological Psychiatry](#)

Efficacy of CBT for Veterans (2018)

Lobban, J. A critical look at the limitations of traditional talk therapy for combat-related C-PTSD.

[View via ResearchGate](#)