Emergency Services musicians launch mental health charity

Tuesday 24 September, 2019

A new charity called **The Blue Light Symphony Orchestra**, which aims to promote music-making in the emergency services was officially launched on Sunday 13th October in Westminster. Over 40 musicians from the Police, Ambulance and Fire services including volunteers and civilian staff played for invited guests.

It is the brainchild of serving detective Seb Valentine, a graduate of the Royal College of Music who has joined forces with composer Matthew Slater (Endeavour - Mammoth Screen/ITV) to share the therapeutic power of music with fellow first responders across the country. The charity will offer start-up grants for new blue light music groups and make music therapy available to help treat conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress. A recent study showed 39% of Ambulance staff suffer from PTSD. Furthermore, a 2016 survey by the charity Mind reported one in four 999 workers had thought about suicide, a truly shocking figure and higher than the national average of 1 in 5.

The BLSO is tailored to the needs of blue light workers, providing a unique opportunity to make music with colleagues who have a shared experience. This has already attracted players from as far as Merseyside to come to London and participate. Playing music allows them to express and process their emotions after dealing with trauma on a daily basis. Music therapy has been hugely successful in treating PTSD in the military but is rarely used elsewhere. The BLSO will work with leading music therapy providers to make it available to first responders who could benefit.

Future plans include a competition to find the most talented musician in the 999 services and commissioning new music, themed around PTSD.

Seb Valentine, founder, CEO and musical director said, “I am hugely excited to launch this charity which combines my lifelong love of music with supporting my colleagues’ wellbeing. Playing music is completely immersive and one of the few ways I can clear my mind and reset.”

Matthew Slater, Chair of the board of trustees said, “I'm incredibly honoured being asked to be involved with such an essential and unique charity. Combining the therapeutic power of music and supporting those in front line services that help the nation's population under challenging conditions is crucial to us all. I very much look forward to working with Seb and the team.”

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