

# Building emotional resilience through music

Published on 4 December 2025 Written by Seb Valentine, Detective Sergeant, Surrey Police

My idea: using music to build emotional resilience and support police mental health

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Over the past 18 months, I have served as staff officer to the chief constable in Surrey Police. During this time, I have become acutely aware of the need to better understand and support the mental health needs of my colleagues.

Emergency service personnel face relentless exposure to trauma. A [2018 report by Police Care UK](#) found that one in five officers live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or an anxiety disorder. A [2019 survey by Mind](#) revealed that nearly two-thirds of blue light workers had considered leaving their roles because of poor mental health.

Sadly, although police officers are more likely to suffer mental ill health than the general population, they are less likely to seek help. The reasons for this are complex, but include stigma, operational pressures and fear of being seen as incompetent.

## Music as therapy

As a graduate of the Royal College of Music and founder of the Blue Light Symphony Orchestra (BLSO), I have long believed in the power of music to support wellbeing. Inspired by successful music therapy programmes for military veterans in the United States, I proposed group music therapy as a novel intervention for police officers experiencing stress, anxiety and trauma.

I partnered with music therapist Amanda Thorpe from Chroma Therapies in 2021 to deliver a pilot programme in Surrey and Sussex for police and fire personnel. The 12-week course combined drumming, guided meditation and training. It offered a safe, creative space for participants, from various roles and department, to regulate stress, express emotions, and reconnect with themselves and others.

The results were encouraging. Participants reported reduced distress, improved sleep and greater emotional resilience. Amanda's expertise was central to the programme's success. Following the

pilot, she joined the BLSO charity as a trustee, helping us further our mission to support emergency service personnel through music.

## Harnessing your existing habits

If you have ever listened to upbeat music in the gym or relaxing music to wind down, you have already bolstered your emotional resilience with music. Imagine how you could help master your nervous system with just a few extra tools.

Our next step is to develop emotional resilience training, based on music therapy principles, delivered locally to teams where and when it suits them. These sessions will teach attendees how to use music intentionally to regulate mood and manage stress. We hope that by framing it as resilience training and not therapy, it may be better accepted.

Most people already use music daily. What they may not realise is how easily it can be transformed from background sound into a powerful tool for wellbeing.

## Further information

For more information about the BLSO and our music therapy programme, email [enquiries@bluelightsymphony.org](mailto:enquiries@bluelightsymphony.org).

For more information about our new residential music week for emergency services personnel in August 2026, visit the [Blue Light Symphony Orchestra website](#).

For support, visit [Oscar Kilo](#), the National Police Wellbeing Service.

- This article was peer reviewed by Kelly Rooks, Constable Talent Acquisition, Northumbria Police

## References

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- Thorpe AJ and Valentine S. (2025). 'Evaluating the potential of group music therapy for reducing symptoms of anxiety and stress in emergency service personnel: A pilot programme'. British Journal of Music Therapy, volume 39, issue 1, pages 20 to 30

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