



**Robyn Collins**  
General Manager



Recently I had the opportunity to visit Western District Council and meet with RSL sub-Branch members from this area. I am truly appreciative of the opportunity to visit District Councils, sub-Branches and Women’s Auxiliaries, each one providing valuable feedback about issues and an opportunity to share what DefenceCare and others are doing to help veterans.

On this occasion I was able to share an initiative of Woolgoolga sub-Branch – a weekly meeting at a coffee shop for young veterans that has mirrored the success of similar groups in other locations.

Support for younger veterans in particular may not necessarily come through traditional sub-Branch meetings - coffee shop gatherings may be more comfortable for them. Other successful initiatives include a Central Coast gardening initiative, surfing lessons and other sporting activities and centres such as the RSL Veterans’ Centre, East Sydney. Welfare support can be offered in many ways and if something outside the norm works, it may be worth a try.

I would value the chance to come to speak to sub-Branches and Women’s Auxiliaries (together or separate) to hear their concerns, talk about DefenceCare and share ideas that are making a difference. Feel free to call me to arrange a visit.

We recently launched an online RSL NSW Welfare and Pension Forum to give those working in the welfare and pension area a network of others to connect with, share information and discuss ideas.

A selection of sub-Branch members viewed the functionality of the group at

RSL NSW State Office and unanimously agreed to trial it for at least 12 months to see if there is sufficient demand and value in the idea.

- Over the twelve months, we responded to 4195 calls for help from veterans and their families – many of these involving complex circumstances and requests for help. In 2013 calls totalled 2651.
- Of these calls, 1778 were for DVA entitlements, up nearly 30% on 2013’s enquiries. During the year, we lodged over 1000 claims for 247 clients and completed 144 appeals at the Veterans’ Review Board.
- 949 calls were for community support, up from 828 in 2013. Our team provided 2698 services in this area (in 2013 this was 1385).
- Finally, almost one quarter of our total calls for help (936) came from organisations such as sub-Branches and Women’s Auxiliaries.
- Our clients were split reasonably evenly in 2014, with calls from 1688 ex-serving members or their surviving spouse, 1,431 serving members and 140 family members.
- In the past six months we have also been tracking how many claims we have lodged under each area of legislation. As we provide this service at four Defence bases, it isn’t surprising to find that we lodged 411 MRCA claims, 59 SRCA claims, 71 VEA claims and 21 incapacity claims for clients.

Raising money in 2015 to ensure that we don’t turn anyone away is our number one goal. We hope you will support us in continuing to help Defence family members in crisis.

**PEOPLE WE HAVE HELPED**

**.... A young naval veteran**

At 24, Emily was medically discharged from the Navy following persistent hip and back pain that resulted from her role



as a medic.

Whilst the claims process is still underway, Emily is happy to tell her story.

“DefenceCare were really good, they explained every stage of

the claim’s process. From the beginning through until the end, I always had support step by step. The forms and the processes involved would have been difficult to do on my own.”

Emily was 18 when she joined the Royal Australian Navy, only six months after completing high school. Deployment for Emily meant travelling to developing nations such as Western Samoa and Tonga, after the tragic 2009 earthquake and tsunami which caused substantial damage and loss of life.

Emily and her colleagues were able to assist the local community nurse in establishing mobile health clinics after the destruction of the Samoan hospital. They frequently travelled into the hills in both countries, as the community moved away from the water’s edge out of fear for future tsunamis. They also were involved in handing out emergency food supplies.

Emily experienced injury and pain at various stages throughout her career as a result of heavy training and carrying significant loads. She also suffered a severe fall on stairs on a ship.

Throughout her six years of service, Emily became removed from her friends and family. She missed the birth of her nephew and being around her godchildren, who were infants at the time. It is only now after she has left the Navy that Emily has been able to reach out and connect with friends and family again.

Adjusting back to civilian life has been difficult but she is looking forward to the challenges ahead with the hope of becoming a community nurse.

“I joined the Navy hoping for adventure and travel. I made many great friends and

wouldn’t change it for the world. Thank you DefenceCare for helping me through a difficult time.”



**... A veteran from the country**

After 19 years in the Navy, Lachlan was medically discharged as

a result of issues from his service in Iraq. Returning to country NSW with his wife, he was recently helped by DefenceCare following the impact of bush fire, excessive rain and then drought.

Lachlan originally left the country and joined the Navy out of the need for stable employment and new challenges.

Single till his Persian Gulf deployment, Lachlan’s wife is also from Defence and they married when Lachlan returned from the Persian Gulf. His time in the service brought him many new friends and helped him gain a broader understanding of world events and the role he and the Navy plays on the world stage.

Adjusting back to civilian life was and still is a struggle.

A lot of the skills taught in Defence become ingrained, and having to readjust to the civilian mentality is difficult. There was a huge loss for him of a trusted support network through Defence when he discharged. He is also missing the structure of life in Defence.

After their service, Lachlan and his wife purchased 3500 acres in northern NSW, with the past four years being exceedingly difficult.

Their property was burnt out in bushfires in 2009/10 and, although they managed to save the family home and some sheds, they lost stock and other infrastructure.

Two years later a one-in-a-hundred year rain event resulted in further stock losses.

Lachlan and his wife rebuilt their stock in 2012 and 2013, only to have four months of 40 plus degree days and strong winds which depleted their water reserves and destroyed their feed. At the same time they suffered critical equipment failures.

DefenceCare’s financial assistance enabled Lachlan and his wife to purchase feed and water at a critical time and subsequent rain over Christmas has helped turned their life around.

Lachlan is presently recovering from surgery on a tumour between his right eye and ear.

“The support provided by DefenceCare was literally a lifesaver. When I reviewed our accounts and received the financial assistance, I cried. I was in a pretty bad space, trying to manipulate what we had to keep the wolf from the door.

“All we can say is thank you, as my wife and I cannot truly specify in words what the assistance meant to us.”

**2015 IN FLANDERS FIELDS POPPY QUILT**

In 2015, the CCWA Women’s Auxiliary NSW will once again raffle an amazing

quilt to raise money for DefenceCare. This year’s quilt, In Flanders Fields Poppy Quilt, is stunning. Tickets (\$2) will go on sale in February. Second prize is an oil painting of a field of poppies. Our sincere thanks for your support – every dollar makes a real difference to veterans and their families in crisis.



**STATE CONGRESS PARTNERS’ TOUR**

DefenceCare will be running a Health and wellbeing Seminar on Monday May 25 from 9am to 12noon at the RSL NSW State Congress in Coffs Harbour. We will also have an information stall at Coffs Harbour Ex-Services Memorial & Sporting Club during Congress from Monday to Wednesday, from 8.30am to 3pm.

Our State Congress Partners’ Tour will combine a guided bus tour of Coffs Harbour and Sawtell, morning tea and lunch. It will be on Tuesday May 26, 8.30am to 3.30pm. More details will be available through sub-Branches in March. If you would like to register your interest in this bus tour, please call Kiestyn Husk on 9264 8188 extension 500.

**CONTACT US**

**DefenceCare. Always there.**

DefenceCare is a charity helping current and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force and their families in times of injury, illness and crisis. DefenceCare is part of RSL

Welfare and Benevolent Institution and is a Tier 1 RSL NSW recognised charity.  
ABN: 61 603 206 488.  
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If you would like to discuss how DefenceCare can assist you and your family, please contact us.

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