



Robyn Collins
General Manager



In the 12 months to end December, DefenceCare responded to 4737 calls for help from veterans and their families – many involving complex circumstances and requests for help. This is an increase of 12.9% on the 2014 total of 4194 and a monthly average of 394 calls.

Of these calls, 1895 were for DVA claims, up 40% on 2014's enquiries. Calls for help with appeals to the VRB totalled 398 (2014: 422), while calls for community support (financial assistance, counselling and referrals) totalled 742 (2014: 948).

DefenceCare received 1618 calls from serving members (up 13.1%), while calls from ex-serving members were 1342 (down 20.5%) and family members 196 (up 40%). Calls from organisations surged, recording an increase of 68.9% to 1581 (2014: 936) – this figure includes calls from sub-Branches and Women's Auxiliaries.

Whilst at the time of writing we do not have our full year financial results, we know that the cost of our services exceeded donations. Although we have increased donations from the general public, donations from sub-Branches fell in 2015 by 15% (-\$86,172), while donations from Women's Auxiliaries increased, no doubt in part due to the wonderful quilts their members have been making and raffling to support DefenceCare.

PEOPLE WE HAVE HELPED

A veteran recovering from serious injury and illness...

DefenceCare's client, Andy, spent just

under 10 years in the ADF. His story of injury and recovery is compelling. Here's Andy's story in his own words:

"At the age of 17 I decided I wanted to join the Australian Defence Force as a soldier with the Army. "So in March 1987 I was shipped to Kapooka for basic training. To say this was an eye opener was an understatement! Yes the training was very hard but it was also very rewarding and these newly learned skills would inevitably set me up for life.

"Once at my first posting later that year (35 Water Transport Sqn – Woolwich, NSW) I quickly got into the groove of military life.

"Mid 1988 things went pear shaped. I was involved in a serious accident whilst in the line of duty that would change my physical condition for the rest of my life.

"I was a competitive race car driver in my spare time racing Karts, Speedway and Touring Cars. My post military career was being planned by a Bathurst winning team owner. After my accident and extremely long rehab I was given the bad news by my medical advisers that I would never be able to race again.

"This was later determined to be the start of my depression. Having no other options



I decided to continue with the Army on advice from my Commanding Officer. As expected I was medically downgraded and retrained in a new role of Movements - posted back to Kapooka then Canberra and my final posting was at Victoria Barracks in Sydney.

"Discharged in 1995, I was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and accident related injuries that had severely worsened. By 2000 I was wheelchair bound and looking for medical solutions.

"I had a chance meeting with spinal surgeon Dr Andrew Kam. He said he could improve my quality of life. In 2003 he operated on me and within seven days I walked out of the hospital. Although I was walking my PTSD was spiralling out of control. I wasn't receiving any treatment and didn't know where to even look for help.

"My local sub-Branch helped me receive some initial treatment and eventually got in contact with DefenceCare.

"Since then the support has been fantastic. My DefenceCare Counsellor Peter has effectively saved my life. I had two young children in my care but couldn't even look after myself. The tools my Counsellor gave me made me a better parent and a better person.

CONTACT US

DefenceCare. Always there.

DefenceCare is part of RSL Welfare and Benevolent Institution and is a Tier 1 RSL NSW recognised charity.
ABN: 61 603 206 488.

DGR: 752 766 491. CFN: 12317.

If you would like to discuss how DefenceCare can assist you and your

family, please contact us.

ANZAC House, 245 Castlereagh St,
Sydney NSW 2000

Ph: 8088 0388 (Monday to Friday
8.30am to 4.30pm). Fax: 9261 4558

Email: defencecare@rslnsw.org.au

Website: www.defencecare.org.au

Facebook: DefenceCare

Twitter: DefenceCare

Instagram: DefenceCare

A veteran and his family who said goodbye...

Warren joined the Army at 18 and spent two years in full-time service that included two tours of Vietnam. He then spent many subsequent years in the Army reserves and was well respected.



Settling back into civilian life was difficult, particularly when it came to his family. Due to his PTSD, Warren's marriage fell apart after just a few years and he had difficulties seeing his daughter.

Warren's life was also heavily affected by his financial struggles and he struggled to hold down a job as his mental health worsened. At age 58, he was no longer fit to work.

By his 67th birthday, Warren slipped into a haze as his mental health worsened to the point where, to his daughter Rose, he became a different person.

Growing up, Rose was very aware of her father's mental health. Later in life, he was chronically suicidal, had difficulty sleeping daily and was heavily medicated in a mental health hospital for the best part of a year. This made it difficult for him to return to his rural property, leaving Warren homeless. At this time, Homes for Heroes stepped in to offer him accommodation.

Rose and her family, including her four small children, moved into Warren's rural property to take on the financial burden. Shortly after moving, Rose's husband became redundant and they were not eligible for any government assistance. The whole family was struggling financially.

It was at this time that Warren was sent back to hospital with chest pain and breathing difficulties and sadly was diagnosed with stage four, advanced small cell lung cancer. Warren fought the cancer with all he had, but eventually

Rose had to leave her husband and children to move back to Sydney for seven weeks to care for her father until he entered a palliative hospital.

Unfortunately after visiting him in hospital, Rose's car broke down on a main road in Sydney, blocking peak hour traffic for over an hour. The car's motor had seized, leaving her over 300kms away from her family. The family couldn't afford to repair the car, but living in a rural area they couldn't afford not to.

"I was completely stuck; the best thing that could have happened to me was the suggestion to contact DefenceCare.

"Without hesitation they helped repair my car so I could continue to visit my father in hospital and return home to my children.

"As icing on the cake, DefenceCare brought my children to Sydney and organised accommodation for us all, to relieve my anxiety about being split between my dying father and my four young children. As a final gift to my dad, he was able to see the four little people that gave his life meaning, a reason to fight his cancer. Dad was given time with his grandchildren before he passed.

"The car is a necessity where I live, but the time DefenceCare gave my dad with his grandchildren is impossible to value. It was the most amazing gift of all."

Unfortunately, Warren passed away four weeks later on his 69th birthday with Rose by his side.

"I know his heart was full of thanks to DefenceCare for the last memories they provided him with his grandchildren and I am eternally thankful for all they have done."

CALLING FOR PEER MENTORS AND PEERS FOR A TRIAL PROGRAM

DefenceCare is looking for Peer Mentors and Peers for a trial Veteran

Peer to Peer Support Program in 2016. The program is for veterans who have suffered mental ill-health – with Peer Mentors well on the road to recovery and Peers in the early stages.

Ideally those involved in the trial will live in the west, north and northwest of Sydney and areas surrounding this such as the Central Coast where Mentors can travel to Richmond on a monthly basis for clinical support.

Social connection is a key component of recovery from mental health conditions and peers with a lived experience can assist with this connection. Individuals experiencing mental illness who are well supported, can have a greater sense of control in their illness management and are able to envisage a path to wellness are more likely to recover.

DefenceCare, in partnership with St John of God Richmond Hospital, is pleased to be involved in the delivery of one of two Veteran Peer to Peer Support Programs being piloted nationally in 2016.

If you are interested in taking part as a Peer or a Peer Mentor in NSW, please contact DefenceCare on 02 8088 0388 for further information on this program please go to our website and view this link; <http://www.defencecare.org.au/docs/Peer%20to%20Peer%20Support%20Program.pdf>

DEFENCECARE STAFF UPDATE

Our team has recently welcomed three new staff members – Zoe Schulz, Mark Andrews and Edy Jabre.

Zoe will cover both the Administrative Reception and Office Administration; Mark is the new community support worker working with Auburn RSL sub-Branch and DefenceCare; and Edy is the new Veteran Peer to Peer Support Coordinator for the trial program. DefenceCare is running for DVA.