



**Robyn Collins**  
General Manager



In 2015 DefenceCare lodged 1062 DVA claims on behalf of serving and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force and their families.

Of these, 737 were under the most recent veterans' legislation, MRCA, while 121 were under SRCA and 204 were under the VEA. In addition, we also completed 153 appeals at the Veterans' Review Board.

Claims and appeals continues to be a significant source of assistance for our clients and we are now providing services in this area on six Defence bases – most recently Richmond and HMAS Waterhen.

Donations from sub-Branches, Women's Auxiliaries and individual supporters are vital to our work. In 2015, 79% of donations were spent on support, financial assistance and services for veterans and their families.

\$617,448 was spent on direct financial assistance – paying bills such as utilities, medical expenses and accommodation for our clients in need.

As has been the case in the last three years, 60% of our clients are from the Sydney metropolitan area and 40% are from country NSW.

In February and March we had two consecutive months of record numbers of enquiries – 524 and 563 calls respectively. This is placing considerable strain on an outdated phone system and we thank you for your patience and understanding if it is difficult to contact us. If you can send a request by email to [defencecare@rslnsw.org.au](mailto:defencecare@rslnsw.org.au), it would be much appreciated while we endeavour to find a solution.

We continue to provide the best possible services for veterans and their families in need and thank you once again for your ongoing support.

## PEOPLE WE HAVE HELPED

### A veteran moving into a peer mentor role...

Amy was an Australian Army medic for just under 13 years. She served all around Australia assisting in border protection and undertook overseas deployments in East Timor and Pakistan.

Now discharged, Amy is one of the first mentors in the trial Veteran Peer to Peer Support program being run by DefenceCare with the support of St John of God Richmond Hospital.

The program helps with the recovery of ex-service ADF members with a mental health condition by pairing them with skilled peer mentors who have also experienced mental ill-health and are recovered sufficiently to provide insight and support for peers who are on their own recovery journey.

Amy, one of the first mentors, met her husband, who was also in the Army, at pre-employment training in Albury-Wodonga. During the first year of their marriage, Amy and her husband were only together for approximately 13 days in total and at one time were separated for eight continuous months.

Amy recalls a particularly difficult time in the service in Pakistan, where it was bitterly cold. Communication was their toughest challenge at the Air Force base due to outdated equipment and the need



for chaperones and guides. Talking to the Senior Medical Officer for the Pakistani Army was especially difficult due to her gender – the foreign officer was unable to look at her or shake her hand.

The events of 11 September 2001 happened on the day Amy went on her Army medic's course. She recalls sitting with her colleagues and a nursing officer watching in disbelief as the events unfolded. This was a clear turning point, with the nursing officer confirming that this event would change 'everything'.

When Amy and her husband decided to start a family, she discharged, finished her nursing degree and has been working as a Registered Nurse ever since.

"At the time I wanted to leave the ADF, I realised Army life had changed and I was going in a different direction with nursing and wanting to have children," said Amy.

"I went on my own journey, but I did miss the friendship, the purpose and the team work Defence provided. I felt I'd lost my identity and even though I wanted to take this path, there was still something missing.

"I had to start all over again and find new networks. I realised my service and Defence career had changed my perceptions and values in life. In the Army you know exactly what you have to do and who you are, but I found it challenging to find that spot in civilian life."

Amy first heard about DefenceCare through the Women Veterans' Network Australia (WVNA), when she was in Queensland. She became aware of the

## 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](mailto:defencecare@rslnsw.org.au)

Website: [www.defencecare.org.au](http://www.defencecare.org.au)

Facebook: DefenceCare

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Veteran Peer to Peer Support Program at this time and wasn't really sure about becoming involved.

It was when Amy again met team members of DefenceCare at a young veterans' forum that she decided she wanted to hear more and eventually became a mentor.

"My own experiences with mental ill-health have helped me see the value in this program. To have someone who lived the experience to help you through day to day life is invaluable.

"The program can give us the tools and skills to relate in some way even if the service and experience is not the same. Mentors know about other services out there so it can help with referrals and advice. You are also a bit more fluid and social than in a clinical setting.

"I jumped on board due to my own experiences in the service and with my family. It's such a needed service and so important that we do this.

"If I could pass on any words about the program, it is that you need to give it a go. It's an important program, providing younger veterans with mateship at a time that they really need it."

#### **A veteran transitioning to a peer leader...**

Lee served within the Australian

Army Infantry for almost 12 years, in the following regiments - Reserves 51st battalion FNQR, 1RAR, 6RAR - and discharged in 2012.

Lee felt called to join the ADF - he wanted to be of service. Being in the military seemed to him the best way to do this - and being an infantry soldier was the best option for him. Deploying to Afghanistan in 2007 with 1RAR, and again 2010 with 6RAR, Lee left behind his daughter, girlfriend, parents, brothers and sisters. Lee enjoyed deployment - he



believed in what he was doing and loved doing it.

In 2007, Lee was blown up by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and in 2008 was diagnosed with PTSD. He began treatment with the aim of getting back to full duties as soon as he could and was successfully redeployed to Afghanistan with 6RAR in 2010.

Lee was very happy to be back doing his job; he was a career soldier. But soon he found himself unable to continue with regular duties due the debilitating effects of PTSD. When he returned to Australia he began the long process of medical retirement and with it came feelings of profound disappointment as his fulfilling military career was over.

After almost a year, Lee found that he was unable to work, unable to maintain relationships, and barely able to function at all. He didn't understand what had happened. Lee kept trying to get on with life and kept failing. It was at this time that Lee found himself homeless - he was living in his car, facing bankruptcy, feeling completely hopeless and helpless.

Lee attended St. John of God Richmond Hospital, to receive treatment for his PTSD. It was here that he met other veterans, learnt about PTSD and how it affected him.

Lee is now one of the peer mentors in DefenceCare's Veteran Peer to Peer Support program, which creates a 'helping relationship' in the form of communication and visits between a peer and a peer mentor with similarities in experiences of military service and mental health challenges.

"I'm happy to be involved in the Veteran Peer to Peer mentor program. I'm hopeful that it will prove beneficial and useful to many veterans."

#### **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.

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>

#### **2016 RSL NSW CONGRESS PARTNERS' TOUR**

DefenceCare will be running a RSL NSW State Congress Partners' Tour, which will combine a guided bus tour of Manly and North Head and High Tea at Gunners Exclusive Drawing Room in Mosman.

It will be on Tuesday 24 May, 8.00am start for an 8.30am departure concluding at 3pm. Information on the tour has been sent to all sub-Branches.

Cost: \$50 per person. Bookings and payment: Call DefenceCare on 0498 990 060 or email [defencecare@rslnsw.org.au](mailto:defencecare@rslnsw.org.au). Please book early, numbers are limited. More information and questions call or email DefenceCare and speak with Zoe Schulz or Jill Rocchi.