

As I write, a media release from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs announcing \$31million in additional funding for veteran mental health has arrived in my email.

The announcement includes support for financially vulnerable veterans with mental ill-health, support for families of veterans, an annual health assessment for veterans in the first five years post-discharge, a pilot case management service for transitioning or recently discharged ADF members and a scoping study to professionalise veterans' advocacy.

The Government has also agreed to 22 of the 24 recommendations (and in principle to the remaining two) made in the Senate committee report, *The Constant Battle: Suicide by veterans*.

Finally, the Government will now provide a DVA White Card to access mental health treatment through this program to all personnel leaving the military.

We look forward to the assistance that these initiatives will provide veterans and their families who are injured, ill or in crisis.

This issue we share with you a story about a veteran we have helped with financial assistance and advocacy services. We also introduce David Willis, a new member of the RSL DefenceCare team.

As this is the last issue before Christmas, on behalf of all at RSL DefenceCare I wish you a safe and happy holiday season and New Year.

## RSL DEFENCECARE'S NSW DISASTER ASSISTANCE

RSL DefenceCare can provide financial assistance and counselling to RSL NSW sub-Branches, RSL members or other members of the Defence community living in NSW if their families are affected by disasters. You can apply for RSL DefenceCare Disaster Assistance

at any time, even after a disaster has passed. Our Disaster Assistance can provide urgent financial assistance as well as funding to support rebuilding or recovery.

We also post on our Facebook site for any disaster updates

[www.facebook.com/Defencecare](http://www.facebook.com/Defencecare)

Other contacts

**DVA:** 133 254

**VVCS:** 1800 011 046

**Defence Service Homes Insurance:**

1300 552 662

**SES:** 132 500

**Insurance council:** 1300 728 228

**Disaster Welfare Assistance:**

1800 018 444

## PEOPLE WE HAVE HELPED

### *A former Warrant Officer and his wife.*

Colin served in the RAAF from the age of 16, keen to get stuck in and serve his country. Forty years later, alcohol abuse and depression left Colin and his wife Julie on the brink of giving up.

During his time in the RAAF, Colin became a member of the Safety Tiger Team, a specialist group of only five members who worked with Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston. He was also on the first plane out of Australia after the September 11 terrorist attacks to Diego Garcia. For this tour of duty Colin had to leave his two young children

with his parents - a separation he really struggled with.

In the later years of his career, and after he had left full-time service, alcoholism, PTSD and severe depression took hold of Colin's life. The struggle between his duty to his country and the impact war had on him both physically and mentally, led Colin to excessive drinking. In 2002, Colin met Julie and in 2005 they were married. Julie, with a career in social work, became Colin's support net.

Unfortunately, his dependence on alcohol continued to grow and Colin's health deteriorated. Unlike those around him, Colin couldn't see his mental health failing; what he did notice was that jobs he was qualified to do 'blind-folded' in earlier years, he was now no longer capable of. This loss of purpose drove him further into depression.

Colin and Julie filed claims with DVA to increase his pension, but they were initially rejected. At the same time, Colin's companion animal, which he relied on for comfort and support, became very ill. With bills piling up and Colin's health worsening, he and Julie were running out of options and were referred to RSL DefenceCare. Our Claims & Advocacy team worked on an appeal to the Veteran's Review Board and the Community Support team helped alleviate some financial burdens.



The appeal was successful, providing a reassessment of Colin's pension at the special rate, allowing more financial and medical support for him and Julie. Julie was especially thankful for how supportive the RSL DefenceCare team were.

"James and Dean were my heroes; they were so respectful and so proud of me, without them we wouldn't be where we are now." As Julie was supporting Colin on her own, the encouragement she received from James and Dean made a huge difference, "it was on some of my worst days that they would call to check how I was feeling; they got it when nobody else did".

## MEET THE TEAM

**Name:** David Willis

**Role:** Community Support Worker



**How long have you been with RSL DefenceCare?** 8 months

**What work did you do before joining RSL DefenceCare?**

I have worked in the community services sector for approx. 20 years. My last employer was a long-term drug and alcohol treatment facility called We Help Ourselves (WHOS). I have worked in a variety of settings in the community sector. These include Out of Home Care, adult and teenage drug and rehabilitation services, homeless services for adults and young people including drop-in centres, residential centres and a medical centre for homeless people in Kings Cross. I have also worked in the disability sector.

**Why did you decide to work for RSL DefenceCare?**

I was looking for a new challenge in my career. I have had an interest in veterans and some of the challenges they face upon transitioning out of the ADF. I had previously worked with clients who had served in the ADF through my work in drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. That limited engagement with veterans had been a good learning experience, so when I saw the job advertised, I thought

it would be a good way of engaging further with veterans and continuing my work and learning experience in the community services sector.

**What is the most difficult part of your job?**

Seeing the difficulties that some of the veterans go through. I have learnt that they can have gone through a lot because of their service, right from basic training and the rigors that that involves, through to regular service and deployments and any other direction that their service takes them. Transitioning back to civilian life can certainly take its toll and seeing this has been difficult.

**What is the most rewarding part of your job?**

Seeing veterans realise that there is help out there for them. The holistic approach that RSL DefenceCare takes means that they can be assisted in a variety of ways, from welfare and claims right through to advocacy and peer support. Watching veterans getting back on their feet and being empowered to take charge of their lives has been a rewarding experience.



## NEW COMPENSATION ACT FOR VETERANS

On 7 September, Parliament passed the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA). This will replace the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA) for current and former ADF members.

All veterans and ADF members with existing claims under the SRCA will automatically become claims under the DRCA. The purpose of this change was to move all military compensation legislation under the Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

Mr Tehan believes this new legislation

will allow for more consistency for veterans' entitlements, subject to consultation with the defence and ex-service community; and will allow DVA to improve the services it offers. There will be no change to eligibility, or the entitlements or benefits available to current and former members of the ADF under SRCA.

Further information on the DRCA can be found at [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au). Alternatively, feel free to contact RSL DefenceCare on [info@rsldefencecare.org.au](mailto:info@rsldefencecare.org.au) or call 02 8088 0388.

## THE POPPY SHOP

Last year a review committee was formed to investigate the operations of the Poppy Shop. The results were presented to the Trustees of RSL WBI, and the decision was made to close the Poppy Shop as it was operating at a loss.

The Poppy Shop was officially closed on 13 October. We take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported the Poppy Shop over the past few years.

## CONTACT US

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

Twitter: DefenceCare

Instagram: DefenceCare