



Robyn Collins
General Manager



As we move towards the end of the year, I would like to thank you once again for your support for veterans and their families in crisis during 2016.

Whilst there is great work being done, we are still struggling with sufficient donations to cover the demand for help. If you are thinking of donating to a charity this Christmas, please consider supporting veterans and their families through RSL DefenceCare.

Mental ill-health, difficulty finding employment outside the ADF, family breakdown, homelessness and tragically, suicide, are some of the key issues veterans and their families continue to face. While there is much good work being done in the community, there is still more to do to identify and support vulnerable families.

One of our biggest challenges is being able to respond to the number of calls for assistance and being able to follow up those at risk.

In 2015 the number of calls for help grew by 13% over the previous year and we responded to 4737 calls from veterans and their families. In the first six months of 2016 the number of calls increased again and this year has so far included two record months. We are on track for more than 5000 calls this year.

As most of you know, our current telephone system is not handling the volume of calls and we have only one person on reception. Many of our callers are severely distressed and some calls take a long time. Too many calls are going through to our voicemail and our phone system is currently not recording

all the messages.

If we had sufficient funds to hire an additional person to answer our phone calls, we could respond more quickly and when the first person is occupied with a call, a second person could take the next. This would help alleviate the frustration I know some of our sub-Branches and clients feel at being unable to get through to us by phone.

If you are a member of a sub-Branch with additional funds to help us with this issue, please consider this in your 2016 budget and donations. Donations from individuals are also welcome and your support is very much appreciated.

PEOPLE WE HAVE HELPED

A veteran transitioning from volunteer to RSL DefenceCare staff member...

Tom joined the Royal Australian Navy at



the age of 19 and served for six years as an electrical technician. For most of his career Tom was based in Australia and worked on destroyers.

With a strong family history in Defence, Tom joined the Navy to become a member of the Defence family. Being in such a large team was important to him and he was eager to take on the difficult training ahead. As a young single man at the time, Tom also looked

forward to the opportunity of travel with the Navy. During his service, Tom participated in a lot of team sport, enjoying the camaraderie, discipline and training that came with being a member of the Defence Force.

"My New Zealand trip was a Public Relations exercise with the New Zealand forces. I enjoyed the places we visited and the operations we took part in with the New Zealand Navy.

"We pulled into a different port every three or four days and I remember really enjoying when the Australians played sport against the New Zealand Defence Force once or twice a week."

There were other memories as well, including one of a fire that ultimately led to Tom's medical discharge and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"There was a fire in the mount on HMAS *Brisbane*, but the good thing that came out of that incident was that we saved the ship due to our training.

"Getting medically discharged, that is a bad memory for me. I felt that I had let down my team."

Adjusting back into civilian life for Tom included a mixture of both good and bad times. The beginning of the process was smooth due to Tom's age and excitement to see what was ahead. What he also found was that he missed the stability, structure and the camaraderie.

"I was married the day after I got discharged and we bought our first house. It was exciting but in those 12 months it was a total shift in life for me and my family."

The most difficult part of the transition process for Tom was retraining and gaining civilian qualifications at a time when he was suffering.

"I got through it but it was hard. I went back as a fourth year apprentice electrician when I got out. I had to learn a lot while I was suffering from a medical

condition that I didn't understand."

Tom has been involved with RSL DefenceCare, initially receiving assistance, and then entering the Veteran Peer to Peer Support program as a mentor.

"I got involved in the Veteran Peer to Peer Support Mentor program initially as a Mentor through an email from one of the claims advisors at RSL DefenceCare. I was excited to be involved and eventually this has led to me becoming the RSL DefenceCare Peer to Peer Coordinator across this pilot project.

"I'm very grateful that I was introduced to RSL DefenceCare via Homes for Heroes and I am so very grateful to be able to pay back the investment they made in me through their services. I am looking forward to the challenge ahead

with my new role, supporting other Australian Veterans."

CHANGES IN RSL NSW APPEALS

RSL Appeals is currently being transferred to RSL DefenceCare as together with sub-Branches, RSL DefenceCare is a major beneficiary.

With the work for the Poppy Appeal already completed, this Appeal will continue as planned. Looking ahead, we would like to share information with and gain input from sub-Branches and Women's Auxiliaries – the continued success of Appeals is important for us all and your feedback and suggestions will be invaluable to our combined future success.

GRANTS

NSW ClubGRANTS

RSL DefenceCare acknowledges and thanks the following NSW Registered Clubs for providing funding to support veterans and their families: Campbelltown RSL, Club Rivers, Merimbula RSL Club, Wagga RSL & Commercial Club, Bathurst RSL Service Club, RSL Club of Dubbo, Diggers – Miranda RSL, Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club, Cardiff RSL Club, Bexley RSL, Earlwood Bardwell Park RSL Club, Kingsgrove RSL Club, Canterbury Hurlstone Park RSL Club, Petersham RSL Club, South Sydney Junior Rugby League Club & Matraville RSL Club.

CALLING FOR PEER MENTORS AND PEERS FOR A TRIAL PROGRAM

RSL 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, have a greater sense of control in their illness management and are able to envisage a path to wellness, are more likely to recover.

RSL DefenceCare, in partnership with St John of God Richmond Hospital, is pleased to be involved in the delivery of one of two such programs being piloted nationally in 2016.

If you are interested in taking part as a Peer or a Peer Mentor in NSW, please contact RSL DefenceCare: info@defencecare.org.au for further information.

OPERATION K9 – ASSISTANCE DOGS FOR VETERANS

Following a successful trial by RSL SA, we would like to trial four Assistance Dogs for veterans with PTSD in NSW. The program has had remarkable results in South Australia. One young veteran had not left his home in two years prior to being matched with an Assistance Dog. He is now able to go to cafes and leave his home – things that most of us take for granted but he was unable to do before receiving his dog.

This program is run and administered by the Royal Society for the Blind (RSB) and produces highly trained Assistance Dogs that perform tasks that are needed by each veteran.

If you would like to donate to this program, please call Jill Rocchi on (02) 8088 0388.

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

Website: www.defencecare.org.au

Facebook: DefenceCare

Twitter: DefenceCare

Instagram: DefenceCare