



Australian Government

**VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families
Counselling Service**



Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service
A service founded by Vietnam veterans

newsletter

edition 4 • July 2009

Make it your mission to support life

Around one in five Australians will experience a mental health problem at least once in their lives.

Current and former serving members of the Australian Defence Forces are some of the most resilient people in the country but their mental health can suffer, just like the rest of the Australian population.

Sometimes these mental health issues can escalate and individuals may become at risk of self harm.

What is Operation *Life*?

Operation *Life* is one government initiative helping to equip veterans and their families with the tools to recognise and act on suicidal tendencies in the early stages.

Operation *Life* aims to prevent suicide and promote mental health and resilience across the veteran community.

Several workshops are available under the program:

- safeTALK – suicide alertness for everyone (half-day presentation)
- ASIST – applied suicide intervention skills training (two days)
- ASIST Tune UP – a refresher workshop (half-day)

PUT YOUR MIND
AT EASE
RECOGNISE > ACT > MAINTAIN

OPERATION *Life*

Who can attend?

Workshops are free and available to those concerned about family, friends or others in the veteran community. Priority is given to veterans and their families. Welfare, pension officers and other helpers from ex-service organisations and the veteran community are encouraged to attend.

Where are workshops held?

Workshops are held in metropolitan and regional locations depending on demand. Members of the veteran community who are interesting in attending a workshop can contact the VVCS on **1800 011 046** for more information. Eligible veterans may receive assistance for travel costs.

Upcoming workshops

safeTALK: suicide alertness for everyone

Participants will learn how to become more alert to suicide prevention opportunities and how to offer help.

Lismore NSW 30 June 2009

Launceston TAS 3 August 2009

Albany WA 24 August 2009

Port Augusta SA 3 September 2009

The preferred provider delivers LivingWorks program material.

To register for this half day workshop call VVCS on **1800 011 046**.

from the VVCS TASMANIA DIRECTOR



The Tasmanian veteran community are in good hands with access to two VVCS centres— each offering a range of services and support for veterans and their families.

Who we are

Our offices are located in Hobart and Launceston and employ four part-time and two part-time counsellors respectively. There are also three administrative staff to help both offices. And last but not least there's me – I am the State Director, primarily based in Launceston but making regular visits to the Hobart office.

Both offices provide counselling services for veterans and their families with outreach services also available in the outer areas of the two cities and along the North West Coast (Burnie, Ulverstone and Devonport).

We also intend to have outreach counsellors on the East Coast (St Helens, Swansea, Bicheno) in the near future.

Services available

Group programs are offered in all of the major regions and cover a range of issues faced by the veteran community including managing anger, stress, anxiety, depression, sleep problems and heart health.

This year Operation *Life* will be available through the VVCS in priority regional areas. Operation Life is an educative program on suicide awareness and prevention.

We have also recently started to offer case management services to eligible clients – this means we can act as a central point of contact for clients with complex needs and ensure there is a coordinated approach to their treatment. We can call on a range of professionals to assist in an individual's case.

Case management is now available through all VVCS centres throughout Australia.

Where we are

In Tasmania the majority of our clients are Vietnam veterans and their families but I'm pleased to report we are seeing an increasing number of younger veterans who have completed more recent deployments.

All former and current serving defence personnel and their families are welcome to visit us at any time during business hours, even if it's just for a general chat about the services we can offer.

You can find us in Hobart at 2 Castray Esplanade Battery Point, or in Launceston at 21 Elphin Road. Or call the VVCS on **1800 011 046**.

The Hobart VVCS will be relocating to new premises at 293 Liverpool Street later this year. The new premises will be adjacent to but separate from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. More information will be provided closer to the moving date.

Russell McCashney

Director

VVCS Tasmania

Anxiety: your questions answered

What is anxiety?

Many Australians experience anxiety at some stage in their lives. Anxiety is a response to danger or threat. Moderate levels of anxiety are normal and will actually improve your cognitive performance, for example, moderate levels of anxiety prior to a job interview or an exam will increase alertness and performance.

If anxiety starts to interfere with your life and prevent you doing the things you enjoy, you should seek professional help to learn how to control it.

What are the common symptoms of anxiety?

If you feel tense, worried or fearful about different events or activities and are unable to control these feelings over a prolonged period of time, then anxiety may be the cause.

A person suffering from anxiety may experience some of the following:

- prolonged worrying about common problems such as finances, work or family;
- avoiding situations that they fear i.e social situations or crowded areas like the cinema, shopping centres or public transport;
- insomnia or difficulty sleeping;
- increased use of alcohol and drugs, particularly in social situations;
- difficulty concentrating and completing school or work projects;
- increased irritability;
- avoiding eye contact;
- feeling restless;
- easily fatigued; and
- negative thoughts i.e 'I can't think of what to say' or 'I can't do this'.

They may also experience physical symptoms like blushing, trembling, sweating, nausea, shaking, pounding heart and shortness of breath.

What help is available for anxiety?

A range of professional services are available to anxiety sufferers. See your doctor if you continually experience any of the symptoms above.

How VVCS can help?

VVCS offers programs specifically aimed at assisting people with their anxiety problems – anxiety and stress management, sleep and relaxation and alcohol management.

VVCS can provide individual, couple or family counselling as well as case management services.

Finding Assistance

VVCS

(and after hours - Veterans Line) 1800 011 046

Lifeline 13 11 14

Suicide Help Line 1300 651 251

Lifeline Mental Health Info Line 1300 131 114

Carers Counselling Line 1800 007 332

Websites

DVA At-Ease www.at-ease.dva.gov.au

VVCS www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs

Beyond Blue www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au

VVCS – serving the next generation

VVCS enters a new era with a new agreement with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for all ADF members, regardless of operational service, to have access to VVCS services.

The VVCS provides support for lifestyle, health and family matters as well as issues relating to military service or peacekeeping operations. Counselling is free and confidential and staff are experienced in issues associated with service and can assist members and their families to cope.

In addition to counselling services, VVCS supports ADF members and their families to adjust to the sometimes difficult transition from the services back to civilian life after discharge. The **Stepping Out Program** is a free 2-day educational program

helping to take the stress out of this transition period. **Stepping Out** is available throughout Australia to ADF members and their partners who are in the process of transition or have recently discharged.

Other VVCS programs available include anger management, relaxation, relationships, anxiety and stress management. These programs equip participants with the skills and knowledge to lead and maintain healthier lives.

Current-serving ADF members can obtain a formal referral for VVCS services through their medical or psych corps.

For more information on VVCS and the **Stepping Out Program** visit www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs or call **1800 011 046**.

Stepping Out Program Calendar 2009

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Adelaide | 12/13 October |
| Brisbane | 27/28 July |
| Brisbane | 26th & 27th October |
| Brisbane | 30 November/ 1 December |
| Canberra | 6/7 August |
| Canberra | 11/12 November |
| Maitland | 20/21 October |
| Melbourne | 19/20 November |
| Nowra | 1/2 October |
| Parramatta | 31 August/1 September |
| Perth | 2/3 September |
| Sydney | 9/10 December |
| Townsville | 6/7 July |
| Wodonga | 14/15 September |

Video counselling now available for rural and remote veterans

Rural and remote veterans in selected areas of NSW and WA now have access to VVCS counselling services via the use of video conferencing.

Veterans and their families who live in Orange, Dubbo, Inverell and Glen Innes in NSW or the Wheat belt, Midwest and Pilbara regions in WA can access the new service as part of a pilot program offering free and confidential one-on-one counselling services via video conferencing with qualified VVCS staff.



What is video conferencing?

Video conferencing enables two people located in different sites to talk to and see one another using a secure computer network that transmits sounds and pictures. Each participant in a video conference is located in a private room with a television screen, video camera, microphone and speakers.

Why video conferencing?

Research suggests it's often difficult for people who live in rural and remote communities to access counselling services due to the travel time and costs associated with making regular trips to appointments.

Video conferencing will help to overcome this problem by making counselling more accessible and inexpensive for veterans and their families.

What to expect?

Counselling will be accessible via one location in each of the regions mentioned above.

You will be provided with information to support and guide you in the use of the video conferencing equipment.

You will receive counselling from experienced professionals who have been trained to operate the video conferencing equipment.

Your rights to privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

To find out more about counselling via video conferencing, contact the VVCS on **1800 011 046** and ask to be referred to the intake counsellor or a member of the video conferencing project team.

WVCS – WORKING WITH VETERANS OF ALL AGES

The WVCS strives to provide a flexible service to all our clients. Whether you are the spouse of a serving member deployed in Afghanistan and living in Darwin, a war widow in Canberra or a Vietnam veteran in Hobart, we do our best to meet your needs.

There are some significant differences between the needs of older and younger veterans. The most obvious difference is age. Ageing brings with it declining health, adjustment to leaving the workforce and often the death of parents, partners and mates.

More specifically, older veterans may experience chronic health problems – the affects of long term alcohol/cigarette intake, heart conditions, early dementia, depression, anxiety or PTSD. Many of these veterans are reluctant to seek medical assistance, assuming it's too late to get help or they should manage it themselves.

In contrast, younger clients are often more open to the important role counselling can play in dealing with life's stresses such as a relationship breakdown, parenting problems or family violence.

But both older and younger veterans have one thing in common – many have experienced service related trauma or readjustment to civilian life. Everyone's experience is individual and WVCS can offer individual attention to your counselling needs.

Alternatively, you can call on WVCS's 26 years of experience in supporting ex-service personnel and their families by joining one of our group programs which cover common issues such as relationships, anger management and stress, or relaxation.

John's story

Two years ago John, a 63 year old veteran, called on the assistance of the WVCS. John has been married to his wife Fran for 38 years; they have one daughter and three grandchildren who live nearby. John describes his family as very supportive and caring.

When he approached the WVCS, John was having difficulty controlling his anger at work, was suffering from depression and also the debilitating affects of chronic heart condition.

WVCS obtained John's permission to contact his GP so that a coordinated plan of treatment could be devised. WVCS, John's GP and John all came to an agreement that several counselling sessions would be beneficial. The sessions would focus on managing John's symptoms of depression and

chronic pain and develop strategies for dealing with his anger outbursts.

John also attended an **Anger Management group program** and, at the completion of counselling, a **Lifestyle program** with his wife.

Twelve months later, John called on the help of the WVCS again. He was experiencing some difficulties related to retiring from his workplace. WVCS organised for John to attend two counselling sessions, helping him to self manage his symptoms and focus more positively on his new lifestyle.

John also enrolled in the 12-month **Heart Health Program** and joined a local walking group with the veterans he met through the WVCS network.

Today, John says that life is going well.



Peter's story

Two years ago Peter, a 36 year old young veteran, contacted the WVCS seeking help with an alcohol problem. Peter's wife had passed away suddenly 12 months earlier in an accident and Peter was now the primary care giver for his daughter. He was worried that his drinking was getting out of hand and making everything worse. Peter was having difficulties parenting his daughter and suffered from constant tension and a feeling of helplessness, with everything seemingly to be spiralling out of control. Peter and his daughter had recently moved so as to be closer to his family for support. However, Peter had become isolated from friends, had problems with his new accommodation, his daughter was having problems at school, as well as his own employment issues. Peter was also suffering from physical health problems – diabetes and he was over weight.

After Peter's initial visit to a WVCS counsellor it was decided that Peter could benefit from a **case management** service. WVCS received Peter's permission to help him reconnect with his old family GP and contact other agencies within the veteran and broader community to link Peter with appropriate services that would meet his needs.

Peter was assisted to establish an appropriate connection with his daughters' school and was able to access the services his daughter required to adjust to her new surroundings. Peter was

enrolled in a community based parenting course to develop his skills and understanding of raising a teenage daughter. Through his case manager, Peter accessed the services of the Tenant Advisory Service and was able to resolve the problems with his accommodation. Peter was also given contact details of a local 'Eating with Friends' group. Although Peter tried the social group, he decided that he would prefer to be linked in with veteran related organisations.

Peter signed-up to the WVCS correspondence alcohol reduction course '**Changing the Mix**' –providing him with information and strategies to safely reduce his consumption. In consultation with his GP, Peter commenced a diabetes prevention program and also enrolled in the 12-month **Heart Health Program**. Through his case manager and support of his family, Peter also completed the WVCS workshops, '**Grief & Loss**' and '**Building Relationships: Communicating & Problem Solving**'. Through these changes, Peter and his daughter recommenced family **counselling** and continued to work through their feelings of grief and loss.

The WVCS case management approach has helped Peter to improve the quality of his life by drawing together programs that provided support and guidance. Today, Peter has more confidence in managing daily life problems, is managing well as a dad and a parent, and is in control of his life. Peter still keeps in touch with the WVCS.

VVCS in focus... statistics for the previous quarter March – May 2009

| Activity | Statistic |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Total Intakes | 3007 |
| Number of counselling clients | 4372 |
| Number of group clients | 1430 |
| Number of different groups | 121 |

Did you know....

- In the last 12 months 2543 Vietnam veterans and 1766 partners received counselling from VVCS.
- The most popular program undertaken by older veterans for the year 2008 was Heart Health with 1683 participants

To contact VVCS

Call on our toll free number: **1800 011 046**

To contact your nearest VVCS centre during business hours and Veterans Line, after hours.

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VVCS NATIONAL NEWSLETTER IS GOING GREEN

VVCS would like to encourage all readers with internet facilities to access our quarterly newsletter via our website. All you need to do is to contact the nearest centre via phone or email as provided above and ask to be put on the newsletter email distribution list. When the newsletter is published – you will be sent an email notification. We will continue to print copies of the newsletter for those clients wishing to receive it this way.

Contacting the VVCS News team

You can contact the VVCS News team by phone (02) 6225 4680 or email wvcsnews@dva.gov.au

Subscribing to the VVCS Newsletter

- If you would like to receive the VVCS newsletter electronically, contact the News Team by email wvcsnews@dva.gov.au
- If you wish to update or be removed from the VVCS newsletter distribution list, contact the News Team wvcsnews@dva.gov.au or (02) 6225 4680.

You can also download a copy of our newsletter from our website – www.dva.gov.au/health/wvcs

VVCS Newsletter is published by VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, PO Box 21 Woden ACT 2606 as a free newsletter for Australia's veteran and defence communities