



Australian Government

VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families  
Counselling Service



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

# newsletter

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## Making the transition from the ADF

Everyone experiences changes in their lives, from home to school, school to uni or straight into the workplace, marriage, divorce on occasion, children, retirement and too many more to mention.

For those who have served in the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Army, the Royal Australian Air Force or worked in another capacity for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) there are also cultural issues which can make the transition to civilian life and the civilian workforce more complicated.



A major lifestyle or workplace change like leaving the ADF can be very stressful. The ADF work environment is unlike many others, which makes the transition to a civilian workplace even more challenging than simply starting a new job. The culture of mateship, working as a team, being deployed and away from home is very different to many civilian jobs. The strengths that you develop working in the ADF may transfer well to the mainstream workplace. Having to re-locate and re-establish your professional and social networks can have an impact on you and your family. These changes can help you develop your resilience and give you broader life experiences.

The experience of being a part of the civilian workplace can open new doors (professionally, socially and personally) and can give you the opportunity to broaden your knowledge and your professional capacity.

The transition to the civilian workplace also means adapting to civilian life, particularly after an overseas deployment. The challenges of the transition process

can make it difficult to maintain healthy stress levels and can have an impact on your relationships with family and friends. For many, being at home all the time can take some adjusting to as well.

For some, the transition from the ADF is planned and for others comes sooner than expected. No matter what rank or corps, getting additional support and skills to manage the life-change can help you get the most out of the process.

The *Stepping Out* program helps ADF personnel make the transition to civilian life. The two-day course is run free of charge by the 15 VVCS centres across Australia. To be eligible for the course you need to be in the process of separation from the ADF or have separated in the past 12 months. Partners are also encouraged to attend the program. The Program is endorsed by the ADF and current serving members can be released from duty for the two days to attend the program.

For more information about the *Stepping Out* program or to register please call VVCS on 1800 011 046.

## 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 email [vvcsnews@dva.gov.au](mailto:vvcsnews@dva.gov.au) or contact your closest centre 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.

## from the VVCS NSW/ACT Director



The NSW/ACT region includes four centres located at Parramatta, Newcastle and Lismore in NSW and Deakin in the ACT.

The region is staffed by a team of 28 including both clinical and administration staff as well as the management team. We have two Deputy Directors based in Sydney and Canberra and a Business Support Manager based in Sydney. Although I am based in Sydney I regularly visit the other centres and try to meet with many of our stakeholders and veteran community representatives through our Regional Consultative Forums held at all four locations throughout the year.

### Services available

All centres offer in-house counselling and case management services for veterans and their families as well as an outreach counselling service to those veterans living in outer metropolitan and rural areas. The Outreach Program currently contracts 120 counsellors in NSW and 26 counsellors in the ACT. Case management services enable us to coordinate a range of services for clients with complex needs. To this end, we continue to maintain strong links with community and government agencies, the ADF and ex-service organisations.

An extensive selection of group programs are available throughout the region including Heart Health, Stepping Out, Lifestyle and Younger Veterans Lifestyle residential programs. We also provide programs that cover a range of common mental health issues including anger and stress management, relationship issues, sleep and relaxation, and pain management. There has been an increase in the number of younger veterans accessing VVCS in NSW and ACT in the recent years.

In response to this we are tailoring some of the workshops to accommodate the needs of the younger veterans and their families.

The first Operation *Life* safeTALK workshop was held in Lismore recently. Local ESO representatives got on board with VVCS staff to network and promote the workshop which contributed to its success. Further workshops across the region are being planned.

### Video-counselling

The VVCS team in Sydney are involved in the exciting, new video-counselling pilot project. This initiative enables veterans living in selected rural and remote areas of NSW and WA to access VVCS counselling services via the use of video conferencing.

Veterans and their families who live in Orange, Dubbo, Inverell, Glen Innes and surrounding areas can now access counselling support from their regional locations. Counselling sessions are held using a secure, confidential video network with a Sydney-based counsellor. Participants are able to see, hear and interact with each other just like a face-to-face counselling session.

Counsellors from Sydney recently travelled to the pilot sites to view the equipment and promote the new service to local ESOs and community support agencies. Feedback from those accessing the service has been very positive and there are now plans to expand the pilot project over the next 12 months.

For more information about VVCS services and programs, or for counselling assistance, contact us on 1800 011 046.

**Ann Lewis**  
**Director**  
**VVCS NSW/ACT**

## Spring into Summer

Most of us let our exercise routines slip a bit over the winter months – selected ski bunnies and fitness gurus excepted. Studies confirm that shorter days, less sunshine and colder temperatures translate to less physical activity in most of the general population. But whatever you did (or didn't) do over winter – forget about it. Its time to emerge from hibernation mode and move on....literally!

Spring is all about new beginnings, so it's the perfect time to re-prioritise and place physical activity higher on your to-do list.

### Take advantage of all that daylight.

- Active transport gets easier as the days get longer and warmer – try riding or walking to work, or walking your kids to school.
- Get to know your area – almost every suburb or town has reserves and trails nearby that often go unexplored. Contact your local council or tourism board to scout out new places for walks or bike rides.
- Try a team sport, even if you've never played before.
- Create a garden.

### Get a motivation boost.

- Find other people to exercise with – if someone else is depending on you, you'll be less likely to bail.
- Pick an event to train for – even if you're not competitive, having a goal can help keep you on track.
- Get a pedometer – research shows people who track their steps actually do take more.
- Write down what you do – ditto the above.



### HOW MUCH?

**Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week – or more.**

**If you're trying to slim down, aim for an hour most days – and try to make it weight bearing, such as walking.**

**Maintain your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing – register for a VVCS program today!**

We have a range of group programs that are designed to help you live and maintain a happier and healthier life.

- **Relaxation & Sleep** – come along and learn through a series of simple exercises how to keep stress at bay.
- **Anger Management** – control your anger rather than letting it control you. Get support and learn strategies to manage your anger.
- **Heart Health** – aims to help you increase your physical health and wellbeing through practical exercise, nutrition and lifestyle management support (veterans & peacekeepers only).

**CHANGING THE MIX ALCOHOL CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM – a self-paced program that will give you the skills to change your drinking patterns from the comfort and privacy of your own home. To register call 1800 1808 68.**

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!



**Getting along with family members is often difficult, as the past can have an impact on our current relationships. To move beyond it, we need to understand how our communication with family members has developed, and how we could improve our way of communicating.**

Military training is one of the many factors which can contribute to some of the difficulties ex-service members may have communicating with their family and friends. For example, some may believe there is one 'right way' to do things and at times react angrily towards seemingly small events, due to being trained to be ready to 'fight'. Some may find they tend to focus on the practical part of the problem rather than the emotional or relationship elements.

When a person is experiencing depression, anxiety or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) they may have less energy to work on their relationships. Whether their condition is short or long-term, difficulties with

sleep, low mood and irritability generally affect relationships. Understanding these effects helps friends and family not to take this behaviour personally. However, having a mental health issue does not excuse inappropriate anger, which needs to be controlled no matter what the cause is. Physical illness can also impact on relationships in a similar manner to mental health problems. Sometimes people use alcohol or substances to cope with physical and psychological difficulties and this has a negative effect on their relationships and actually increases symptoms in the long run.

This list below outlines communication techniques that we can choose to improve relationships with family members:

- **Choose a time and place** to talk when you won't be disturbed and when both are willing to talk.
- **Talk when not highly emotional** such as when you are feeling strong anger, fear, resentment and sadness. It is much more effective to deal with conflict once your emotions have settled.
- **Use 'time outs' as needed.** If either person becomes emotional, or if the argument gets too heated, have a break and resume when both parties have cooled down. Undertake some constructive and calming activity during the break, which may need to be up to 24 hours.
- **Be respectful** through listening, body language and your tone of voice. Try not to criticise, be defensive, call names or use sarcasm, and if you do occasionally fall back into these old habits, apologise and begin again.
- **Attack the problem, not the person.** Own your part of the problem and use 'I' and 'We' statements rather than 'You', which sounds blaming and creates defensive responses. For example, "when you do that I feel hurt" rather than "You're such an idiot, you always do that!"
- **Stay on the subject.** Handle one problem at a time and do not bring up past mistakes.

## Could you and your partner benefit from time to re-discover how to connect and improve your relationship and lifestyle?

For many veterans and members of the ADF, time away from home on deployment or training can be stressful. The high tempo of ADF life can also create demands and stresses on families especially partners.

Twelve months ago, Glen and Sandra felt that their relationship was feeling the strain, they wanted to improve their communication, mutual understanding and sharing of activities. They had been married for five years, but felt they were drifting apart and needed to become more aware of each other's needs and wants.

Glen and Sandra decided to contact WVCS to talk about their situation. After their initial visit to a WVCS counsellor, they decided they wanted to make time to improve their relationship and lifestyle and enrolled in the **Residential Lifestyle Program**. This is a residential course over five days, designed for veterans and members of the ADF, and their partners. It provides participants with strategies to improve their relationships, communication and stress management skills.

Over the five days Glen and Sandra focussed on each other and learned about:

- communication skills for couple relationships;
- stress management including relaxation skills;
- impact of military service;
- anger management strategies;
- conflict resolution and problem solving skills;
- enhancing your self esteem; and
- practical advice on health and nutrition.

Glen and Sandra discovered the benefits of a healthier lifestyle and gained skills for communicating more effectively with their family and their wider social network. Glen and Sandra felt they had re-energised their relationship and gained great social benefits in meeting other couples. Glen has recently enrolled in the 12 month **Heart Health Program** with some of the men from the course.

If you would like to know more about the program, or to register, contact WVCS on 1800 011 046.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT! continued

- **Take turns speaking.** Listen to each other and don't interrupt. If it is a family member you are talking to, listen to them as you would a good friend, being open and willing to hear.
- **Don't mind-read.** Don't assume you know what the other person is thinking; ask them and listen with an open mind.
- **Try to see things from the other person's point of view,** as if you were walking in their shoes. This does not mean you understand or agree. When you do this, you open the door for the same in return, to be heard

- **Repeat what you have heard,** as feedback allows clearer understanding for both sides.

Remember, conflict is a part of all relationships and these skills take practice. Just reading about this today increases your awareness. All relationships require work and attention.

Do you want to improve your relationships? WVCS provides counselling for individuals, couples and families as well as group programs aimed at improving communication and lifestyle skills.

Register now – call WVCS on **1800 011 046**

## VVCS – National Advisory Committee



Whilst I am sure that every reader of this newsletter is familiar with the origins of what was then the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service (VVCS), I am not so sure that they will be equally familiar with a body that was established at the same time – the National Advisory Committee (NAC) to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. The role of the NAC was to advise the Minister on the establishment and operation of the counselling service and offer other advice on staff appointments, selection of sites for centres and other relevant matters. Like the VVCS itself, the NAC has continued to grow and its role is now much wider than simply providing an advisory function to the administrators of the VVCS.

In April 2009 I was invited by Minister Griffin to take over as Chairman of the NAC from Mr Brian McKenzie who was standing down after eight years of dedicated service to the Committee. After recently retiring from 28 years of service with the ADF (the last six in Canberra as Director-General and Head of the Defence Health Services) I was delighted to accept the offer. I am passionate about the need for our servicemen and women to receive the very best in mental health support both during their service and in the years that follow. In 2002 the ADF introduced the ADF Mental Health Strategy which has lifted the profile of mental health and wellbeing to heights never before seen. It is equally important that DVA refine and develop the mental health services that it delivers to the veteran community.

The NAC has nine permanent and four ex-officio members and meets formally three times per year. NAC members come from a wide range of backgrounds with representatives from the veteran community, peacekeepers/peacemakers, and partners and children of veterans. There is also representation by eminent General Practice and Mental Health specialists along with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO). The Committee is united by an extremely strong link – a total commitment to enhancing the wellbeing of our clients. I find it a real honour to be working with such people.

During the three formal meetings held around Australia each year, one day is devoted to consultation meetings with stakeholders, clients and VVCS staff. These meetings provide the critical information needed for the NAC to develop recommendations that can be made to the Minister to assist him in ensuring DVA delivers services that are relevant and effective. Whilst past consultation forums have been extremely useful, attendances have not been large and I invite you to help lift the profile of NAC in your community and encourage people to attend the forums in their regions.

As I explore my way around this new challenge I never cease to be amazed at the dedication, professionalism and commitment of the staff of the VVCS. On behalf of the NAC I invite all VVCS staff and clients to work with us to make VVCS an even stronger and more effective organisation.

Dr Tony Austin AM  
Chairman, NAC

## VVCS receives a positive tick for Quality

**Veterans and their families receiving services through VVCS can be assured that VVCS has been recognised and accredited, as a national organisation, for its quality of practice and service standards. This achievement has been possible due to the commitment of VVCS staff and the participation of the ex-service community in a review that demonstrated how VVCS meets explicit standards in delivery of mental health services to the veteran and defence communities.**



Ms Rebecca Smith, CEO of QMS and Mr David Morton, National Manager, VVCS.

Rebecca Smith, CEO of Quality Management Systems (QMS) presented accreditation certificates to VVCS during a formal presentation held in Adelaide on 22 September 2009. Attendees included the DVA Acting Deputy Commissioner of South Australia Mr Malcolm Uhe, the local VVCS team and key members of the South Australian ex-service community. The National Manager and centre Directors accepted certificates on behalf of their local teams.

During her presentation, Rebecca made reference to VVCS' commitment to continuous improvement as demonstrated by the success of achieving our third round of accreditation. She praised VVCS for the quality of its preparation and in demonstrating our commitment to building quality organisations, providing quality services and programs to the veteran community and in sustaining quality external relationships.

It was noted that this time VVCS and QMS embarked on a national process of accreditation as a direct result of consultation with QMS and the two previous experiences. Rebecca stated that some of the factors that made this approach such a positive and successful experience was the whole of organisation approach with VVCS only having to prepare one Quality Journal and, having consistent membership of the review teams, including the QMS external team and the internal national VVCS team. Good communication and ongoing liaison between QMS and VVCS at both national and centre levels also played an integral part of this achievement.

She especially expressed her gratitude for the welcome and support extended to the QMS team at each location and for the generous participation from the ex-service community.

## VVCS IN FOCUS

**DID YOU KNOW....in the period June – August 2009**

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**2692 people approached VVCS for counselling**

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**3577 people received counselling from VVCS**

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**127 group programs were held across Australia with 1061 people participating**

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**In the last 12 months, 480 couples attended the Residential Lifestyle Program across Australia**

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**In the last financial year 714 couples attended VVCS for relationship counselling**

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**The four most common reasons for attending VVCS counselling (at presentation) are:**

**Depression  
Relationship concerns  
Family relationships  
Anxiety**

## VVCS HOBART IS MOVING .....

From the 23 November 2009, you will find VVCS located at 254 – 286 Liverpool Street Hobart Tas 7000

The new contact numbers are:

**(03) 6221 6777**  
Listed Directory Number  
(main number)

**(03) 6221 6779**  
new Fax number

## 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.

**VVCS Adelaide**  
99 Frome Street  
Adelaide SA 5000  
savvcs@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Darwin**  
2 Chung Wah Terrace  
Palmerston NT 0830  
vcsnt@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Maroochydore**  
129 Horton Parade  
Maroochydore QLD 4558  
vcssouthqld@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Southport**  
12 Short Street  
Southport Qld 4215  
vcssouthqld@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Albury/Wodonga**  
81 Hume Street  
Wodonga VIC 3690  
vcsvic@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Hobart**  
254-286 Liverpool Street  
Hobart TAS 7000  
vcsnhobart@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Melbourne**  
Level 4, 440 Elizabeth Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
vcsvic@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Sydney**  
88 Philip Street,  
Ground Floor  
Parramatta NSW 2150  
vcsnsw@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Brisbane**  
15 Astor Terrace  
Spring Hill QLD 4000  
vcssouthqld@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Launceston**  
29 Elphin Road  
Launceston TAS 7250  
vcs launceston@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Newcastle**  
Unit 1/8 Auckland Street  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
vcsnsw@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Townsville**  
Nathan Business Centre  
340 Ross River Road  
Cranbrook QLD 4814  
vcstownsville@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Canberra**  
6-8 Campion Street  
Deakin ACT 2600  
vcscanbreg@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Lismore**  
Office 6, Lvl 1 Conway Court  
(Entrance: Molesworth St)  
17 Conway Street  
Lismore NSW 2480  
vcsnsw@dva.gov.au

**VVCS Perth**  
7 Kintail Road  
Applecross WA 6153  
vcswa@dva.gov.au

## Contacting the VVCS News team

If you would like to receive the VVCS newsletter electronically, contact the News Team by email [vvcsnews@dva.gov.au](mailto:vvcsnews@dva.gov.au)

### Subscribing to the VVCS Newsletter

If you wish to update or be removed from the VVCS newsletter distribution list, contact the News Team [vvcsnews@dva.gov.au](mailto:vvcsnews@dva.gov.au) or (02) 6225 4680.

You can also download a copy of our newsletter from our website

[www.dva.gov.au/health\\_and\\_wellbeing/health\\_programs/vvcs/Pages/national\\_newsletters.aspx](http://www.dva.gov.au/health_and_wellbeing/health_programs/vvcs/Pages/national_newsletters.aspx)

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