



VETERANS' HEALTH WEEK 2023

Many Paths to **Positive Mental Health & Wellbeing**

An extract of personal experiences from our Veterans' community to help promote good health and wellbeing and shine a light on the importance of mental wellness.

“Personally, I’ve found taking time for oneself, spending quality time with family, and engaging in regular exercise to be effective in managing stress and mental health.”

JOSH CASEY
RHEINMETALL Australia



HEALTHPATH

“During my time in the military, I served in the Australian Army as a RAEME Vehicle Mechanic. My deployment took me to Afghanistan with the SOTG 14/15. Beyond my service, I have a range of hobbies and interests, including riding motorbikes, hiking, and shooting.

Transitioning to civilian life was relatively smooth for me as I landed a job in the mining industry in remote Western Australia, where many fellow veterans were already working and they provided valuable support during my transition. My advice to other veterans facing health or well-being challenges is to find a hobby or sport that keeps both their body and mind active.

While I can't share specific experiences highlighting the importance of maintaining physical and mental health as a veteran, I believe that each veteran's journey is unique, and coping strategies vary. Personally, I've found taking time for oneself, spending quality time with family, and engaging in regular exercise to be effective in managing stress and mental health. Although I haven't been involved in any veteran support networks or programs myself, I recognize the importance of such resources for those who may benefit from them.”

“To manage stress and mental health, the support of fellow veterans, my children, friends, and workmates are valuable pillars of strength.”

BRENNAN (BJ) SMITH
RHEINMETALL Australia



HEALTHPATH

“Brennan (BJ) Smith served in both the Australian Army and the Australian Airforce during his military career. In the Army, he worked as an Infantryman, while in the Airforce, he served as an Airforce Supplier and his military service included deployments to various operations. In 2003, he was part of Operation Anode in the Solomon Islands, where he spent eight months. Following that, in 2004 and 2005, he participated in Operation Catalyst in Iraq, with deployments lasting for six months on various occasions.

Outside of his military duties, BJ has a range of hobbies and interests. He enjoys mountain biking and spending quality time camping with his family and friends. Additionally, he actively supports other veterans and their families in his free time.

Transitioning from military life to civilian life was a challenging journey for BJ. He described the military as a well-structured environment where tasks were highly organised and rank-dependent. Adapting to civilian life, which required multi-skilling and flexibility, took some time. He emphasized the importance of self-belief and taking proactive steps to upskill, leveraging available support organisations, and maintaining a strong support network.

When asked for advice to struggling veterans, BJ urged them to reach out for help and be grateful for the support they receive. He stressed the significance of not exploiting people's goodwill and encouraged veterans to support each other, highlighting that they are not alone in their journey. BJ shared the critical importance of maintaining physical and mental health as a veteran, noting that neglecting these aspects can lead to mental health issues, symbolized as the "Black Dog." To manage stress and mental health, BJ mentioned the support of fellow veterans, his children, friends, and workmates as valuable pillars of strength. He also emphasized the acceptance of having challenging days.

BJ has been actively involved in various veteran support networks and programs, with some providing more effective assistance than others, depending on individual needs and headspace. He proudly collaborates with the RDA VEP committee and is dedicated to giving back the support and friendship he has received from the veteran community.”



“For veterans facing challenges with their health or well-being, I advise seeking employment in a defence-related company as it offers a familiar environment and often employs veterans.”

GREG FRANKEL
RHEINMETALL Australia

HEALTHPATH

“Greg served in the Australian Army for 31 years as a member of the Armoured Corps, specialising in M113 and ASLAV vehicles. During his military career, he deployed on Operation Solace to Somalia for a duration of 6 months. Beyond his military service, Greg has a diverse range of hobbies and interests, including fly fishing, shooting and gold prospecting.

Transitioning to civilian life has been smooth for him, describing it as a “soft landing” because he now works in a defence-related company with a team composed mostly of fellow ex-servicemen, some of who he had served with in the Army.

For veterans facing challenges with their health or well-being, Greg advises seeking employment in a defence-related company as it offers a familiar environment and often employs veterans. Fortunately, Greg has not personally experienced any health issues or stress related to his military service.

Although he hasn’t been involved in veteran support networks or programs, his story highlights the importance of a supportive work environment and camaraderie among veterans in easing the transition to civilian life and maintaining overall well-being.”

"I personally cope with stress and mental health by keeping busy or enjoying caravanning and camping with my family."

DAVE PATERSON
RHEINMETALL Australia



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David served in the Air Force as an Armament Technician for Fast Jets, specifically working with F/A-18A/B Classic Hornets, F/A-18F Super Hornets, and E/A-18G Growler. During his service, he took part in Operation Okra twice, engaged in multiple Red Flag exercises, and spent six months at Naval Air Weapon Station conducting kinetic and non-kinetic weapon testing. Outside of work, David has a variety of hobbies and interests, including fishing, camping, 4WD, geopolitics, and investing.

Transitioning from military life to civilian life was smooth for David as he moved straight to a role in the defence industry, which allowed him to maintain effective communication with the customer and stay close to the defence community. His advice to other veterans struggling with their health or well-being is to stay busy and stay connected to the defence or defence industry to maintain the connection they once cherished.

David emphasizes the importance of maintaining physical and mental health as a veteran. He personally copes with stress and mental health by keeping busy or enjoying caravanning and camping with his family. While David hasn't been involved in veteran support networks or programs himself, he shares valuable insights into the importance of finding activities and connections that provide support and well-being for veterans in their civilian lives.



“Building a robust support network was vital, a lifeline that helped me navigate the turbulence of post-service life. Seek help and never give up.”

MATT BURFORD
RHEINMETALL Australia

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“Matt’s life journey takes on a profound mental health focus, showcasing his resilience and the challenges he faced along the way. Having dedicated over a decade to the Australian Army, Matt’s role as a Cavalry Crew Commander, Gunner and Driver in the Armoured Corps was not without its intense demands. His deployments to East Timor, totalling 10 months added layers of stress and emotional strain to his experiences. Even during an exchange program in New Zealand, he confronted danger head on.

Yet, Matt’s mental fortitude shone brightly during his transition to civilian life, as he faced the unique challenges that often accompany military veterans. His commitment to sharing his experiences and educating others about the military lifestyle became a cornerstone of his healing process. In his journey, he discovered that building a robust support network was vital, a lifeline that helped him navigate the turbulence of post-service life.

Matt’s advice to fellow veterans, grounded in his own experience, underscores the importance of seeking help and never giving up. He knows that despite ones best efforts, the battle with mental health issues can be relentless. Matt’s story serves as a testament to the enduring strength of those who have served and their ability to overcome the mental health challenges that arise from such service.”



“Talk to someone.

I believe that both physical and mental health are crucial for veterans and require daily attention.”

PAUL BROADFOOT
RHEINMETALL Australia

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“Paul served in the Royal Australian Navy as a Submariner during his time in the Defence Force. Despite his service, he didn’t experience any deployments. Outside of work, Paul enjoys golf and fishing as his hobbies. His transition from military to civilian life was abrupt, as he mentioned, “When I was discharged, there was no transition; your time is up, see you later.”

However, Paul emphasizes the importance of seeking support and sharing feelings, stating, “Talk to someone, real men do cry and have feelings.” Paul believes that both physical and mental health are crucial for veterans and require daily attention.

When it comes to managing stress, he advises taking a step back and taking time for oneself in stressful situations. While Paul hasn’t been involved in any veteran support networks or programs himself, his insights highlight the significance of mental health and the importance of seeking help when needed.”

“The Veteran Engagement Program at Rheinmetall assisted me during challenging times, offered advice, and provided a source of support in my career.”

DREW GOSSAGE
RHEINMETALL Australia



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Drew served in the Australian Army as a Vehicle Mechanic during his time in the Defence Force. Although he did not have any deployment experiences or specific operations, Drew shared his diverse set of hobbies and interests outside of work, which included spending time with his family, going on day adventures with his partner and four young kids, reading, engaging in real estate, and tinkering in his garage, especially with anything related to computers and movies.

When it came to transitioning from military life to civilian life, Drew found it initially challenging, especially in connecting with people who couldn't relate to his experiences. However, he realized that forging deeper bonds with those who understood him was essential. To other veterans facing health or well-being struggles, Drew advised finding a healthy outlet and distraction to cope with challenges.

Drew emphasized the importance of maintaining physical and mental health as a veteran, highlighting that maintaining physical health from military routines can help ease the transition into civilian life and provide something to look forward to daily. Taking care of physical health can, in turn, contribute to better mental health.

In terms of managing stress and mental health, Drew offered two effective strategies. First, he emphasized the power of humour in improving morale, breaking down barriers, and building trust among teams. Second, Drew shared that having four kids had been one of the best things for his mental health, describing the joy of experiencing their milestones and the comfort of their hugs.

Regarding veteran support networks or programs, Drew mentioned his involvement in the VEP (Veteran Engagement Program) at Rheinmetall, which he found immensely beneficial. He noted that the program assisted him during challenging times, offered advice, and provided a source of support in his career. Drew credited the program and its members for being a key reason he remained with the company for nearly seven years.



“Programs, such as With You With Me, counselling services, and RDA have been beneficial in aiding my transition and well-being as a veteran.”

DEAN PETHERICK
RHEINMETALL Australia



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“Dean served in the Navy during his time in the military. His role was in Weapons Electrical Engineering, a crucial and specialized field. He had the opportunity to deploy to various locations worldwide, including the Gulf region, as part of different operations. Outside of work, Dean has interests in history and spending time with his kids.

His transition from military life to civilian life has been gradual, and he emphasizes the importance of patience and resilience during this transition. Dean's advice to other veterans facing health or well-being challenges is to stay mentally active, maintain self-belief, and seek support when needed.

Dean has a wealth of experiences highlighting the importance of physical and mental health for veterans, although he mentions that listing them all would be quite extensive. In managing stress and mental health, he suggests being patient with civilians, as effective communication is key to mutual understanding.

Dean has actively been involved in veteran support networks and programs, such as "With You With Me," counselling services, and RDA (possibly referring to the Rehabilitation and Development Agency). These programs have been beneficial in aiding his transition and well-being as a veteran.”



"I believe that maintaining physical and mental health is crucial for veterans, making both small and big challenges more manageable."

PETER FORDYCE
RHEINMETALL Australia

HEALTHPATH

Peter served in the Australian Army as an apprentice of the 46th class, joining in January 1991 and receiving a medical discharge in May 2001. During his time in the military, he primarily worked in RASIGS as an Electronics Tech and Cypher tech. Peter had deployment experience in Bougainville in 1997 as part of the Truce Monitoring Group, spending four months there.

Outside of work, his passion lies in old steam engines. Transitioning from military to civilian life hasn't been without its challenges for Peter, as he describes it as difficult at times, but he continues to persevere. His advice to fellow veterans facing similar struggles is to reach out and talk to a mate or any fellow veteran, emphasizing the unique camaraderie within the veteran community.

Peter believes that maintaining physical and mental health is crucial for veterans, making both small and big challenges more manageable. He finds solace in working with a Cadet unit, which provides a sense of belonging and happiness akin to his military experience. While Peter didn't specify his involvement in veteran support networks or programs, he highlights the importance of finding a supportive community in one's post-military life.



If you have any questions please contact:

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