

ADVOCACY, ENTITLEMENTS AND SUPPORT (AES) SPOT¹

Introduction

I opened my last AES Spot with the trite observation that, as far as veteran and family support is concerned, *'we live in exciting times'*. Let's further explore why.

Extension of Care and Support Programs

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs has announced that the Commonwealth has extended the Non-Liability Health Care (NLHC) and Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) programs. In future, for any personnel who had served one day in the full-time ADF, NLHC cover would be available, and VVCS services and support would be available to their partners and children.

Transition

Discussions with veterans and newer ex-service organisations highlight a couple of considerations that are worth writing about. No criticism of the Services is either intended or implied. The evidence suggests that some ADF members have been discharged administratively when medical discharge may have been appropriate, and others' separation is not being held in abeyance (HIA) long enough.

The upshot is that some discharged personnel are seeking retrospective consideration of their mode of separation to medically unfit, while others are in crisis. In either case, support that would have otherwise been accessed has not been.

The Defence Community Organisation provides a wide range of services for Defence families, including crisis support. Qualified social workers, psychologists and other human-services professionals staff the 24/7 Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608), providing assessment, assistance or referral for illness or injury, bereavement, financial emergency, or domestic violence.

ADF Transition Centres have been established at most major ADF establishments across the country. Each Centre is staffed by uniformed members of the three Services of the ranks of Warrant Officer to Major (E). The locations and contact details of the Centres are accessible at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Transition/Default.asp>

Conversations with younger veterans underlines how deeply many are affected by the loss or structure, purpose and comradeship they experienced on separation. The dimensions of their experience are exacerbated for those who have separated without the support that is available. Whether the cause is unawareness of the support available, their own decision, or a failure of command is moot. The enormity of the issue is clear.

Two registered charities that have been established to alleviate the problem provide the data. Veterans 360 Australia Ltd <http://v360.org.au/> cites estimates that, on any one night around 3,000 ADF veterans are sleeping in conditions that the ABS classifies as 'homeless'. A VOTSA (Veterans of the Streets Australia Ltd) <https://www.votsa.org.au/> volunteer talks in terms of personally providing crisis support for around 300 veterans. Few of these veterans were supported during transition. Although entitled to an MSBS Disability Pension, they had not applied for one before separation. Others were not held in abeyance long enough for claims for liability to be lodged with DVA.

Advocacy Training and Development

There have been some significant advances in ATDP over the last six months. I'll bring you up to speed on some of the main one.

10620NAT Course in Military Advocacy

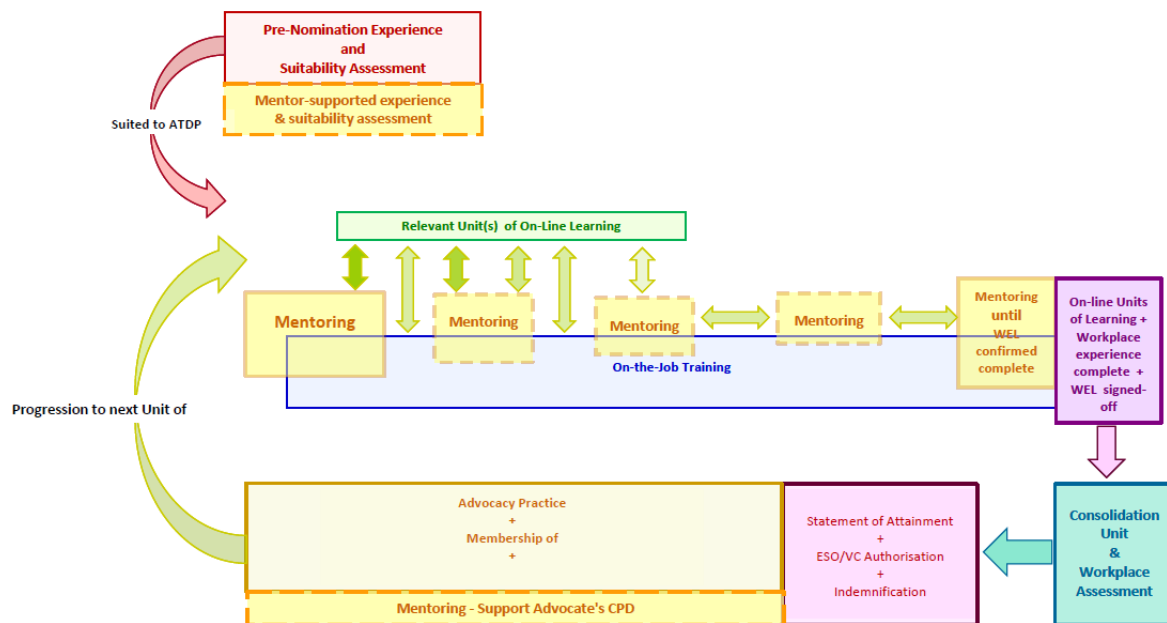
¹ Article was prepared by R.N. (Dick) Kelloway, National VP AES, Level 4 Compensation and Level 2 Welfare Advocate.

The Advocacy Training and Development Program took a giant leap forward on 28 April with accreditation by ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority) of 10620NAT Course in Military Advocacy. In anticipation, ATDP has been conducting RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) for TIP-trained Level 2 Welfare and Pension Officers.

To date around 100 welfare officer and 150 pension officers have completed RPL and will shortly receive a VET-legislated Statement of Attainment at Level 2 for Military Advocacy. Around 175 of those completing RPL have volunteered for training as Mentors. RPL is planned for Compensation Advocates Level 3 (VRB) later in 2017 and Level 4 (AAT) in mid-2018. An ASQ-accreditation requirement is that competence be demonstrated at one level of competency before seeking assessment of competency at the next level.

To remind, ATDP moves advocacy training at welfare and pension officer Levels 1 and 2 from a list of face-to-face courses to a learning pathway that engages adult-learning principles (learning that integrates experience with further learning at your own pace, in your own way). Each unit-of-learning involves on-line course material (10% of learning), on-the-job experience (70%) supported by a trained mentor (20%), face-to-face consolidation and workplace assessment. Assessment as competent provides any ESO the confidence that it can authorise the advocate to provide services in its name, and the VITA insurer the assurance that its risk is consistent with its terms of indemnification.

A flow chart depicting the learning pathway at each level of competency follows.



Role of ESO Executive

You'll see on the flowchart that ESO Executives acquire a significant responsibility under ATDP to provide workplace experience and assess the suitability of candidates for advocacy training. Trained ATDP mentors will support you through this process; but the decision is yours as if you are a RAAFA Branch President.

The objective is not to make it more difficult to become an advocate. Rather, it is to ensure that those who are trained are motivated and have the capacity to meet the professional standards that underpin ATDP. To put the need into context. Military advocacy is a DVA-funded program. The Government requires that the 'best bang is obtained for the buck'.

Mentors

As you'll also see on the flowchart, mentors provide support across the full range of advocacy activities. Not shown on the diagram are facilitation of Communities of Practice and assurance of the quality of advocacy services delivered to DVA clients. Mentoring is not only critical to improving advocacy services, but is also going to be professionally demanding and time-consuming. Understandably, the coat must be cut according to the cloth; however, those who mentor will have a high level of motivation and expertise.

Young Veterans' Membership

RAAFA has been working on the need to increase membership as our older members – as John Gillespie McGee alluded – *'Put out [their] hand, and touch the face of God.'* Clearly, the younger cohorts of RAAF-ies are a prime target. Equally clearly, there is no single attractor.

Meetings by RAAFA executives with serving personnel at Richmond, Williamstown and Amberley and regular monitoring of Facebook suggest one possible way. Younger veterans care about each other and use social media extensively to keep in touch. Whenever a mate is in difficulty, her/his mates rally round. Narratives about how one coped with a similar experience is exchanged freely. So too is information about entitlements and advice – regrettably, incorrect or misconstrued in too many cases.

The psychological ramifications of bad advice are no less severe than the damage that is being done by the rants on Facebook about DVA. In the context of crisis support, the need for sound advice suggests a way forward. The proceedings of a young veterans' forum in 2015 are also supportive. Participants at the latter stated strongly that they wanted a course in crisis response (triage). They wanted to help their mates better.

This presents RAAFA with an opportunity that may lead to membership. We could encourage serving and separated RAAF personnel to work with RAAFA ATDP-trained mentors to provide informed advice in cases of crisis. The ATDP Pre-nomination stage could be utilised in this way, presenting a value-add for RAAFA – suitability for advocacy training could be assessed.

Conclusions

All service organisations are facing challenges of relevance and membership. RAAFA could meet its challenges with a comprehensive environmental scan. Advocacy and support bring opportunities and threats, strengths and weaknesses to the strategic planning table.

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