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VETERANS SHED INC.**
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Submission to Task Force on Abuse in the ADF

Background and History.

My name is Barry Heffernan and I am a Vietnam Veteran.
I have the Welfare Coordinator's role at the Vietnam Veteran's Association in South Australia, which is a purely voluntary position.

I have a background in the area of Pensions and moved to the Welfare side because I saw so many Veterans such as myself who had been allocated a pension through DVA who were never followed up and asked how their lives were evolving since receiving their support.

I began hearing stories from Veterans and their families about how their health would deteriorate and it seemed that there was really nobody with a similar background who could relate their experiences and offer first hand advice, rather than go to the Department (DVA) and talk to someone "who hadn't been there".
So Welfare became my thing.

Some four or five years ago I received a call from a man who was pleading for someone to listen to him because he had "been everywhere and nobody was interested in his story"
I agreed to meet with him and see if we could do anything to make his situation more tolerable.

His story was one of pain and suffering as he told how his life from the age of 15 years had tumbled as a result of sexual assault and abuse he had received after he joined the Navy and been posted to HMAS Leeuwin in Western Australia.
He told stories of how each evening he and a couple of his friends were repeatedly beaten and humiliated by older recruits and how irrespective of obvious wounds and other telltale signs, those who should have shown a duty of care had continued to ignore the torture these "children" were enduring.
In this man's case he claimed to have been raped by up to five recruits using a broom handle and then masturbating into a soft drink can and making him drink it.

I felt ill as I listened and after I had completed my interview with "N" I decided to visit DVA and ask whether support was available for this man as a result of his claims.

Still serving shoulder to shoulder

I was horrified with the reply I received from the person at DVA who said that there was nothing they could do because “he didn’t report it “
I said to her that he had a “broomstick inside him “ and asked her what she would have done in the same situation and soon just turned and walked away disgusted that a country who supposedly looks after those who choose to serve it, could just ignore such incredible abuse.

I contacted Senator Nick Xenophon who met with “N ” and then called a press conference to gain an idea of how widespread this abuse may be.
We were both horrified when answers came back from all over Australia that ours was not the only incident and this was rife, in particular at HMAS Leeuwin.
The rest of this is history.

At much the same time a cadet from Duntroon claimed to have had sex with another cadet and it seemed that the supposedly clean fabric of the ADF was being shown to be tarnished so the Defence Minister decided to call for several reports into various forms of abuses and low standards of behaviour in the ADF.
As I said earlier, the rest is history.

Massive amounts of money were thrown at these problems and all sorts of accusations were made and a legal company, DLA Piper, who appear to be the legal arm of Defence advertised for those with stories of abuse to come forward.

My Observations of the DLA Piper process.

Both Senator Xenophon and myself were inundated with stories of abuse and the resultant effects on the lives of so many people, who now I refer to as “victims”

To have victims, both male and female from all over Australia contacting me and saying that after all of these years at last someone was going to take notice then hearing them break down as they told of how they in many cases had they lost their families and drifted into alcoholism and other self abuse because it was too difficult to explain their experiences.

Men and women who were alcoholics could not hold down jobs nor hold together a relationship because of their past experiences came forward and told their stories. .
With all of this in mind, I became more and more horrified and critical of the lack of compassion shown to these victims when they were sent six sheets of A4 paper asking them to relate their experiences during their time in the ADF.
Surely I thought, that with all of the publicity in the media about this abuse, these victims deserved to be treated with more dignity than this.

As this process rolled on I became increasingly aware of the problems which the victims were facing in having to complete their life story on six pieces of paper and then send this to someone who they didn’t know, had never spoken with or met with no guarantee of security and confidentiality.

I will now place a list of problems I found were faced by those who did complete this supposed “questionnaire”.

I question the ability of a victim to accurately recall incidents and times leading up to their abuse after, in many cases after such a long time.

I question the ability of a victim to unemotionally and clearly, recall incidents. These people have for many years been trying to put these incidents behind them not thinking that one day they may be called on to fill in a two inch square box for someone to judge.

I question the repercussions to a victim's mental state when he or she has to recall their experiences ,for what?

I understand their fear of possible retribution from their attacker as this information is brought forward.

It should be remembered that many of these incidents were never reported because of the fear of further abuse and assault and in some cases, the threat of death.

As I said earlier, there was no guarantee of security for these replies. Did these forms just sit, on some one's desk out in the open and in view of every one who wandered past?

I am very critical of the lack of immediate support which should have been offered to someone who showed the courage to come forward.

Was anyone, such as a trained psychologist reading between the lines and querying the mental state of each victim?

Did anyone follow up with an offer of support?

I question at the time of their attack, who was the "right" person to report to?

Were the recruits told initially, when I assume they were issued with a list of the rules of the place, and given the past history of Leeuwin, who to report such problems of bullying to.?

No?

These were just 15 year old kids

Why am I not surprised?

Following the attacks, why were the incidents which should have or may even have been reported, not followed through to protect the victim or the abuser?

My Observations of the DLA Piper process in handling complaints.

As I commented earlier, I have grave questions about the way each of the victim's replies were treated when received.

I am also critical of the initial numbers which were reported through the media. I ask how could numbers go from apparently around 1300 down to around 800 without anyone actually meeting with and speaking to the victims in a bid to understand the real problems which were being experienced as a result of their abuse?

I recall that the government referred to these claims as "plausible" claims.

How can anyone seriously determine something as being plausible without actually speaking to the person who made the claim?

This just goes to strengthening my claim that both the DLA Piper report basing it's figures on these results and the way that they were achieved, just lacks credibility.

Further to that, I would claim that this Task Force, claiming that it is "independent," but using Piper's figures and the way they have been culled, cannot again claim to be totally "independent"

The cynical side of me asks whether each reply was given a mark out of ten?

To expect people to open up their lives and talk about their tragic experiences to faceless and nameless people in some distant office is just fantasy.

To ask them to fill in a small box on an A4 sheet is just an insult.

This goes to strengthen my points on how I would have worked, had I been asked to provide a plan

I question the lack of apparent sincerity, security and concern for these statements made by so many people who live such tragic lives

I am referring to an article I saw in the media which showed a stack of paperwork, appearing to be out in the open in some office, which was claimed to be part of the many statements which had been submitted.

How would I have handled this situation had I have been approached?

Since I began dealing with "N " and many other victims of ADF Abuse, I have probably met with , spoken to, or had other forms of contact with over 200 victims, so I would go so far as to say that I had a pretty fair idea of the tragedies experienced by and the problems faced by the victims of abuse.

I have spoken to and appeared in various forms of the media over a period of several years on this subject.

I would have thought that at least that someone in Defence may have taken the time to contact me to ask my opinion on this matter.

Instead, the Defence Minister decided to allocate heaps of money at a few reports which just did not, in my opinion hit the right targets..

His decision to ask a company of lawyers who have absolutely no idea of the traumas experienced by over a thousand victims, to judge who is more deserving than someone else simply by looking at six sheets of paper filled in by people who still in many cases live in fear of their lives and still incapable of facing the outside community, to my mind is amazing to say the least.

I am still meeting people with these problems.

Had I had been approached I would have suggested the following solutions.

That with the knowledge I had learned about their plight, I would have suggested that I travel to these centres of victims I had discussed earlier and meet each individual.

Over the time I have found that people are happy to talk to me because “you have a Service background and you know what it’s like” which I have heard said so many times.

All that I would have asked is that my costs be paid, because I am TPI and I am not able to earn a salary.

I would have been more than happy to do it on that basis.

When DLA Piper initially placed the advertisements in the daily papers and the replies began to arrive, I would have asked that each reply be recorded geographically, obviously to allow a systematic follow up bases on areas.

That is, divided into states and then into districts and towns and when the numbers of replies had mounted significantly, I would have contacted the victims and set up an individual meeting with each of them and possibly a family member or two, to get a bit more of an idea just much the victim’s life had been affected by the abuse they had suffered.

I would have heard how the experiences suffered by each had led to such problems as unemployment, anti social behaviour, alcoholism and the usual mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and in turn suicidal attempts.

Imagine this, an embarrassed government showing actual compassion and even sincere interest in the suffering of people who signed on to serve their country..

In turn I would have, after each meeting provided an individual report to the Minister’s office on the condition of each of those I had spoken to.

Rather than throw “up to \$50K” to each victim, irrespective of their problem I would have given a more accurate view of what I really considered really needed in the short term to actually assist these people.

It may have even meant that the government initially provide something similar to a Gold Card to each to allow them to seek all sorts of specialist support and in turn possibly showing that the government DOES care and IS showing it.

I question how” up to \$50K” will assist an alcoholic to “move ahead”.

I question how ‘up to \$50K” will assist a person, who has developed a dependence on drugs, will be able to toss their habit.

I question the plight of the many families I have met with, whose son or daughter had experienced abuse during their term in the ADF,, and then have in turn experienced a nightmare life themselves as they try to cope with and tolerate years of abuse.

I question the value of “up to \$50K” to a person who now lives by themselves and who probably has severe mental problems with nobody to adequately look after their affairs.

To say that I am disgusted with this supposed show of support is an understatement. These poor people are the result of years of neglect by both sides of Commonwealth governments.

Back in the early 70's a Judge Rapke, released a report which gave a signal that all was not right at HMAS Leeuwin.

So what was done about it?

We are now paying for this neglect with these victims of abuse

I am amazed at the comments by General Hurley when he said that "none of this abuse goes on these days and that steps have been taken to eliminate what went on in the past."

He is kidding.

I can tell the General that I still receive stories from people who have been assaulted and abused in very recent times.

Irrespective of whether the General believes all is well or not, bastardisation and sexual assaults still exist.

Whether General Hurley says that the rules have changed and the goal posts have been moved or not, nothing much has altered.

Whether or not there are responsible people in place to listen to and act on reports of physical and sexual abuse, it still exists.

The biggest fear that exists is the fear of retribution, the fear of a life living in fear itself.

I still receive reports from people who are the targets of these attacks and threats.

I mentioned earlier that the other major group of victims involved because of the ADF Abuse problem, are the families and close friends of the victims.

I have lost count of the number of family members I have met with who have told some dreadful stories of the ways their son or daughter have treated them

In many cases the mother has had to become the "carer" in the situation leaving the father as the only breadwinner .

I have heard stories from people where they have had to give up their employment or change their work arrangements to help look after their victim son or daughter, through no fault of their own.

This is commonly referred to as the "Ripple Effect"

Because until now, no avenue of compensation has been available to victims, the hardships experienced by parents in particular, I believe should be examined and compensation provided on an individual basis.

I am aware that consideration is being given to families of abused children in the Royal Commission into abuse currently running in Victoria.

I can see no such avenue existing with this Task Force even though many Junior Ratings who applied to join the Navy and began at HMAS Leeuwin, were just 15 years of age, mere children..

I am also concerned that a closing date has arrived for applications to be received by the Task Force.

Having met many abuse victims and urged them to hand their details to myself or someone else to submit, I am aware that a lot have still not done that.

It is not just that they forgot but as members of this Task Force should realise, coming forward to many is a massive step and this just needs to be realised by this Inquiry.

Most have never until now, spoken about their ordeals and I am convinced that because of this reason, this Task Force should be open ended for the time being

My belief is just this.

If we are serious about reaching and assisting as many victims as possible and in turn getting as much value from the enormous amount of taxpayers money being put forward, encouraging as many as we can to step forward and has to be the main issue.

That is if we are really serious.

How should Abuse in the ADF be handled in the future?

As I have stated earlier, I am very aware that although we are told that all is well in the ADF, abuse is still rife.

I am now advocating the introduction of an Independent Ombudsman who will work without the interference of the ADF and investigate all reports of abuse and bastardisation anywhere in the ADF

This position could be filled by a person (a lawyer perhaps) who has a background of service within the ADF.

He or she will report directly to the Defence Minister's office and have the power to investigate any complaints without restraint from the ADF and have the power to discharge from the forces, any perpetrator found guilty of a crime and even have him or her later tried by a civilian court

Victims of abuse in the ADF should be able to contact this office without the fear of facing their alleged perpetrator or having he or she gaining access to the claims as has been available back in the earlier years..

I realise that this suggestion obviously requires long discussion but with all that has happened over many years and if the ADF is interested in seriously attracting numbers to it's ranks, then a suggestion such as mine should not be ignored.

Past history should tell that story.

Conclusion

In closing I would like to say that along with many victims and their families I witnessed the Defence Minister stand up in Parliament late last year and apologise, without warning, to all those who had suffered abuse over many years, in the ADF. He did it without any compassion and without warning, not allowing those who had suffered so many indignities, the opportunity to attend Parliament and listen. This seems at odds with other "apologies" where the victims were given ample notice of what was planned to occur..

The Minister should be ashamed of this pathetic effort to clean the slate. It went to prove that this government and many before it have absolutely no idea of the amount of suffering which has been prevalent over the years and during their respective watches.

Let me put it this way.

The governments of the day were the employers.

Thousands of their employees suffered serious injuries.

The governments of the day provided unsafe workplaces.

The employers were and are now culpable
What more is there left to say?

I hope that my submission will be read and taken notice of.
Sadly over the past four or five years I have met with many sad and damaged people, who had every intention of serving their country with dignity.

It has now come the point where each of those who signed on should be treated with the dignity that they deserve and properly compensated for their suffering..

B Barry Heffernan
Welfare Coordinator
Vietnam Veterans Association SA.

Shed Coordinator
William Kibby VC Veteran's Shed

COMBADAS – Community-Based Defence Abuse Support

SYNOPSIS

INTRODUCTION

- COMBADAS is a community-based and veteran self-supported initiative of, and an adjunct to, the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed (WKVCVS), and aims to provide far more than just a 'shed' environment for veterans.
- COMBADAS provides and encompasses a broad range of all-embracing programs and community-based enterprises aimed at providing support and ongoing care to members of the veteran community.
- COMBADAS is a multi-focal approach to working with ex-ADF members in the community who still suffer the effects of abuse while in the forces.
- COMBADAS is a major WKVCVS initiative, is a totally new and unique project in Australia, and provides multi-faceted support for ex-ADF members who have experienced abuse while serving their country, and who continue to live with the effects in civilian life. This is a distinctive and extremely timely enterprise
- COMBADAS supports both the veterans themselves, as well as their families, where required.

NEED FOR COMBADAS

- Many defence personnel have approached WKVCVS requesting assistance with issues related to abuse suffered during their service. COMBADAS has become a 'default source of choice' for support.
- The WKVCVS has become a 'first and preferred point of call' for those with grievances, and hence, is an ideal place from which to conduct support programs.
- COMBADAS offers service background-based thinking, but with a neutral approach to claims.

WHAT WILL COMBADAS DO?

- COMBADAS will take up where DART leaves off and provide a '**low-cost**' alternative assistance program.
- An initial twelve month pilot program, will prove out overall concepts, and build a structured, well thought out program which can be expanded upon and transposed to other regions of Australia.

WHAT DO VICTIMS NEED AND WHAT WILL COMBADAS PROVIDE THEM?

- COMBADAS will provide safe, supportive, non-judgemental community-based facilities for the support of ex-ADF members who have experienced abuse, and will address unmet emotional and communal needs.
- COMBADAS will provide emotional, psychological, and financial/legal assistance to family members of veterans, so as to better enable them to come to terms with the emotional traumas experienced by their loved ones, and to handle the subsequently emotional burdens thereby imposed upon them.

HOW WILL COMBADAS WORK? - COMBADAS will provide a range of services including:

- COMBADAS provides mutually supportive comradeship and regular community-based interaction with people, who have some understanding of their service experiences, in a safe and supportive atmosphere.
- COMBADAS PROVIDES ACCESS TO:
 - Counselling and mental health support
 - Pensions and Welfare assistance
 - Legal advice and support
 - Respite for Veterans
 - Family Respite
 - Family and Individual Peer-to-Peer Support Groups
 - Employment Opportunities
 - Skills and Workforce Training
 - Availability
 - Protocols and Procedures
 - Confidentiality and Anonymity
 - Fiscal Accountability
 - Political Support

FINANCIAL IMPACT - Small financial input by Government – large financial impact.

- COMBADAS aims to eventually be fully self-funding, but in the interim, short-term financial support is required and it is anticipated that while some initial seed-monies may be sourced from DVA and other interested Governmental and non-Governmental agencies, there is a need for COMBADAS to become financially self-sufficient into the future.
- Funding is also being sought from private companies and benefactors. It is estimated that funds in the order of \$100,000.00 per annum will be required for initial support work and the setting up of ancillary sheds, as well as for the financing of travel and accommodation for members of the WKVCVS to extend their work to other states and individuals outside South Australia.

The long-term aim of the initial COMBADAS project is to establish and provide, a sound, well-constructed, and well thought through pilot for a program which can ultimately be expanded throughout the entirety of Australia, and which can serve as a model for other community-based initiatives – not only in the field of abuse support, but in other allied fields where Federal and/or State Governmental programs may be either insufficient, inappropriate, or lacking in entirety.

COMBADAS is therefore highly recommended as a one-stop, community-based, peer-to-peer organisation for addressing the ongoing welfare of any members who have experienced abuse of any fashion while in the service of their country, and is an economically and emotionally sound means for providing that assistance.

COMBADAS

COMBADAS – Community-Based Defence Abuse Support

COMBADAS is a community-based and veteran self-supported initiative of, and an adjunct to, the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed (WKVCVS), and aims to provide far more than just a 'shed' environment for veterans.

COMBADAS provides and encompasses a broad range of all-embracing programs and community-based enterprises aimed at providing support and ongoing care to members of the veteran community.

COMBADAS A multi-focal approach to working with ex-ADF members in the community who still suffer the effects of abuse while in the forces.

COMBADAS is one of the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed's major initiatives, and as such, is a totally new and unique project in Australia, aimed at providing multi-faceted support for ex-ADF members who have experienced abuse while serving their country, and who continue to live with the effects in civilian life. As such, this is not only a distinctive enterprise, but an extremely timely one. Importantly, COMBADAS seeks to support not only the veterans themselves, but strives to also provide backing and succour to the families of those veterans, where required.

COMBADAS is initially being conducted as a twelve month long pilot program, aimed at delivering support for ex-service personnel who may or may not have been through the DART (Defence Abuse Response Taskforce), while proving out overall concepts, and building a structured, well thought out program which can then be expanded upon and transposed to other areas and like-minded organisations throughout Australia.

Vision and Mission Statement

COMBADAS aims to provide a safe, supportive, and non-judgemental community-based facility for the support of ex-ADF members who have experienced abuse – either sexual, physical, emotional, or psychological, while in service of their country, and where emotional, and day-to-day living needs that may currently be unmet, can be addressed.

COMBADAS also aims to provide emotional, psychological, and financial/legal assistance to family members of veterans, so as to better enable them to come to terms with the emotional traumas experienced by their loved ones, and to handle the subsequently emotional burdens thereby imposed upon them.

Scope

COMBADAS is open to all personnel who have ever served in the Defence Forces –either with the Army, the Navy, the Air-force, or with Peacekeeping forces, and whether they experienced overseas duty or not, whether they are male or female, and regardless of rank. Access to the COMBADAS program is open to all ex-ADF members, regardless of age, gender, or emotional status, and whether or not those persons have ever received any form of assistance previously from any other organisation.

Range of Services

COMBADAS operates in alignment with, and with the support of, a number of ancillary groups and services.

The physical structure and range of ongoing day-to-day activities provided by the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed will operate as a tangible focal point where veterans can gather and enjoy mutually supportive comradeship and regular community-based interaction with other people, who have some understanding of their service experiences, in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Operating and available from the WKVCVS will be a range of support services designed to meet specific needs of ex-ADF members who are still experiencing the effects of abuse while in service. These will incorporate, but not be limited to:

Counselling and mental health support – COMBADAS have a number of qualified Clinical Psychologists and Psychiatrists, experienced in dealing with veterans and their families, who are available to assist with counselling and support, and who offer their services 'pro bono'. We are actively seeking to extend the number of available professionals, and welcome support from interested persons.

We also have strong, positive working relationships with the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), and with the Veterans Counselling Service (VVCS), and are currently looking at the suitability of the support available from a number of other veteran service organisations.

Pensions and Welfare assistance - COMBADAS have fully trained and accredited Welfare and Pensions Officers who are available to assist members with their needs in these areas, and who can advocate for members on their behalf.

Pensions and Welfare officers with WKVCVS are all experienced in handling difficult and complex cases, and have extensive experience dealing with Tribunal hearings and assessment validation work.

Legal advice and support – COMBADAS works closely with Shine lawyers, who have agreed to work with veterans, nationally, on a 'pro bono' basis, and who are able and willing to prosecute appropriate cases as and when required.

COMBADAS also have strong links to senior law enforcement officers who are willing to engage and support any members who are experiencing legal difficulties, and who can [provide guidance and advice for any members going through the court system.

Respite for Veterans – COMBADAS can supply week-long trips to the Flinders Ranges, where participants stay at selected outback stations, and where they have the opportunity to mix with other veterans and engage in a small amount of therapeutic work each day, or simply sit under a tree and relax.

This initiative has now been operating for more than twelve years, and has seen numerous veterans participate, and enjoy 'switching off' for a short time. Many 'newbies' then go on to return time and again, and eventually become mentors themselves for 'newbies'.

Family Respite – Opportunity for family members to engage in respite weekends and trips. COMBADAS is currently exploring the option of supplying respite for close family members of abused veterans, and is working with several benefactors in order to establish respite centres for women and children. Some extension of existing Flinders Ranges trips will be incorporated into this initiative, and a number of suitable properties have been sourced.

Employment Opportunities – Work for veterans Program through local employers/trainers. A 'Work For Veterans' program has been running through COMBADAS for some time now, and a number of veterans have benefited from the program, with members receiving training – and ultimately - employment – in a range of locally-based industries. This concept will be greatly expanded during the coming year, and several new companies have indicated their interest in the concept.

Skills and Workforce Training – Connections with training organisations through existing sponsor companies. One of COMBADAS's major industry sponsors has connections with State and National Industry Training institutions, and runs accredited training course which are available to all members of COMBADAS.

Availability – COMBADAS personnel are available at short notice to travel locally or interstate to talk with people suffering from exposure to abuse while in the ADF, and who are trained to work with people who are emotionally vulnerable. It is envisaged that once COMBADAS has been expanded interstate, this availability will be greatly enhanced, and persons experienced in the concepts and philosophies of COMBADAS will be available to support and mentor new units as they come on line, as well as providing an experienced initial contact with the COMBADAS system.

Protocols and Procedures – Fully accountable and documented procedures and protocols have been developed for the running of COMBADAS, which take into account accountability, confidentiality, and repeatability.

Confidentiality and Anonymity – COMBADAS guarantees both confidentiality and anonymity for all participants, and this is reinforced by COMBADAS having developed and using a comprehensive and exacting set of guidelines for behaviour of its staff and counsellors. COMBADAS also offers a degree of 'safety' for members who have issues with current organisations such as the Service Misconduct Prevention Response Office (SMPRO), which unfortunately is seen by many – probably incorrectly, but nevertheless believed - as being subject to the risk that support personnel of that office may in some way have a shared history of service with some of the perpetrators of abuse.

Fiscal Accountability – Auditing yearly of all COMBADAS accounts is a pivotal aspect of the fiscal responsibility of COMBADAS, and all relevant book-keeping and documentation is audited each financial year, with returns publically available to all.

Political Support – A great deal of political interest and support for COMBADAS has been shown from both Federal and State-level politicians, and further such backing is being explored at the current time. On current measures, it is credibly anticipated that the program will be strongly supported by politics of all outlooks.

Funding

The aim of the program is to eventually be fully self-funding, but in the interim, short-term financial support is required and it is anticipated that while some initial seed-monies may be sourced from DVA and other interested Governmental and non-Governmental agencies, there is a need for COMBADAS to become financially self-sufficient into the future. Funding is also being sought from private companies and benefactors. It is estimated that funds in the order of \$100,000.00 per annum will be required for initial support work and the setting up of ancillary sheds, as well as for the financing of travel and accommodation for members of the WKVCVS to extend their work to other states and individuals outside South Australia.

Future

COMBADAS has a range of other initiatives planned for future expansion of the plan – these include, but are not limited to:

- a. The establishment of COMBADAS in other parts of Australia, and which would operate under the same principles and guidelines as COMBADAS Adelaide does currently. It is envisaged that this would initially stem from the establishment of four additional COMBADAS units, spread across the country, and which follow the theme of bearing the name of Victoria Cross recipients. The vision is that the first four such extensions would be the Ben Robert-Smith VC Veterans Shed in New South Wales or Canberra, The Keith Payne, VC Veterans Shed in Queensland, the Mark Donaldson VC Veterans Shed in Victoria, and the Daniel Keighran VC Veterans Shed in Western Australia. The sheds themselves could come from current non-functioning Men's Shed across Australia, and could

be re-invigorated with the assistance of Men's Sheds Australia, who already support the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed in South Australia.

- b. The instigation of peer-mentored skills learning workshops, centred around members with existing skills, such as wood-carving, metal-work, woodwork, and other similar talents, and utilising two or three-day, live-in courses and intensive one-on-one learning and support. These workshops would provide not only skills training from knowledgeable peers, but would also provide experienced help and support from counselling staff and other members of the COMBADAS support family.

COMBADAS, therefore, is postulated as a one-stop, community-based resource for the supply of emotional, psychological, physical, and community-oriented assistance for members of the defence services who have experienced abuse while in the service of their country, and a resource which is ideologically and politically neutral. As such it will – and does now – supply a safe refuge for victims of defence-force abuse, with overriding confidentiality for members, and the complete knowledge that members will not have to interface with the perpetrators of their abuse experiences, and where they can meet and talk openly and healthily with like-minded persons and support personnel.

The long-term aim of the initial COMBADAS project is to establish and provide, a sound, well-constructed, and well thought through pilot for a program which can ultimately be expanded throughout the entirety of Australia, and which can serve as a model for other community-based initiatives – not only in the field of abuse support, but in other allied fields where Federal and/or State Governmental programs may be either insufficient, inappropriate, or lacking in entirety.

COMBADAS is therefore highly recommended as a one-stop, community-based, peer-to-peer organisation for addressing the ongoing welfare of any members who have experienced abuse of any fashion while in the service of their country, and is an economically and emotionally sound means for providing that assistance.