

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021 Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
Phone: +61 2 6277 2313 Fax: +61 2 6277 2221 jscfadt@aph.gov.au

30 April 2020

Veterans Care Association Incorporated Submission

JSCFADT Inquiry - Australia's defence relationships with Pacific island nations

1. **Executive Summary.** Australia can draw on its shared military history in the region through the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP), and in conjunction Australian veteran community, promote export, investment, tourism and enduring stability in the region. This submission will focus on Timor-Leste, with the experience of Veterans Care Association Incorporated (VCA) in Timor-Leste over the past 20 years, particularly over the last five years conducting the Timor Awakening program.

2. **VCA Recommendation 1** – The Australian Government (through DCP) play a more active role in raising the profile of historical commemoration in Timor-Leste, establishing Timor its due place of Australian folklore and Australian identity. An Australia whole of Government effort could promote and brand ANZAC Day in Timor-Leste a major national event for the Australian public, Australian veterans, Australian media, Australian defence and government officials. Raise the profile of the Timor-Leste story in Australia, in schools, public and media. Develop historical memorials at significant places of Australian military engagement in Timor, such as in Dili (WW2 Airfield), Bazartete, Same, Betano, Balibo, Mailiana, Loihuno, Suai etc.

3. **VCA Recommendation 2** – The Australian Government, through the DCP, support the Australian veteran community to engage in projects in Timor-Leste. Australia has thousands of veterans with health illness, who would benefit from programs such as Timor Awakening and have skills to offer that can be put to work in community development projects. Timor-Leste is a proven place of sanctuary and healing for Australian veterans. The Australian veteran community is highly respected in Timor-Leste at all levels, across all sectors. Able bodied veterans can also contribute with many throughout the Australian business community having personal connection with Timor-Leste. Australian veterans have strong association with the Timor-Leste veteran community who are powerful enablers in the country, organised at national, regional and local levels to act in community development.

4. **VCA Recommendation 3** - The Australian government invests in providing wider access to English language programs and initiatives in Timor-Leste (especially to the rural poor). The current very successful English Language program provide by DCP to F-FDTL personnel provides a basis for further development. The more Timorese that speak English, the better trade and employment opportunities exist, in Timor-Leste and the Australian labour market, especially the seasonal worker program. Breaking the cycle of poverty, through work opportunity is the best way to empower an emerging country, building resilience against conflict and promoting conditions for stability and effective trade.

5. **Background.** Australia and Timor-Leste share a strong history that resonates with both Australian and Timorese people. Australian and Timorese efforts in Portuguese Timor in 1942 is a great unknown story in Australia of ingenuity, endurance, courage and friendship

between the surrounded Australian Commandos and the Timorese people. Timor should take a rightful place in Australian folklore and identity as Gallipoli, Tobruk and Kokoda, with more than 30,000 Australian servicepeople having served there. The modern chapter of shared history and mutual admiration is the success of the Australian lead INTERFET and subsequent peacekeeping missions. Australian soldiers again earned a good reputation for professionalism, conduct and capability. Similar histories with WW2 history and peacekeeping.

6. VCA is an ex-service registered charity organisation based in Brisbane that aims to reduce the instance of veteran suicide and improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families. The key staff at VCA are all experienced veterans of service in Timor, with extensive connectedness and credibility with Key leaders in Timorese society, due to enduring military, police and humanitarian engagement in Timor-Leste over 20 years.

7. VCA provides pastoral care, psychosocial rehabilitation, welfare, education, self-responsibility and social enterprise. VCA's flagship program, Timor Awakening (TA) is an immersive, evidence-based, peer to peer wellbeing program for veterans; composing holistic health education, group therapy, mentoring, physical activity, historical commemoration and community development. The program is centred around an 11-day immersion in Timor-Leste. The TA program has a focus to utilise and promote local industry in Timor-Leste, and across three programs per year contribute approximately \$200,000 to local economies.

6. Australian Veterans, through the TA program, have forged a powerful bridge of people to people relations with Timor-Leste. Every President and Prime Minister of Timor-Leste's history has welcomed one or more of the TA groups in both formal and informal receptions. See attached letters of thanks and endorsement from former President Jose Ramos-Horta and Former Prime Minister Dr Rui Araujo. These occasions have been universally embraced and applauded by Timor-Leste senior leadership. The program has received widespread media coverage in Timor-Leste through every media median and is one of the most widely recognisable international programs in the country. Key to every program are regular community engagements both formal and informal, at village, district and national level. There are traditional welcoming/friendship ceremonies, commemorations of Australian and Timorese historical events & locations and a range of community development programs that include scholarships, construction of education facilities and development of historical tourism sites. Australian veterans universally enjoy these activities and engagements as do the local communities. A range of trade opportunities exist for the Australian government and private sector to support.

7. The Timor Awakening program was developed in 2016 in response to the increasing suicide crisis, as well as diminishing mental and physical health, amongst the Australian veteran community. To date approximately 300 Australian Veterans and partners have participated in the program and a much larger community has been supported through various activities in Australia. The program has been highly effective in achieving the aim of improving the health and well-being of veterans. A major factor in the success is due to the program being conducted in Timor-Leste, and the engagement with the Timor-Leste veterans and population. The program is run by former Australian Army officers Michael and Gary Stone who have extensive experience and relationships in Timor-Leste, both having served in Timor-Leste in a multitude of government and non-government roles over

the past 20 years. VCAI offers the experience of Timor-Awakening to promote opportunities to strengthen relationships, trade and investment in Timor-Leste.

Current activities and outcomes undertaken by Defence in the South West Pacific, including the relationship between Defences longstanding Cooperation Program and its Step-Up activities;

8. The DCP staff have provided a level of material support to each Timor awakening program and had two members participate in each of the 12 programs run so far. They have also substantially supported annual ANZAC Day activities and the INTERFET 20th anniversary. The support has been vital in providing VCA/TA access to SAT phone and some medical equipment in country. This support has never been guaranteed but provided by local DCP commanders discretion (with minimal cost). This support could be formally endorsed and directed as a component of the DCP acting on behalf of Defence, DVA and DFAT, as a whole of Govt activity, led by Defence.

Opportunities for closer coordination and collaboration between Defence and other Government departments on Australian programs and activities across the South West Pacific.

9. The Australian veteran community, and principally the VCA and the veterans they have brought back to Timor-Leste, have been substantially involved in supporting developing Timorese veterans associations as well as a very modest Timor-Leste Government Veterans Affairs staff. AS Defence staff, DVA and DFAT in conjunction with Australian veterans association including VCA could more closely support both these nation building pillars of stability, particularly in financially assisting the development of a Veterans Centre in Dili, on the site allocated by TL Govt of the WW2 airstrip and later INTERFET, UNTAET and ISF base. Support could also be provided to the project being developed by VCA at SAME (former WW2 Commando HQ location) of a Veterans University, comprising English language, Construction, medical and agricultural faculties.

Opportunities for closer coordination and collaboration between other nations seeking to invest and engage in the South West Pacific, including planning and execution of joint activities and preparation for HADR.

10. Since 1999, New Zealand has had a shared experience in Timor with Australia, in Defence, Police and other capacity development. This has now extended into the veteran space, with NZ involvement in TA programs in 2019 and 2020 and most future TA programs. Promotion of any future initiatives should seek NZ input and collaboration.

11. **Conclusion.** Over the past five years Australian and Timorese veterans have rekindled a strong connection that is proving to be life changing to veterans from both countries, leaving a practical imprint of capability in Timor-Leste and enhancing relations for future relations between our peoples. Australian Government endorsement of Defence support to Australian veteran activities could further enhance Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste. Further information is provided below demonstrating the activities and engagement that VCA through the Timor Awakening program have been conducting.



Timor Awakening Program Overview

Prepared by Program Director Michael Stone, 1 April 2020



Timor Awakening (TA) is an immersive, evidence based, peer to peer wellbeing program for veterans; composing holistic health education, group therapy, mentoring, physical activity, historical commemoration and community development. The program is centred around an 11-day immersion in Timor-Leste, creating a disruption from participant's routine to take pause, learn about themselves and seize responsibility for a positive direction forward in life. Timor Awakening is available to Australian Veterans (and spouse or carer), from any state, with or without operational service. The aim of Timor Awakening is to prevent veteran suicide and improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families. Timor Awakening has a comprehensive medical support team from all streams of the mental health community. Every Timor Awakening participant conducts a range of data collection based on internationally accepted metrics for mental health contributing to detailed quantitative and qualitative reporting on each program.

By attending the program veterans have elected to participate in their own rescue, taking responsibility for the life they want. The program is intensive and obliges participants to be active in a peer group, whilst facilitating reflection time and individual mentoring. A range of stimulating activities and environments provide fertile ground for healing, growth and development. Our veteran facilitators, who are active participants on each program, demonstrate the value of becoming a healer of others and are examples that post traumatic growth is possible. The endstate of Timor Awakening is to have inspired and informed veterans empowered with tools for positive change and linked to the array of veteran resources available in Australia.

Timor Awakening embodies the relationship between Australian soldiers and the people of Timor-Leste forged in World War 2 promoting honourable values, shared identity & unified purpose. Timor-Leste, as a nation, welcomes Australian veterans of Timor-Awakening, from the President of the Republic down to the local village chief, for what is a unique life changing experience. Timor-Leste veterans provide inspiration, practical tools and lessons in overcoming trauma and re-establishing purposeful lives. With 24 years of war and oppression the Timorese veterans are world leaders in resilience, courage and discipline, and it is profound that their choice to forgive their enemies has set them free to continue serving their people with extremely low instance of PTSD and other mental illness. There are cognitive benefits for veterans to return to a former conflict zone, to experience these places through a new perspective and remove the images of anxiety that may be trapped within their minds.

The community engagement and development aspect of Timor Awakening provide veterans a sense of esteem, pride, community, hope and purpose. Riak Retreat is a major educational facility being built funded by Australian Veterans and construction has included cooperation between Australian, New Zealand and Timorese Veterans.

The program was developed in 2016 as a response to the increasing suicide crisis, as well as diminishing mental and physical health, amongst the Australian veteran community. To date over 250 Australian Veterans and partners have participated in Timor Awakening. For more information including forms to nominate to participate visit www.timorawakening.com

Timor Awakening has been possible due to financial support of Bolton Clarke and RSL QLD, along with major volunteer contributions of a number of veterans. Corporate partners are required for the program to continue and share the program with the wider veteran community for both domestic and international programs. **Veterans Care Association has a clear strategic aim to utilise the data and successful interventions of Timor Awakening as a model for Department of Veterans Affairs to commit to funding wellness intervention to prevent veteran suicide, broken families and injured veterans. Wellness intervention will result in considerable government budget savings compared to \$ spent on 'sickness' treatment, pensions and medication, as well as increase health and wellbeing of veterans and their families, save lives, and meaningfully re-engage some of the nation's most energetic and capable members of society. In the soul of the veteran is a need to serve, to be of value, to contribute and to belong.**

Timor Awakening Program Media

RSL QLD 3 Minute Video overview (2020) - <https://www.facebook.com/RSLQueensland/videos/594230674463467/>

Timor Awakening 7 Program Video - provides a snapshot of the program (6 mins) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5Xdip5bcus>

Riak Veterans Retreat and Language School - short videos about this project which is our enduring project for all veterans:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N78XE6tpnRs&t=36s> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQIU9rT6OvM>
<https://www.facebook.com/timorawakening/videos/2441330942583644/>

ABC News story on the Riak Retreat project 19 Sep 19:
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-19/war-veterans-heal-in-east-timor-tour/11525170>
<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/am/war-veterans-healing-through-community-work-in-east-timor/11526898>



Timor Awakening program components (content structure)

Detailed preparation - involving individual admin/medical/mental prep, personal and group engagement.
Orientation - Darwin concentration, team bonding, individual mentor 1 on 1, briefing, 24 hours in TL.
Self-Awareness. Improving capacity to relate to yourself and others.
Grounding (beliefs, techniques, mindfulness).
Taking ownership and responsibility of personal circumstances.
Nurturing your mind, body and soul.
Destigmatising trauma and mental health.
Anxiety, depression and stress - understanding the causes, biology, recognising the signs and mitigating symptoms.
Tools to help relax, ground and manage feelings and physical symptoms of stress and anxiety.
Communication and positive living in communities.
Restoring a sense of Identity and Purpose.
Forgiveness.
Goal Setting.
Forging a new Identity (participants form identity as alumni of program, as Australian veterans, as Australians)
Strategies to help you go back to activities or places you may have avoided since the trauma.
Transitioning back to connection with communities, support and positive pathways.

Timor Awakening Activities

Group discussions
Self-awareness exercises
Physical activation (group walks, stretching, breath work, personal exercise, volunteer work)
Volunteer work on rural education projects (handyman labour, gardening, landscaping, painting)
Breathing and breath work
Mindfulness and grounding
Goal setting
Communication skills
Body Language – impact of posture, effects on communication
Introduction to Neuro Linguistic Programming
Visits to historic locations
Service commemoration: both Australian and Timor-Leste military commemoration
Community engagement with schools (Kits4Kids)
Meeting and learning from Timorese veterans
Meeting and learning from Timorese leaders
Visiting and meeting NGOs

Group discussion topics on Timor Awakening

Living with purpose and identity (and helping others).
Growth mindset / Living above the line.
Addiction and relapse prevention.
Taking ownership and responsibility (of our past, present and future).
Nurturing the body – Nutrition, exercise, sleep.
Mental health – Anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress (awareness, mitigation).
Safety plans – Addiction relapse, Triggered Anxiety/Stress/Depression, Suicidal Ideation
Suicide – helping others, getting help, safety plans, processing and managing bereavement
Communication and relationships
Relationships
Forgiveness / Letting Go
Resources for veterans and families at home



Participant Testimonies from Timor Awakening, 2016 to 2020



"There should be more programs where veterans share in their health and wellbeing environment together. instead of with civilians who don't necessarily understand veterans' perspectives."

"This program is totally different from a doctor's appointment, specialists, open arms appointment or courses. This program is real, it is run by veterans that understand the veterans and veteran community which is better than a 20-year-old from open arms trying to have a respected impact. This program is worthy and an absolute necessity."

"This opportunity has allowed my wife and I to go through similar experiences in a country that I served in. This has helped me to relate more and connected deeper. This holistic approach has not only helped me heal, but to have witnessed other veterans heal and have renewed outlook on life."

"By far the best intervention I have ever experienced through military support."

"This valuable program far surpasses any conventional treatment in Australia. it is professional and well planned and should continue to be supported completely, made available to more veterans."

"I have got off the couch and am cleaning up my property and restoring my dignity."

"I've been motivated to get a job and have just landed work as an electrical assistant."

"I have managed to heal the grief I felt over a death that has haunted me for 20 years."

"I have enrolled in a master's degree in social science to study PTSD and how I can help Vets."

"I am now managing well in balancing family life and work."

"I have rediscovered my identity as a veteran and have become active in my RSL Sub-branch."

"I have discovered I can cope without my assistance dog."

"I have renewed my relationship with my wife."

"I am now helping my Veteran son, in dealing with traumas he hasn't addressed before."

"Circle time was awesome", Being in Timor with the veterans was humbling and truly allowed us to understand the process of forgiveness. Helping to build at Same was amazing.

"Thank you to all involved in the for making me believe in myself, to make a better path for myself and the opportunity to help other's believe in themselves to achieve their goals."

"It has assisted me with looking at what is needed to improve my life and wellbeing. And to eliminate the negativity in my life."

"This took me out of my comfort zone and I hope it will flow in to my treatment and appreciation of others."

"Feeling more open to trying new things and open in my mind to other activities to help heal."

"Timor Awakening experience is a great way to sort out your problems by showing you how to move forward... I have a clearer sense of what I need to do to improve my state of mind/situation."

"This journey gave a sound basis for self-reflection, mind and body rejuvenation within the companionship of kindred souls."

"This trip has changed my life. I no longer want to kill myself."

"I have gained a clearer understanding of my own needs and an enlightenment of my own capabilities, and I don't need to save all people."

"I have been in treatment with a psychiatrist for 3 ½ years. TA was more benefit than that time on medication."

"My anxiety has diminished. I am feeling an inner peace. I am looking at things with a better internal lens."

"I am more relaxed, more connected, more open. More sympathetic to people in general."

"I just want to say it's the best and most rewarding adventure I have ever done. Thanks from the bottom of my heart."



"It is extremely positive and supportive program that enables participants to improve then personal lives and consequently their family's as well and be great contributions to society."

"Thank you for making this venture possible and I can only hope that you find it possible to continue supporting what is an amazing health initiative for veterans, their families and the wider community."

"I am a veteran of East Timor, I also served in Iraq and Afghanistan as a security contractor for 12 years, this course taught me to accept Australia again."

"Words can't express my appreciation to the opportunity of being part of the experience, Thank you just doesn't seem enough."

"I am so thankful to have been given this opportunity, it has been the best experience of my life."

"Australia was still foreign to me before I went on TA7, I refused to accept my own country from being away for so long, this course has brought me back home and given me hope and reminded me that Australia is my home."

"This is the only program that has encouraged and embraced equal participation of spouses/ partners. Being able to experience and participate together sets us up for greater chances of success."

"This program works it has a profound effect on not only veterans, but their families. We are so grateful for having the opportunity to participate in this wonderful life changing trip."

"The staff are and have done a brilliant job in coaching and nurturing members through the program they are very approachable and are very knowledgeable."

"This is a pathway to a longer life."

"Keep supporting the program. I have had four hospital visits for mental health issues and this program has been more effective in my recovery process."

"Unique program achieving excellent results in the veteran community that definitely contributed to reducing the incidence of veteran suicide."

"This program is great for all veterans it's a good way of expressing your feelings and experiences and to hopefully come to leave with it all."

"Very helpful and fulfilling, talking and listening to others has helped me wake up to the crap I have been putting up with in my family life, it will help me decide with my wife if we should stay together."

"Very helpful, I feel I am transitioning to the next stage of my life and this has been an incredible catalyst that I will be forever grateful for."

"I found it much more valuable then 1 year with a psychologist in a clinical environment."

"Life changing, if the people who experienced decades of war, assaults and death can forgive then I will work to do the same."

"Very, again I feel like I am in control of my destiny."

"Best thing I have done, I believe I have learnt and left behind old demons, now time to look forward."

"It was extremely helpful in that it has changed my mindset. I now look at the positive things I came away with and the changes I will make to my life that will impact positively on my family."

"Timor awakening changed my life and has given me a clear view ahead for the future."

"This is an exceptional program, you've nailed it. One of my roles in life is educationalist and this program has A+ in all categories, immersion and experience, reflection, listening and responding and allows plans for future growth, are all encompassing with this program."

"The program itself is great and I don't feel it needs to change. The only thing I would like to see is for it to go national, so more people can experience what we have experienced."



PRIMEIRO MINISTRO

VI Governo Constitucional

Gabinete do
Primeiro-Ministro

Dili 25th May, 2017

Dear Chaplain Gary and
[REDACTED]

I write to you to express my heartfelt thanks for your work on the development and delivery of the Timor Awakening program, a truly life changing initiative.

My staff and the Veterans Task Force have been delighted to work with you over the past 14 months. We are learning some valuable lessons in providing care for our Veterans and their families and have been honoured to welcome back Australian Veterans through the program.

The people of Timor-Leste will remember the more than 30,000 Australian Veterans; military, police and civilian, who gave their service to assist the people of Timor-Leste. Only recently are we mindful that many of them have suffered as a result from their time here. We are very pleased that you have made it possible for some of them to return here as part of their healing and rehabilitation, and we welcome them warmly. We are also pleased that in this very practical way we can show our appreciation.

Veterans were the heart and soul of our struggle for the Restoration of our Independence and our country recognizes their service, sacrifice and the important contribution to peace and development they will continue to provide the nation.

It has been inspirational to our Veterans to see what you have planned and delivered as veterans yourselves from your own initiative. We have not experienced this type of therapeutic approach before, and it is opening our eyes more to the reality of health issues that veterans deal with, and the comprehensive ways that can assist them.

Palácio do Governo
Edifício n.º 10
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste



**PRIMEIRO
MINISTRO**

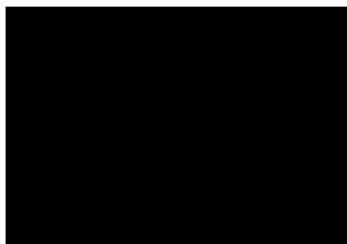
Gabinete do
Primeiro-Ministro

Your program has had very positive media attention in Timor-Leste, and it is evident that your trips to remote rural areas have been very well received by entire communities, who have welcomed you all with full Timorese hospitality.

I am delighted to commend the work of your team in Australia, and very appreciative of the funding provided in Australia to support the continuation of this program.

Timor-Leste is blessed to have you as our friends and partners, our brothers and sisters. May God bless you and may the already strong bonds of friendship between our Veterans of Timor-Leste and the Veterans of Australia continue to deepen.

Please accept my best regards.



Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo
Prime Minister
Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

**VETERANS CARE ASSOCIATION
2 VICTORIA PARK RD
KELVIN GROVE,
QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA 4059**

Palácio do Governo
Edifício n.º 10
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

*To the friends, supporters
of VCA*

Dili, 26 March 2017

I commend you for your efforts in developing the Timor Awakening Programme. It has been my pleasure to welcome and host the participants in my home and thank them in person for their assistance to our country. Many Australians have helped and supported us over the years, but it has been your military and police who have borne the brunt of the more dangerous work, often with deleterious effects upon their health and their families.

It is fitting that veterans and their partners can come back to Timor-Leste and see the fruit of their efforts – a country that is growing economically, undertaking significant reconstruction and a people with smiles on their faces and joy in their hearts.

I am grateful that you have embraced Timorese veterans on your programme. This is providing them inspiration of what veterans can do for themselves, as well as challenge our Government to provide supporting arrangements for veterans and their families. Veterans continue to play an important role in society providing leadership, serenity and maturity in the promotion and maintenance of peace.

The Timor Awakening programme is commendable. It is professional and caring. The programme's emphasis on promoting holistic health and ongoing service for veterans is unique and world class. The bonds of friendship that were forged between our forefathers in World War Two continues to strengthen through our veterans. I am sure many more people will benefit through this programme where veterans care for veterans under professional oversight.

I would particularly like to encourage financial sponsors of this programme. Thank you for supporting this initiative of peace and healing. Your investment in healing and supporting our veterans and their families, from both nations, is priceless.

Finally, I offer my special thanks to the staff of Veterans Care, especially Michael and Gary Stone. You are family to us. You have helped me and our people more than words can express. May God bless you and may God bless all Australians.

In friendship and gratitude,

José Ramos-Horta GCL AC
Nobel Peace Laureate, 1996
President of Timor-Leste, 2007-2012



P R I M E
M I N I S T E R

14 July 2016

Timor Awakening - Letter of Support

Dear Mr Cameron,

The histories of Australia and Timor-Leste and the relationship between our two nations have been intertwined since our people supported the Australian Commandos who based themselves here in Timor-Leste in WWII.

The friendship between our nations was deepened further as a consequence of the support provided by Australia as our people fought successfully for independence and emerged earlier this century to take our place among the nations of the world.

From these past conflicts in our region and other deployments of servicemen and servicewomen elsewhere in the case of Australia, Timor-Leste and Australia have come to owe a great debt and share great love and respect for our veterans.

As nations, we have also come to a higher understanding – not only about the contribution the men and women of our armed services make to maintaining peace in our world – but also of the sacrifices veterans and their families make to keep the world at peace.

I am therefore very pleased to support *Timor Awakening* for all that it will mean to the lives of our veterans and their families.

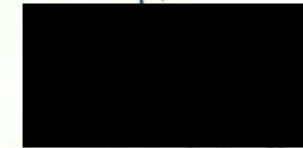
I am also pleased to support *Timor Awakening* for the clear potential it has to further enhance friendship between our two countries.

The primary purpose of *Timor Awakening* is to raise the health and wellbeing of veterans and their family members – both Australian and East Timorese - through education, shared experiences, engagement, mentoring and peer support – led and facilitated by specialists delivering pastoral care.

Timor-Leste is excited to be involved in the programme and wholly supports the programme for the obvious potential it has to positively affect the lives of veterans and their families.

I thank the Returned Services League of Australia (QLD), Veterans Care Association Inc. and others involved in developing and working to implement *Timor Awakening*.

I extend my best wishes to the veterans and their families who participate in this opportunity and look forward to welcoming them warmly to Timor-Leste.



Dr Rui Maria de Araújo

Prime Minister

**MR STEWART CAMERON CSC
STATE PRESIDENT
RETURNED SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA, QUEENSLAND BRANCH
283 ST PAULS TERRACE
FORTITUDE VALLEY
QUEENSLAND 4006**

Consulting Rooms:

The Grange Practice
Level 1, Suite 2
3 Days Road (Cnr Gilbert Rd)
GRANGE QLD 4051
Australia



Dr John
Barletta

DipT, BEd, GradDipCouns, MEdSt, PhD, M.A.P.S.

Counselling, Consulting & Clinical Psychologist

Contact:

Telephone: 07 3356 4400

Facsimile: 07 3356 4600

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: www.johnbarletta.com

**Letter of support and endorsement for
Veterans Care Association's *Timor Awakening* program**

To Whom it May Concern:

March 31st 2017

My belief is that *Timor Awakening* has the potential to continue its great work for the very worthy cause of holistic veteran rehabilitation. As a practicing Psychologist I believe that their program has sound psychological underpinnings and, with further iterations, will be even more adept at addressing the complex needs for veterans.

My connection with *Veterans Care Association* began in 2016, soon after I became aware of the work they were planning for the renewal and rehabilitation of Australian veterans via an innovative immersion experience in Timor-Leste. Deacon Gary Stone asked me to be a consultant to the leadership team, and I was pleased to be able to volunteer my time and resources to the development of clearly such a worthy cause. My expertise and focus has been to enhance the social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of participants.

In my dealings with *Veterans Care Association*, specifically the *Timor Awakening* program, it has become obvious that the organisation is committed to developing a quality healing program that encourages an extended period of engagement for participants. This feature of staying connected to participants and facilitating participants to stay connected with one another is crucial to maintain treatment gains.

In addition to consulting to the leadership team during last year, I was humbled to be asked to attend *Timor Awakening* in February/March this year (TA#3). This third iteration of the immersion program integrated learnings from the previous two visits to Timor-Leste. This process of being open to the feedback of participants and facilitators is the hallmark of an agile organisation that is focused on the development of a respectful, quality, excellence-oriented service.

Whilst participating in and contributing to the *Timor Awakening* process, and ultimately the visit to Timor-Leste, it has been inspiring to see veterans and leaders connect, support, guide, challenge, and educate one another and themselves. The veterans, though wounded in certain ways, have been quite willing and able to use their relative strengths to be future-focused, and work on integrating their learnings from *Timor Awakening* to change their lives toward greater health and wellbeing.

Provider Number: 2647132T

ABN: 71485084298

Registration Number: PSY961260

Academic

Lectures
Scholarship
Supervision

Clinical

Assessment
Diagnosis
Treatment

Counselling

Adult Psychotherapy
Couples Counselling
Family Consultation

Forensic

Court Reports
Medico-Legal
Non-Treating

Organisational

Consulting
Mediation
Workshops

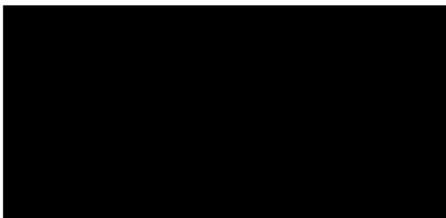
I believe that *Veterans Care Association* will continue to be open to quality research, sound theory, reflected practice, and structured feedback to grow and develop their programs to ensure veterans are supported in their journey toward greater resilience and optimism.

Let me reiterate that it is my professional opinion that *Timor Awakening* can continue the work for the worthy cause of veteran rehabilitation. I believe that the program has sound psychological underpinnings, and with further work will be even more proficient at catering to the complex needs of veterans.

I hope this letter of support provides sufficient useful information to encourage your organisation to continue its support for Veterans Care Association's *Timor Awakening* program.

Please contact me should you need clarification on any aspect in this matter.

Regards,



Dr. John Barletta, PhD, M.A.P.S., M.C.C.L.P.

Nationally Endorsed - Counselling Psychologist & Clinical Psychologist

-----O-----

Bioagraphy:

For 34 years I have provided education, counselling, and psychological services. My career began as a teacher, then guidance counsellor, relationship educator, and tenured senior university academic, and continued with extended studies and work in the USA and Italy. I trained at *QUT* (DipT, GradDipCouns), *ACU* (BEd), *UQ* (MEdSt), *OhioU* (PhD), and *APF-Rome*. I am an energetic, practical, down-to-earth professional and base my work on scientific research not crazy pop psychology. I have a passion for helping adults challenged by various issues, as well as those seeking greater balance in life. I promote healthy living via the application of integrated positive psychology principles. My expertise includes psychological therapy, workshops, keynotes, medico-legal and psychological assessments, corporate consulting, executive coaching, mediation, clinical supervision, and peer consultation. The Counselor Education faculty at Ohio University honoured me with the *George E. Hill Memorial Award*, which recognises the outstanding scholarship, service and leadership of an alumnus. I am author of *The Home Therapist* and *The Practice of Clinical Supervision*, have been the psychology expert columnist for *Style* magazines for several years, and I often present at Universities on an invitational basis.

-----O-----



Timor Awakening 12 Program Report

22 February to 4 March 2020

Prepared by Veterans Care Association, 30 March 2020

Holistic Care of Body Mind & Soul for Veterans, Families & Carers
Reg. Charity No: CH2629 | ABN: 97 213 464 172



Timor Awakening 12 Program Report

Section 1: Timor Awakening 12 – Summary of Activity

Prepared by: Project Director, Michael Stone

Timor Awakening (TA) is an immersive, evidence based, peer to peer wellbeing program for veterans; composing holistic health education, group therapy, mentoring, physical activity, historical commemoration and community development. The program is centered around an 11-day immersion in Timor-Leste, creating a disruption from participant's routine to take pause, learn about themselves and seize responsibility for a positive direction forward in life. TA is available to Australian Veterans (and spouse or carer), from any state, with or without operational service. The aim of Timor Awakening is to prevent veteran suicide and improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families. TA has a comprehensive medical support team from all streams of the mental health community. Every TA participant conducts a range of data collection based on internationally accepted metrics for mental health contributing to detailed quantitative and qualitative reporting on each program. This report presents an overview of the TA12 program, quantitative analysis and reflections of participants.

Timor Awakening 12 (TA12) was conducted from 22 February to 4 March 2020. The 11-day holistic health program included 1 night in Darwin, 6 nights in Dili and 4 nights in rural areas of Same, Timor-Leste (TL). TA12 included 19 Australian Veterans, with 2 spouses, two New Zealand veterans and 9 Timorese Veterans. TA12 was supported in Timor-Leste by the TL National Veterans Council, the Australian Defence Cooperation Programme, New Zealand Defence Force and local authorities.

TA12 provided a multitude of education and healing interactions and experiences at the individual, small group and large group levels, including professional education and guidance, peer2peer support, physical exercise, mindfulness, meditation, exposure therapy and unique interaction with foreign communities and veterans. The program has been designed to provide a safe, nurturing and inspiring environment where veterans and their spouses have the opportunity to reevaluate their lives, envisage and plan where they want to go, and provide a range of tools to help them achieve a healthy and purposeful life. The wide range of components, activities and discussion topics covered on the program are mentioned on p7.

Results and reflections of participants on T12 are profound, reflected in part 2 of this report, p8-26.

Special elements of the TA12 program included:

- Holistic Health (nurturing the mind, body, soul and relationships).
- Official VIP Airport Welcome by National Veterans of Timor-Leste.
- Tour of National War Museum and Chega Museum and Prison.
- Welcome reception by Nobel Peace Laureate and former President José Ramos-Horta.
- Welcome reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff.
- Visit to historic military sites in Dili, Maubisse and Same.
- Community Traditional Welcome to Riak Retreat, hosted by Riak Leman, UBTL and Fulelomar.
- Participation in construction of English language school at Veterans University, Same.
- Commemoration and dedication ceremony at remembrance memorial garden, Riak Retreat.
- Visit to National Rehabilitation Centre and exhibition game of wheelchair basketball TL vs TA.
- Visit and activities with the AHHA school, signing of MOU with AHHA for teaching at Riak Retreat.
- Visits to Pro-Ema Training Restaurant, which empowers women from at risk environments.



TA12 Quantitative Report

Official Welcome. A cross section of the Timorese Veteran Community were awaiting TA12 participants on the tarmac in Dili welcoming the Australian veterans with traditional ceremony. Officials included Mr Riak Leman, National Veteran President, Mr Jorge Alves, TL Veteran Leader, Ms Ines Almeida, representing Minister of Veterans Affairs. Veterans of the Timor Awakening program were presented Timorese woven 'Tais' and individually welcomed to country. The program was offered the honour of processing through the VIP terminal. A welcome address was given on behalf of the TL Government and entire veteran community of Timor-Leste.



Holistic Health Sessions. Holistic Health sessions included prepared sessions, discussions and activities on the following topics: mental health, exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, goal setting, forgiveness and reconciliation, resources for veterans in Australia, communication, growth mindset, PTSD, anxiety, addiction, relapse prevention, suicide, sleep management and families. A number of videos were utilised including the Veterans Family Health Toolkit video series, Kriadu Memorial video, Australian Story – The Presidents Man, A Hero's Journey and Balibo. The Timor Awakening focus of holistic health is that healing is possible, there are many resources to achieve this, that we should live in the present with a growth mindset and plan for the future. A detailed list of program components, activities and discussion topics can be seen on page 7.



Welcome by Nobel Peace Laureate and Former President José Ramos-Horta. Former Prime Minister, President and Nobel Laureate, José Ramos-Horta hosted the TA group at his personal residence thanking the participants for their friendship and service. The participants were honored to be welcomed into the home of José Ramos-Horta and hear many stories from past and present of his efforts for peace and humanity. The participants were presented the history of Jose Ramos-Horta throughout the program, the incredible challenges he has faced and his contribution to Timor-Leste and the world. It was a highlight to meet him in person and be inspired by his example of forgiveness, humility, hard work and service.



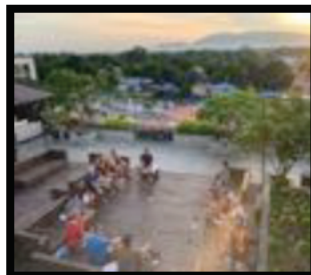


Welcome reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff.

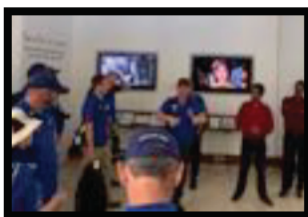
The Australian Ambassador welcomed the Timor Awakening group to their official residence. Ambassador Roberts thanked all Australians for their service, and for the support provided from families. He praised the Timor Awakening program in developing and maintaining strong relations between Australia and Timor-Leste, via the unique relationship that has been developed between veterans of both countries. Representatives of Australian Military, and Embassy met and mingled with Australian and Timorese veterans. This welcome is healing for veterans to be acknowledged for their service, to feel proud of themselves and their nation.



Physical Fitness. Physical fitness is a fundamental element of the program. Fitness sessions are planned early morning on a daily basis, include village walks/runs, stretching, breathwork, mindfulness, yoga, mountain hikes and gym. The daily program is active with walking and activities that involve movement, social interaction and stimulation. Other activities included cultural dancing on a number of occasions and a full-length game of wheelchair basketball against the TL national team. Establishing a routine of physical fitness as the start of each day establishes the importance and impact of physical fitness for healing, health and well-being.



Tour of the National War Museum and Chega Political Prison. Veterans were welcomed by the leadership of the Timor-Leste National War Museum and Chega Political Prison Exhibition and Museum. Through examining history, with living Timorese survivors in their presence sharing testimonies, veterans learned of suffering and resilience the Timorese have had to endure. The survivors radiate the good values that sustained them through tough times, the resilience of their struggle and the positivity they project today. The most striking lesson is the transition of the veterans' post-war, how the Timorese reconciled with their former enemies and still living lives of dignity, honour and service. Australian veterans shared that they drew strength from the Timorese veterans and will apply perspective, techniques and effort into their own pathways of healing and service.





TA12 Quantitative Report

Cultural experience. TA12 included regular immersion with Timorese culture, travelling through three Districts and experiencing a wide range of cultural activities in the cities and far reaches of the country. Traditional welcome ceremonies were prepared for participants at Dili Airport, Same and Pro Ema Restaurant. Participants experienced the warm hospitable and forgiving nature of the Timorese; a culture rich in values and resilience, respect, dignity and humility. Participants were appreciative to be received with dignity, appreciation and identity as an Australian or Kiwi veteran. The issues of culture, beliefs, rituals were discussed as well as practiced throughout the program. Indeed Australian, New Zealand and Timorese cultures were all practiced, experienced and explored. A key insight was that to understand your identity (as an Australian, an individual, a veteran etc) it is important to put the past on the table, the good with the bad, accept that all experiences have contributed to who you are and that is worthy. Our focus lies on the present and what actions we can do in our next step forward for ourselves, our families, our communities and humanity.



NGO's & Volunteer Projects. On TA12 participants visited NGOs and volunteers throughout TL learning from their insights and projects, as well as help identify potential ways veterans can support in the future (as volunteers back in TL or for projects to raise money for). Many participants remarked they experienced a call to action in the service of others as a means of their rehabilitation.

Veterans noted in group sessions and program feedback that these initiatives have inspired them to get more involved in their communities and given them an appreciation for the support we have in Australia, in a realisation of the importance of purpose and identity in life. A great opportunity exists for Australian veterans to mobilise in both domestic and regional communities and contribute as volunteers, restoring a sense of purpose and serving the community in practical ways.

Organisations visited included during TA12 included:

1. Pre-Ema Training Restaurant, Dili.
2. AHHA Boarding School, Dili.
3. National Rehabilitation Centre (CNR), Dili.
4. Projetu Montanha, Aileu.
5. University of Boaventura TL (UBTL).





TA12 Quantitative Report

Community Development - Riak Retreat. The community engagement and development aspect of Timor Awakening provide veterans a sense of esteem, pride, community, hope and purpose. TA12 participants spent 3 days in Same assisting in the construction of an English language Institute as part of our collaboration with the Veterans University in a project called Riak Retreat. This project seeks to assist the education of the families of Timorese veterans, and for poor rural Timorese as well as provide a place of Retreat for all veterans and their families in a beautiful setting beside a river. Using pre-arranged resources, a range of tasks were achieved concurrently: clearing approx. 4 acres of land, building a side access road, development of guerrilla furniture for reflection eating area, siting and establishment of foundations for the Kitchen/eating/admin building, dormitory block, outdoor classroom block, and development of Riak Retreat memorial garden. Veterans found the work stimulating and purposeful. Further development of this project will be a part of subsequent programs.



Community Development – Kits for Kids. The TA12 group prepared and distributed 2000 basic writing kits for school children in many schools of rural communities. The resources were provided by Townsville RSL / Rotary in a program called *Kits4Kids*. Veterans also brought other gifts and educational materials that they handed out in schools, orphanages and NGOs. Many veterans realised that they can return to offer their skills, whether medical or manual labour to help others. Service for others is a key theme of Timor Awakening in rehabilitation and leading a healthier and purposeful life.





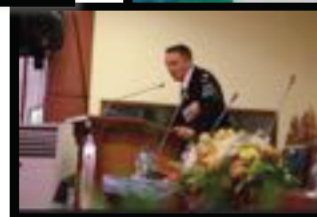
TA12 Quantitative Report

Historical Perspectives. Participants learned personal perspectives of the 24-year Timorese resistance struggle lead by FALINTIL. TA12 had Timorese Veterans join the program throughout. Many hundreds of veterans welcomed and met with Veterans throughout activities in Dili and the Districts. Participants learned how they employed guerrilla tactics, many of whom had learned from the Australia/Timorese WW2 experience, to defy unthinkable odds. Many of TA12 participants remarked of how the resilience, reconciliation, forgiveness and continued service of the Timorese veterans was an inspiration for them. Many other historical sites were visited, and stories told, in locations where veterans within the group had served, an experience which proved to be impactful and healing.



Participants visited the key sites of Australian and New Zealand military involvement from the time of INTERFET through to present day, including Dili, Aileu, Maubisse and Same. Many of the participants related personal stories of their deployments and their feelings of contrast witnessing the changes that have taken place. Revisiting the site of previous destruction, stress and trauma was cathartic for all veterans who have previously served in Timor-Leste. Through the remarkable development that has taken place, the vibrant village life, active economy and thousands of children going to school with such vitality and happiness, all in well-dressed uniforms, the Veterans felt proud of their contribution and felt healing of the suffering these places experienced in the past.

Timor-Leste National Veterans Day. TA12 participated in the Timor-Leste National Veterans Day parade, march and official lunch and commemorations. Participants were given a special section at all events and program director, Michael Stone was invited to address the nations veterans, which was broadcast nationally on all TL media. Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak and Minister of Veterans Gil Santos personally and publicly welcomed and thanked TA veterans. Timor Awakening embodies the relationship between Australian soldiers and the people of Timor-Leste forged in World War 2 promoting honourable values, shared identity & unified purpose. Timor-Leste veterans provide inspiration, practical tools and lessons in overcoming trauma and re-establishing purposeful lives. With 24 years of war and oppression the Timorese veterans are world leaders in resilience, courage and discipline, and it is profound that their choice to forgive their enemies has set them free to continue serving their people with extremely low instance of PTSD and other mental illness. There are cognitive benefits for veterans to return to a former conflict zone, to experience these places through a new perspective and remove the images of anxiety that may be trapped within their minds.





TA12 Quantitative Report

Conclusion. The feedback from participants of TA12 was positive and appreciative for the opportunity to experience profound growth and healing, as highlighted in participant reflections, p22-26. Through professional mentoring and guidance, together with the extensive peer to peer therapy, Timor Awakening offered an experience uniquely different to other programs available for veterans. The multitude of activities created a bonded group that will remain connected through each other's journey of healing and growth. The overarching theme of hope and purpose was a feature throughout dozens of activities. Even with the realities of a troubled and traumatic past, the Timorese experience is testament to veterans that there is hope, and with purpose and support a positive future is possible.

By attending the program veterans have elected to participate in their own rescue, taking responsibility for the life they want. The program is intensive and obliges participants to be active in a peer group, whilst facilitating reflection time and individual mentoring. A range of stimulating activities and environments provide fertile ground for healing, growth and development. Our veteran facilitators, who are active participants on each program, demonstrate the value of becoming a healer of others and are examples that post traumatic growth is possible. The endstate of Timor Awakening is to have inspired and informed veterans empowered with tools for positive change and linked to the array of veteran resources available in Australia. The program continues to develop with higher efficacy which is passed through participants into the wider veteran community to create an impact on a larger scale.

Timor Awakening has been possible due to financial support of Bolton Clarke and RSL QLD and significant volunteer contributions of experienced veterans. Corporate partners are required for the program to continue and share the program with the wider veteran community for both domestic and international programs. VCAI has a clear strategic aim to utilise the data and successful interventions of Timor Awakening as a model for Department of Veterans Affairs to commit to funding wellness intervention to prevent veteran suicide, broken families and injured veterans. Wellness intervention will result in considerable government budget savings compared to funds spent on 'sickness' treatment, pensions and medication. As well as increase health and wellbeing of veterans and their families, save lives, and meaningfully re-engage some of the nation's most energetic and capable members of society. In the soul of the veteran is a need to serve, to be of value, to contribute and to belong.



RSL QLD 3 Minute Video overview (2020) - <https://www.facebook.com/RSLQueensland/videos/594230674463467/>

Timor Awakening 7 Program Video - provides a snapshot of the program (6 mins) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5Xdip5bcus>

Riak Veterans Retreat and Language School - short videos about this project which is our enduring project for all veterans:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N78XE6tpnRs&t=36s> . <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQIU9rI6OvM>
<https://www.facebook.com/timorawakening/videos/2441330942583644/>

ABC News story on the Riak Retreat project 19 Sep 19:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-19/war-veterans-heal-in-east-timor-tour/11525170>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/am/war-veterans-healing-through-community-work-in-east-timor/11526898>



Timor Awakening 12 program components (content structure)

Detailed preparation - involving individual admin/medical/mental prep, personal and group engagement.
Orientation - Darwin concentration, team bonding, individual mentor 1 on 1, briefing, 24 hours in TL.
Self-Awareness. Improving capacity to relate to yourself and others.
Grounding (beliefs, techniques, mindfulness).
Taking ownership and responsibility of personal circumstances.
Nurturing your mind, body and soul.
Destigmatising trauma and mental health.
Anxiety, depression and stress - understanding the causes, biology, recognising the signs and mitigating symptoms.
Tools to help relax, ground and manage feelings and physical symptoms of stress and anxiety.
Communication and positive living in communities.
Restoring a sense of Identity and Purpose.
Forgiveness.
Goal Setting.
Forging a new Identity (participants form identity as alumni of program, as Australian veterans, as Australians)
Strategies to help you go back to activities or places you may have avoided since the trauma.
Transitioning back to connection with communities, support and positive pathways.

Timor Awakening 12 Activities

Group discussions.
Self-awareness exercises.
Physical activation (group walks, stretching, breath work, personal exercise, volunteer work).
Volunteer work on rural education projects (handyman labour, gardening, landscaping, painting).
Breathing and breath work.
Mindfulness and grounding.
Goal setting.
Communication skills.
Body Language – impact of posture, effects on communication.
Introduction to Neuro Linguistic Programming.
Visits to historic locations.
Service commemoration: both Australian and Timor-Leste military commemoration.
Community engagement with schools (Kits4Kids).
Meeting and learning from Timorese veterans.
Meeting and learning from Timorese leaders.
Visiting and meeting NGOs.

Group discussion topics on Timor Awakening 12

Living with purpose and identity (and helping others).
Growth mindset / Living above the line.
Addiction and relapse prevention.
Taking ownership and responsibility (of our past, present and future).
Nurturing the body – Nutrition, exercise, sleep.
Mental health – Anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress (awareness, mitigation).
Safety plans – Addiction relapse, Triggered Anxiety/Stress/Depression, Suicidal Ideation.
Suicide – helping others, getting help, safety plans, processing and managing bereavement.
Communication and relationships.
Relationships.
Forgiveness / Letting Go.
Resources for veterans and families at home.



Section 2: Timor Awakening 12 - Review of Participant Data

Prepared by Mrs. Candice Carroll, Client Support Officer and Mrs. Christina Hully, Psychologist.

Data was collected from 13 participants and 4 pastoral carers on TA12 at two time points: Commencement of the program (22nd February 2020) and the conclusion of the program (04th March 2020). TA12 was the 11th evaluated program which demonstrates the positive efficacy of the program. A high percentage of the participants showed significant improvements in their health and wellbeing in the areas of Mental Well-Being, Post-traumatic Stress, Depression, Stress and Anxiety, Moral Injury. We would like to note that we have participants who were on this program and past programs who were not ex-serving but are partners or family members of participants who were veterans. These participants did not show a level of disability or post-traumatic stress at the commencement of the program, nevertheless demonstrating improvement in other health and well-being markers. As part of this program there is a particular focus in monitoring changes in the Moral Injury symptoms of the veterans as a result of the Timor Awakening experience. This is an area that participants have not known about or addressed in earlier treatment programs in which they have been involved. Moral Injury was assessed with a pre and post deployment assessments which gave us a significant positive difference.

The anecdotal comments at the end of report reflect a fascinating diversity of positive outcomes, the program is seen to show a positive impact on the participants.

Demographics

Of the 17 participants on the program data was collected from 16 Veterans (of these Veterans there are 4 Staff) and 1 Civilian. This report includes all the data from the TA12 participants. We have included four Pastoral Carers (Staff) in the report so we have an understanding on how the program impacts our staff as well.

Demographic data collected on the 17 participants revealed the following. 12 participants identified as male and 5 as female. The average age of participants was 47 years ($M = 47$ years, $SD = 7.16$ years), indicating that the average age of participants on this deployment was less than the participants of TA10 by 1 years and the age span has decreased by 14 years (TA12: 35-62; TA10: 38-76; TA9: 38-74yrs; TA8: 30-66yrs; TA7: 23-94yrs; TA6: 37-73yrs; TA5: 31-78yrs) 16 participants had a history of serving with the military services. Fourteen (14) participants had served in the army with three still currently serving, two (2) had served in the RAAF. Of these 37.5% reported that they had been medically discharged. At the time of departure for Timor four (23.5%) participants reported that they were retired, eleven (64.7%) reported that they were employed, one (5.8%) participant identified as unemployed, and one (5.8%) participant identified as a Volunteer.

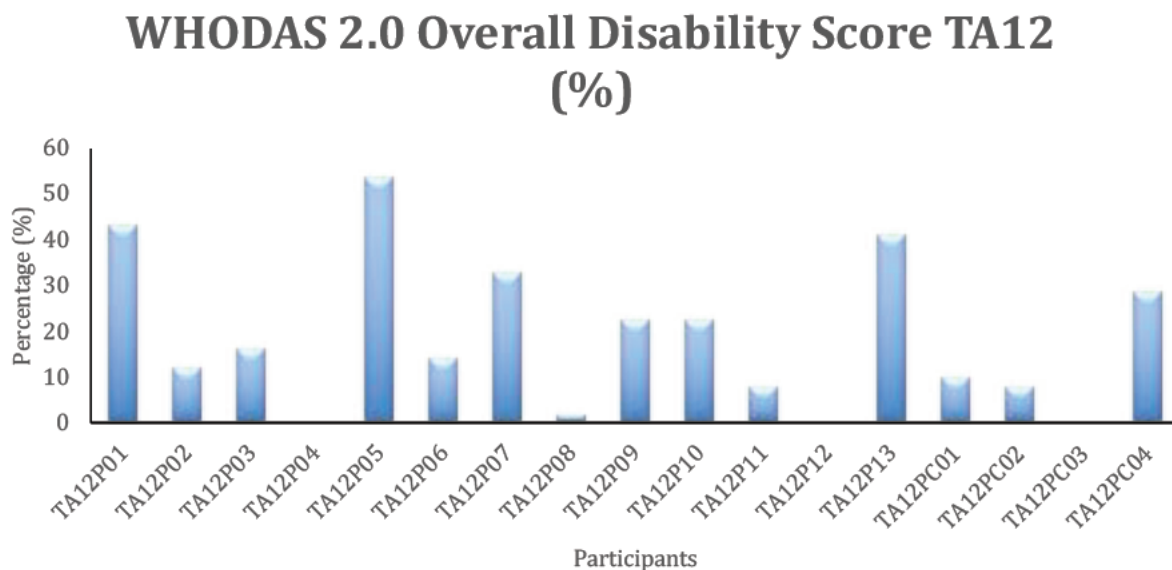
Family Characteristics

Eleven (64%) participants identified that they were in a long-term relationship (de facto or married), and three (17%) reported being single. 17 participants provided family demographic information which indicated that eleven (64%) have children. Of the twenty-one participants who have children, ten (58%) currently have dependent offspring.



Health Status

Physical Health: TA12 participants were administered the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0 (WHODAS 2.0) 12-item version to screen overall functioning and disability due to health conditions. The WHODAS 2.0 provides an overall summary score expressed as percentage of disability experienced in daily life over the past 30 days, with 85% representing full disability due to health condition. All participants completed the questionnaire and disability scores are graphed below.



As the graph above demonstrates, there was variability in the overall functioning level of participants who engaged in TA12.

The average summary score was 18% disability. Comparison with population data available from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that our participants' average score ranks below the level of functioning to be considered a disability when compared to the general population. This result suggests that overall this group of Timor Awakening participant's daily function was comparably greater than what has been reported for participants on the previous program (TA4 = 30.17; TA5 = 32.15; TA6 = 40.5; TA7=40.5; TA8=8.04; TA9=26, TA10=23; TA12=18) where the level of disability had been as high as 90-95% when compared with the general population. Further analysis may be required to identify if the higher average disability score is impacted by age range or health conditions reported by the participants in each individual deployment.

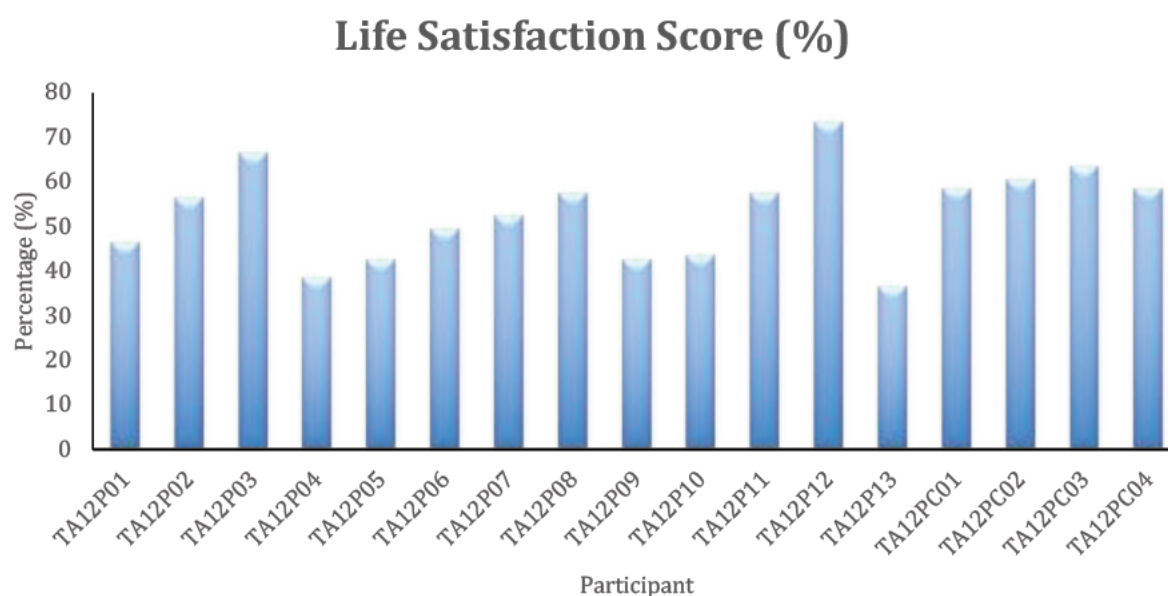
Mental Health

All TA12 participants provided information about their current and previous treatment for mental health conditions. At deployment, 10 (58%) participants were taking medication for a psychiatric condition and all these participants were under the care of a psychiatrist. Of these 7 (41%) were also receiving psychological treatment. one participant was receiving psychiatry treatment without



medications and two participants were receiving psychological treatment alone. The psychiatric condition most reported by participants was again Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Secondary to this demographic information, participants completed the Quality of Life and Enjoyment Scale, Short Form (QLES) to provide information on their pre-deployment levels of life satisfaction. The QLES provides a summary score expressed as percentage of life enjoyment over the past 14 days, with 100% representing full life satisfaction. All participants completed the pre-deployment screening measure, the following analysis is based on the responses of 17 participants. Participants overall life enjoyment scores are graphed below.



As the graph above demonstrates, there was some variability in the overall life enjoyment of participants who engaged in TA12. The average summary score was marginally above 71% life enjoyment, with the lowest score at 41% life enjoyment and the highest at 100% life enjoyment. In comparison to other Timor Awakenings, this was above the range of positive life experiences at the time of deployment (TA5 Average= 61%; Range= 40- 93%, TA6 Average= 40.24%; Range= 27-78%, TA7 Average= 55.42%; Range = 36-68%, TA8 Average= 65.93%; Range= 26%-100%, TA9 Average = 68.30%; Range=33.93%-100%, TA10 Average = 72%; Range = 36%-100%), indicating that the presentation of participants varies from group to group.

Section 3: TA12 Program Efficacy

Outcomes

Participants completed standardized self-report assessments at Pre- and Post-deployment to aid an understanding of the symptoms of psychological distress and general health and wellbeing of the participants undertaking the deployment to Timor on TA12. These included the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS21), the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C), the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and Moral Injury Military Scale. De-identified Pre- and Post-deployment results on each assessment area are demonstrated below.

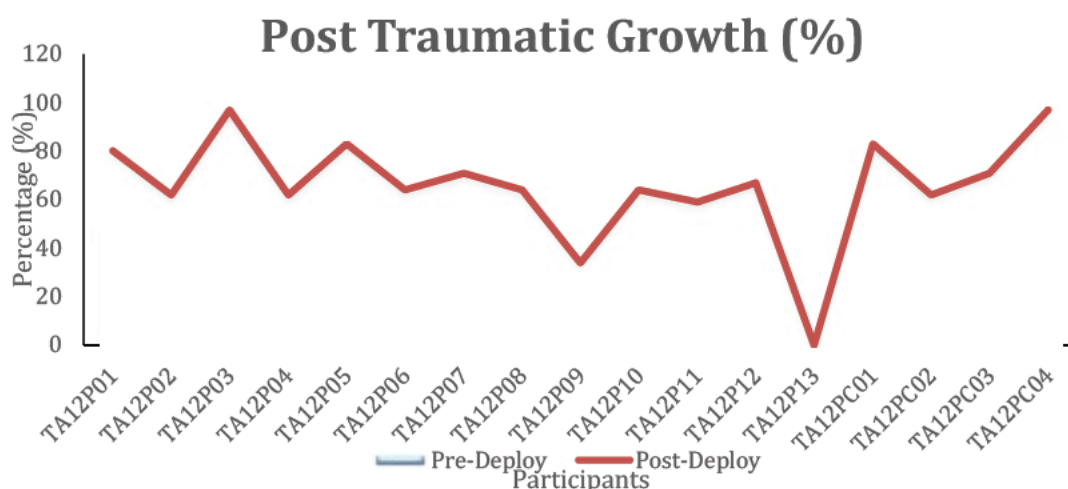


The final assessment of participants perceptions of personal change as a result of the TA12 experience is the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) which is a measure of positive change as it is the primary aim of the Timor Awakening experience is that participants are given opportunities to make some positive changes to their mental health and wellbeing despite the impact of their time within military service in countries and situations that have had enormously negative impacts on their functioning, physically, mentally, emotionally and interpersonally. This is the first time that the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory was administered to participants both at the end of the TA experience and immediately prior to deployment. In previous assessment the assessment was only administered at the completion of the deployment as it was deemed that this did not give accurate information about the impact of the TA experience. It is the results of this final assessment which will be an initial focus of this report prior to reporting in detail any changes in mental health functioning of the participants.

Post Traumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity and other challenges in order to rise to a higher level of functioning. Post traumatic growth occurs when individuals report a personal benefit from circumstances that represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual and pose significant challenges to their way of understanding the world and their place in it. Posttraumatic growth is not about returning to the same life as it was previously experienced before a period of traumatic suffering, but it is about undergoing significant 'life-changing' psychological shifts in thinking and relating to the world, that contribute to a personal process of change, that is deeply meaningful.

The Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) enables quick assessment of an individual's perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life. Each participant's de-identified results on the PTGI that was completed Pre-Deploy and Post-Deploy of the TA12 experience is demonstrated below. This indicated that each participant experienced some personal growth from the experience of returning to Timor.

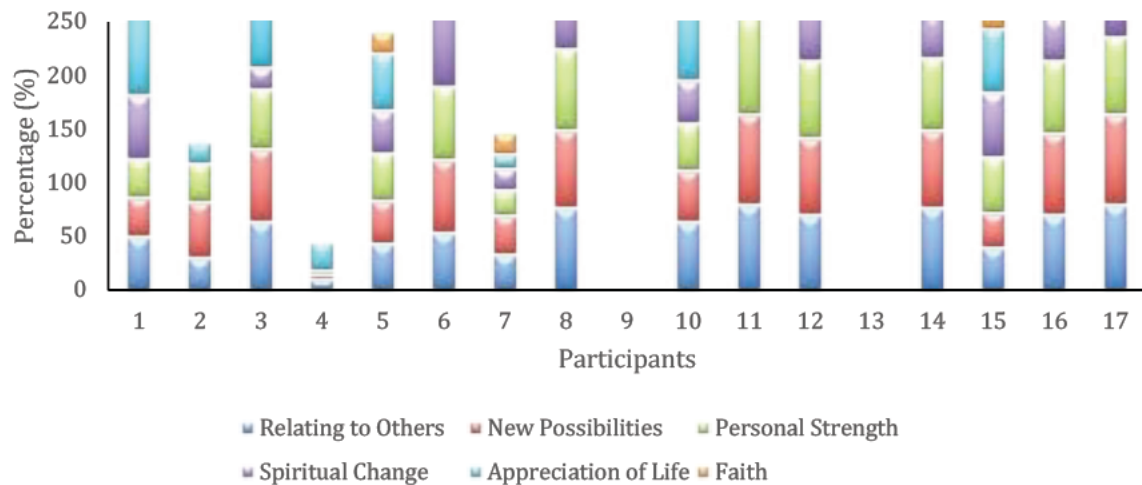


Following is a pre and post deploy graphical representation of the areas of change each participant experienced. The change indicates the percentage of the within participant change and not a

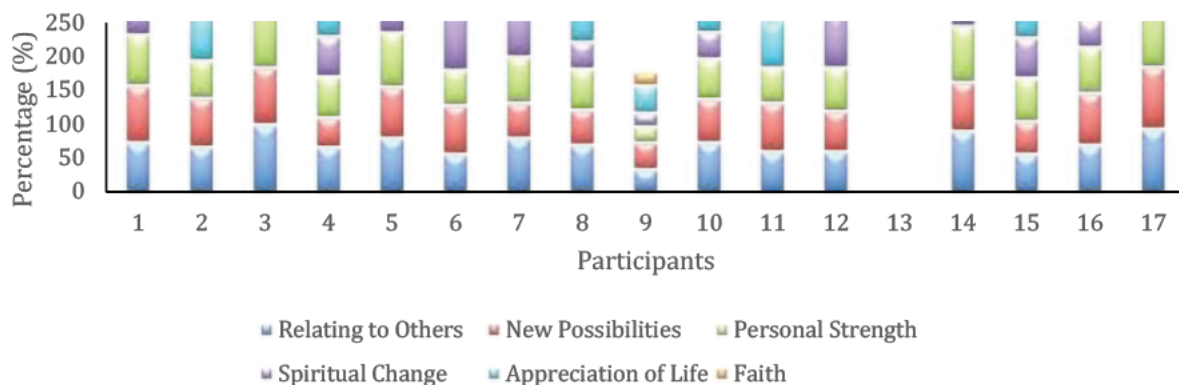


comparison of change between participants. However, to further understand the overall improvement of Post Traumatic Growth of the group as a whole statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences between the group's Pre and Post-deployment scores. Analysis was based on the 17 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant increase in the group's overall scores on the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory from Time 1 ($M = 51.35$, $SD = 28.63$) to Time 2 ($M = 65.88$, $SD = 22.68$), $t = 2.119$, $p = .016$.

Areas of Post Traumatic Growth in Each Participant Pre-Deploy



Areas of Post Traumatic Growth in Each Participant Post-Deploy



As you can see the comparison between pre and post deployment for each participant, shows improvement throughout each area for the entire group.



Overall Growth Within Group Participants Pre-Deploy



■ Relating to Others ■ New Possibilities ■ Personal Strength
■ Spiritual Change ■ Appreciation of Life ■ Faith

Overall Growth Within Group Participants Post-Deploy



■ Relating to Others ■ New Possibilities ■ Personal Strength
■ Spiritual Change ■ Appreciation of Life ■ Faith

A comparison of each of the within group factors assessed within this instrument indicated that there is identifiable area of growth that is statistically different, improvement in relating to others, faith, spiritual change, and a decline in personal strength, new possibilities and appreciation of life.

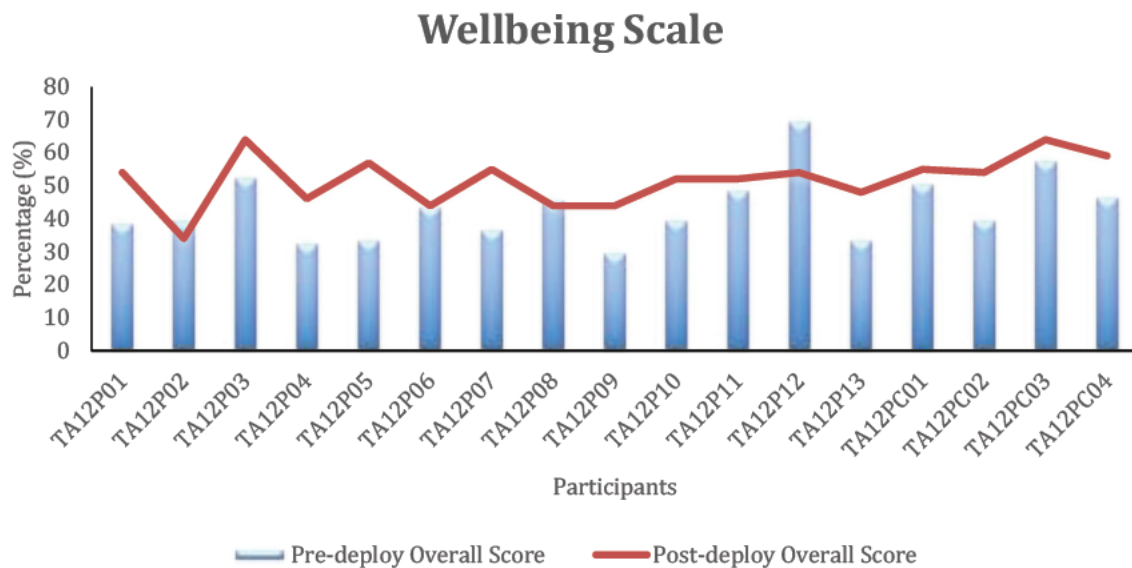




Mental Wellbeing

To support the changes reported by participants in their perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was completed at Pre and Post-deployment. The WEMWBS enables quick assessment of an individual's mental wellbeing across areas including but not limited to relaxation, energy levels, self-esteem, optimism and social connection.

Each participant's de-identified results on the WEMBWS at Time 1 and Time 2 is shown in the following graph:



A change in score of 3 points is considered to be meaningful.

In reviewing the responses on the wellbeing scale a change of 3 points or more in this scale is considered to be meaningful. 82% (18) of the participants involved in TA12 reported an improvement in the total score at the end of the deployment, 14% (3) of the participants involved in TA12 reported no improvement in the total score at the end of the deployment. Although at this time it cannot be considered a true indication of clinical significance for each respondent, as further statistical analysis of the assessment instrument is required. Therefore, a statistical comparison of the Pre- and Post-deployment scores for the entire group was conducted to determine if the difference between the mean scores of both Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance.

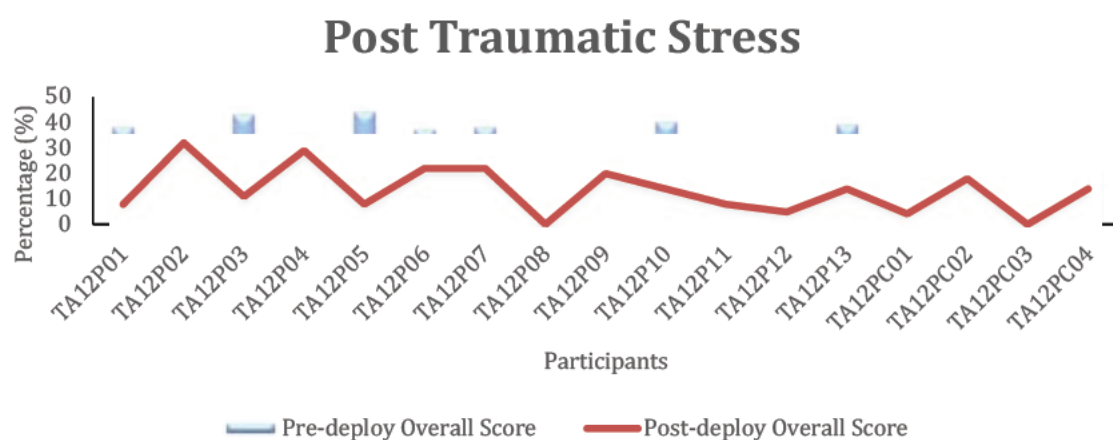
This analysis reviewed the responses of all 17 participants. A one tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant improvement in group's overall score on the WEBWBS from Time 1 ($M=43.82$, $SD=10.24$) to Time 2 ($M=51.76$, $SD=7.74$), $t=2.119$, $p=.004$.



Mental Distress Assessment Post-Traumatic Stress

Participants completed the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C) at Pre- and Post-deployment. The PCL-C is a questionnaire that is designed to assess clinical symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM5). The DSM-5 categorizes PTSD symptoms into several different criteria related to behaviours of re-experiencing, avoidance and hypervigilance and these are assessed in the PCL-C.

Each participant's de-identified results at Time 1 and Time 2 are demonstrated in the following graph:



Score >38 likely to be experiencing PTSD

Graphic representation of participants' scores on the PCL-C shows that 41% of participants were reporting clinically significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress at the time of deployment to Timor. On return from Timor the number of participants continuing to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress had decreased to 5%.

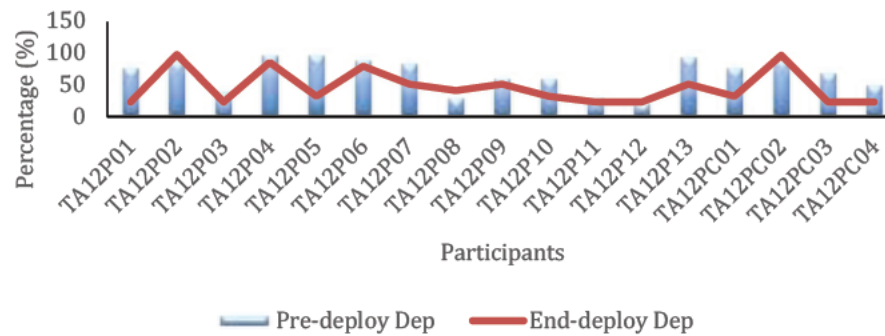
However, to further understand the overall improvement of post-trauma symptoms of the group as a whole statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences between the group's Pre- and Post-deployment scores. Analysis was based on the 17 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the PCL-C from Time 1 ($M = 27.71$, $SD = 14.21$) to Time 2 ($M = 13.47$, $SD = 9.40$), $t = 2.119$, $p = .000$.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Participants completed the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS-21) at Pre- and Post-deployment - herein referred to as Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. The DASS-21 is used to screen for mental health symptoms associated with depression, anxiety and stress. It is used widely in clinical settings to guide mental health professionals and to evaluate interventions.



Depression



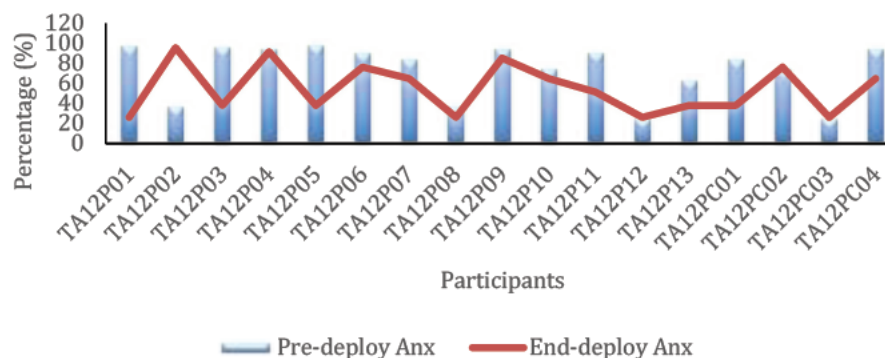
* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

Graphic representation shows that several the participants experienced elevated symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress at pre-deployment. It is also evident that the majority of participants reported a decrease in some or all of these symptoms at the conclusion of the tour, bringing most within the normal to mild range when compares with the general population.

Each participant's de-identified results on subscales at Time 1 and Time 2 are shown in the following graphs. On departure 17% of the 17 participants were experiencing symptoms of depression what are considered to be of clinical concern. Post-deployment results indicated that 11% of participants remained in this range, one participant experienced higher levels of Depression on the completion of TA12 than they were experiencing prior to departure.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre and Post-deployment scores for the group were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 17 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 from Time 1 ($M = 70.15$, $SD = 25.96$) to Time 2 ($M = 46.58$, $SD = 27.23$), $t = 2.19$, $p = .000$. Indicating that on this occasion there was a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of depression within the group.

Anxiety

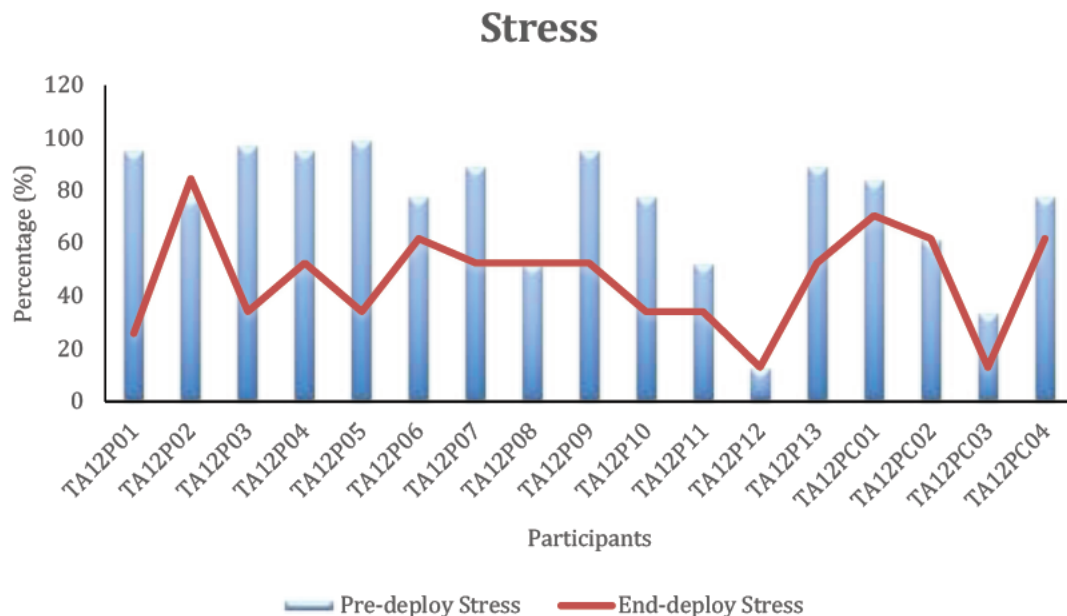


* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95



On departure 35% of participants were experiencing symptoms of anxiety that are considered to be within the clinical range. Post-deployment results indicated that 5% of participants remained in this range. One participant experienced higher levels of anxiety on the completion of TA12 than they were experiencing prior to departure. There is no available qualitative data to begin to consider the source of this increase in the level of anxiety during TA12.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 17 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was not a statistically significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ($M = 75.66$, $SD = 26.69$) to Time 2 ($M = 54.71$, $SD = 24.51$), $t = 2.11$, $p = .012$, indicating that on this occasion there was a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of anxiety within the group.



* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

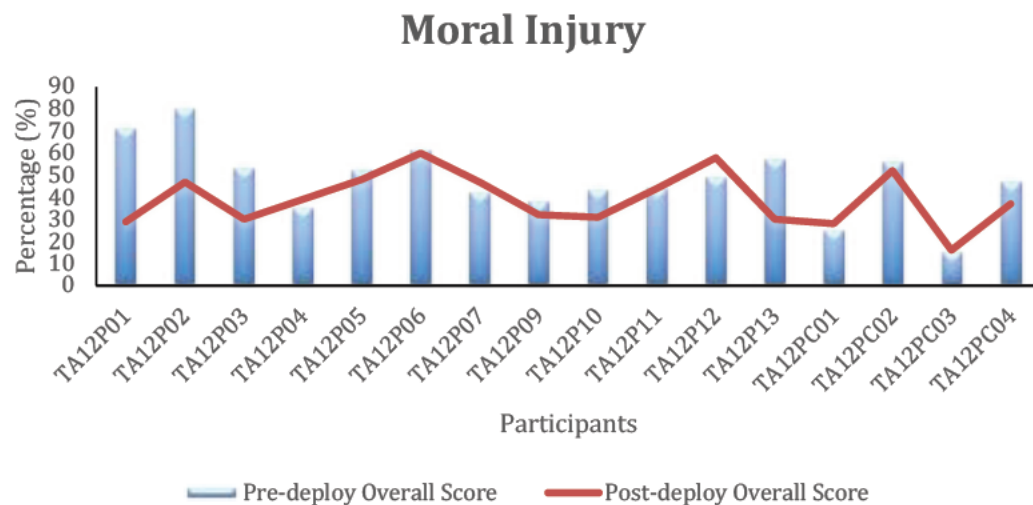
Graphic representation shows that 29% of the participants were experiencing elevated symptoms of stress at pre-deployment. Post-deployment results indicated that no participants remained in this range.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 17 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ($M = 75$, $SD = 24.58$) to Time 2 ($M = 46.56$, $SD = 19.72$), $t = 2.11$, $p = .012$



Moral Injury

16 Participants who had previously served in the Defence force completed the Moral Injury symptom Scale – Military (MISS-M) version short form. The MISS-M is a 10-item measure of moral injury (MI) designed to use in Veterans and Active serving military participants, consists of 10 theoretically grounded subscales that assess the psychological and spiritual/religious symptoms of Moral Injury: guilt, shame, betrayal, moral concerns, loss of meaning/purpose, difficulty forgiving, loss of trust, self-condemnation, spiritual/religious struggles, and loss of religious faith/hope.



Considering the impact on Moral Injury on veterans is a developing area in the military psychology. According to Koenig (2017) there is opportunity for a negative psychological and spiritual impact on military personnel who in the course of work undertakes tasks that are a contravention of personal beliefs and values. In reviewing the pre-deployment and post-deployment responses of the participants of TA12 is noted that 2 participants (11%) are reported high levels (>70) of moral injury pre-deploy, and post-deploy responses of the participants indicate that all participants showed reduction in the moral injury. These results show that there is a clinical difference between pre and post after being on the Timor Awakening program. To date there is no definitive indicator of a score that demands clinical attention. Further guidance is being sought from the author of the scale, however, further follow up of the wellbeing of the individuals with high scores pre-deployment is recommended to help maintain low range.

However, to further understand the overall improvement of Moral Injury of the group as a whole statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences between the group's Pre and Post-deployment scores. Analysis was based on 16 participants who are veterans and provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant positive decrease in the group's overall scores on the Moral Injury from Time 1 ($M = 49$, $SD = 16.07$) to Time 2 ($M = 39.25$, $SD = 12.20$), $t = 2.131$, $p = .019$.



Section 4: Post Deployment Recommendations

Post Deployment Connection to External Support Networks

At the concentration for Timor Awakening pre-briefing in Darwin participants were told that they were beginning their transition back to Australia. Every day of the program, throughout all sessions, perspective and practical implementation of insights and lessons learned when home in Australia is discussed. A fundamental element of Timor Awakening is providing practical tools for daily implementation for participant health and well-being. As a key part of the final stage of in the in-country program a 12 month personal health and well-being program was developed by each participant and mentoring provided by their personal pastoral care mentor. Both in the group sessions and in private sessions each individual were given referral and recommendation to access Government, Non-government and ESO provided health and well-being support tailored to their location and personal circumstances.

Post Deployment Participant Contact

At the time of preparing this report, all participants have had a follow up phone call, 2 weeks post Timor Awakening 12. Out of the 17 Australian based participants, 5 participants are still reporting significantly high symptoms of mental health concerns following the return of TA12, they have been offered support and a further follow-up will be undertaken to ensure that any improvements are maintained. Despite improvement throughout the deployment a follow-up call to all participants will be undertaken to ensure that the improvements are maintained, and that the participant is encouraged to seek further professional help and support for any ongoing areas of concern. As part of the program participants have all been invited to receive an extended course of personal coaching. 3 month follow up contact will review each individual in terms of their health and wellbeing, their health and well-being plan and the referred support provided by ESO and external organisations.

Reference

Koenig, H. G, (2108) *Religions* 2018, 9 (3), 86-100; doi:10.3390/rel9030086. Downloaded from www.mdpi.com/journal/religions 15-4-2019.





Timor Awakening 12 – End of Program Reflections from Participants

1. How are you feeling today in comparison to how you were feeling before coming?
 - I am more positive and confident.
 - That I have more issues to work on then I thought, but that is ok.
 - Satisfied, relaxed, happy and sure about things now including the future. Thanks to TA12 and the participants and Pastoral carers, I am in a good place now.
 - Enjoyed the days and people at the morning session.
 - A Lot more relaxed and mentally calm.
 - Calmer, I feel that I have been able to connect with my spiritual side on the deeper level.
 - I am calmer and more connected to self and others.
 - More open to new experiences, more honest about my feelings, more connected to my husband and others military experiences.
 - Exhausted, but satisfied, rewarded. I enjoyed the time being able to process thoughts in my head.
 - I am feeling calm and ready to integrate what I have uncovered and learnt back into my life in Australia. I feel supported and loved.
 - Although Tired and sore I feel good and happy with my achievements.
 - Neutral.
 - More creative and clear.
 - relaxed, happy and content with life.
 - Exhausted but calm.
2. What discussion topic was the most interesting and impactful?
 - Living above the line or below the line.
 - Mindfulness.
 - Tolerance, behavioural discussion and observation of oneself.
 - Veteran suicide.
 - Suicide.
 - I found all the topics interesting, big talk in smaller groups.
 - Forgiveness and self-ownership/responsibility.
 - talking about feelings and what's in the heart not just the head.
 - wheel of life, identity and nurturing the body.
 - All of them were but the topic of forgiveness is multifaceted and needed to be returned to many times to unpack and understand.
 - Grounding and forgiveness.
 - Talking to local veterans and community.
 - Suicide awareness.
 - All topics were enjoyable - and have their place, suicide awareness impactful - moved by participants experiences, they are brave.
 - Nutrition, and suicide just make sure you check on your mates.





3) What aspect of the program do you feel you got the most benefit from?

- The history and link that Timor has to Australia.
- Discussions in circle time and visiting the schools.
- Videos of information which I did not know, Circle time, which was very informative and enjoyable, meditation/ breathing is now part of my morning and afternoon routine.
- Veteran Suicide.
- Overall all of the program.
- The best part of the program was connecting with nature and the simple parts of life.
- Group discussion.
- Time at some - teamwork in a new community and making a huge start/contribution to the new buildings as a team.
- Physical activity in Same. Promoted teamwork within the TA group, but also students, teachers and Timorese Veterans. Plus allowed the mind to be absent of thought at times.
- "Circle time was awesome", Being in Timor with the veterans was humbling and truly allowed us to understand the process of forgiveness. Helping to build at Same was amazing.
- The physical working with students and Timorese Veterans.
- Working with the local's community.
- Grounding and self-awareness.
- Interacting with the Timorese in Same building project.
- Circle time and one on ones.

5) What was special/impactful about conducting a wellbeing program in Timor-Leste?

- To get on track and stay on track.
- Being in an environment where my service had impacted and somewhere away from a clinical setting.
- Most of my problems are from serving in East Timor in 1999. I was positively heavily impacted by the population's forgiveness of their past history and moving on for the good of the country. I needed to attend the program to see and hear from locals and now I have forgiven and can also move on. This is massive for my mental health.
- The poverty, yet the hope and inspirational stories.
- Working with the community was a highlight.
- Spending it with my wife and allowing her to experience it. Also reconnecting with my spiritual side.
- So good to get "out" of the Australia routine environment, forces mind and body adjustment.
- Timor is part of our region and history and a large part of my husband's military deployments.
- Interaction with the Timorese. Plus, it forces you to be absent from normal daily life.
- Being in Timor allowed you to be fully immersed in the program and open up completely and release the pains of the past. It helped me forgive myself and see how the Timorese people are today and how grateful they are.
- Interaction with students and Timorese Veterans.
- Working with the local community.
- It embraced the past not tried to hide or downplay it.
- Different environments, others you don't know and leave as friends. Embracing the love of another country who we have a connection with.
- Being able to help at Riak retreat and walk with the Timorese veterans on their national veterans' day.



- 6) How does this program differ from other programs or treatment you have participated in?
- First program I have been on.
 - Participated with other veterans for the first time.
 - This program is not just a 30 min appointment I have been challenged both physically and mentally throughout the program. The program has given me new tools which are different than any doctor has given me. this program has made me “own it” and to look at myself.
 - Closeness and bonding of the group, willingness to share and grow as a group.
 - I have no experience with other programs but rate this one very highly.
 - it allows to be part of the environment, psychologists and psychiatrists are so clinical. This program allows for a more holistic approach.
 - more group participation, there was a great amount of activities.
 - much deeper focus on trauma and emotions and mental health than I have ever experienced before.
 - I haven't participated in other programs outside of TA this TA12 had more focus on circle time and wellbeing then TA10.
 - A complete 10-day integration, sharing stories and building trust. The same results cannot be achieved through “hourly sessions” with therapists that don't understand what veterans have gone through.
 - TA is the first and only program I have participated in.
 - This is my first program.
 - Only program ever done.
 - I have not done any other program or had treatment.
 - you are more involved as a participant.
- 7) How was the mentoring beneficial to your experience?
- They knew when to talk to me and what to say.
 - bringing awareness of the program to the moment.
 - I had a direct person to talk to as well as the other staff. The input and mentoring from the other participants was also beneficial.
 - identified as a member of the group.
 - It has pushed me to be more positive about the future.
 - it allowed for them to constantly check on me and help answer questions.
 - promotes deeper thought and emotional awareness.
 - yes - great opportunity for reflections 1 on 1 very important part of the program.
 - Good opportunity to raise topics one on one.
 - It was important to be able to unpack issues as they arose in a caring, nurturing environment. It was great to get different perspectives from multiple mentors.
 - Giving different aspects to working out problems.
 - Neutral.
 - Personalisation of concepts raised in the group.
 - Educational.
 - Allowed deeper exploration of topics if you wanted to.





8) What could be done to improve the Timor Awakening Program?

- A variety of morning activities.
- Keep as it is with subtle improvements/ changes only as required. No need to change anything at all as far as I see it.
- More time during some bonding/relevant activities.
- Allow for rest periods
- smaller group activities and more big talk.
- for more time required in “Topic/Theme” discussion, create smaller groups for ongoing discussion, too many topics were “highlighted” and then too quickly too move on.
- Smaller group breaks away during group activities - enables more open and deeper conversations, at least for me it does.
- Clear expectation/ requirements for dress, this trip felt like a greater balance than I felt on TA10 which was good. I would like to explore relationships or self-sabotage a bit more.
- Honestly though the program worked really well, just enough travel around.
- if possible a day mid program with an afternoon of relaxation to give participants an opportunity to refresh and regain physical and mental balance.
- no improvement needed, productive outcome.
- possibly more Same trip to later in program to enhance the metaphoric significance of even though we are leaving the Chi behind it will still grow and prosper.
- I think I don't have that experience; all have been amazing, and all have been different.
- Like it how it was structured.

9) Is there a message you would want the financial sponsors of TA to hear?

- The benefit to the veteran far out ways the cost both in the short and long term.
- Thank you, please continue your generosity in allowing veterans an experience of healing.
- This program changes and saves lives. The program is life changing and provides advice and options - different than medical. The program deserves to be funded.
- TA has a beneficial effect on participants.
- Fund, Fund, Fund. This program has given me a new outlook to life.
- this could work beyond military groups.
- your support of the TA program has achieved me to explore symptoms, feelings and emotions at a level not supported in any other medical support programs.
- This program is not only relevant to veterans it is also important for their families too.
- Normal medical hospital bed in Queensland Health is \$2K+ per day. This is a good program that could assist veterans by preventing that occurrence.
- This valuable program far surpasses any conventional treatment in Australia. it is professional and well planned and should continue to be supported completely, made available to more veterans.
- Supporting this program, it gives people the opportunity to hear different views/aspects and abilities to approach their issues with more “tools” in the box.
- this is a very powerful and beneficial program that can save lives.
- TA has been a benefit to participants, please continue to support veterans who are in need.
- Thank you for your continued sponsorship as without it this program would not run. its support of veterans trying to reconnect in the civilian space is positive and has positive outcomes.



10) Is there a message you could share with DVA regarding considering support to programs like Timor Awakening for Veterans and Spouses?

- DVA supporting this program would ensure a long-term cost saving to the department and far greater outcome to the veteran and their spouses.
- There should be more programs where veterans share in their health and wellbeing environment together. instead of with civilians who don't necessarily understand veterans' perspectives.
- This program is totally different from a doctor's appointment, specialists, open arms appointment or courses. This program is real, it is run by veterans that understand the veterans and veteran community which is better than a 20-year-old from open arms trying to have a respected impact. This program is worthy and an absolute necessity.
- They need to seek new methods like Timor Awakening to counter veterans' suicide. This was a cathartic experience as expressed by other members throughout TA12.
- DVA needs to support and sponsor this well-run program.
- This opportunity has allowed my wife and I to go through similar experiences in a country that I served in. This has helped me to relate more and connected deeper. This holistic approach has not only helped me heal, but to have witnessed other veterans heal and have renewed outlook on life.
- The support of the TA program has achieved me to explore symptoms, feelings and emotions at a level not supported in any other medical support programs.
- By far the best intervention I have ever experienced through military support.
- Let's focus on preventative medicine - help veterans before they become really ill or unstable.
- Please keep this program going! I cannot recommend it highly enough. Thank you so much for a life changing opportunity and chance to reset my life, You guys Rock.
- This program is miles above and beyond any current offerings to Ex ADF or emergency services.
- please support holistic and spiritual side to treatment for veterans.
- This program brings positivity back to the veterans and shows what the veteran can do.

END REPORT





Timor Awakening 10 Program Report

Program dates: 13 to 25 September 2019

Report Compiled: 21 October 2019



Holistic Care of Body Mind & Soul for Veterans, Families & Carers
Reg. Charity No: CH2629 | ABN: 97 213 464 172

Qualitative Report – Timor Awakening 10

Section 1: Timor Awakening 10 – Summary of Activity

Prepared by: Project Director, Michael Stone and Pastoral Care Coordinator, Gary Stone

Timor Awakening 10 (TA10)

Timor Awakening 10 (TA10) was conducted from 13 to 25 September 2019. The 11-day holistic health program included 1 day in Darwin, 6 days in Dili and 4 days throughout rural areas of Timor-Leste (TL) including the Districts of Manufahi, Likisa and Bobonaro. The Timor Awakening Program is a holistic health and well-being program of rehabilitation and renewal for veterans and their families. The program promotes values, identity, purpose and spirituality in each of our lives, as a solid foundation for health and happiness.

TA10 included 23 Australian Veterans, with 7 spouse/carers (total 30) and 15 Timorese Veterans. TA10 also supported an 8-person contingent of RSL QLD delegates who came across for the 20th anniversary of INTERFET and who participated in 8 days of the TA Programme. TA10 was supported in Timor-Leste by the TL Office of the Prime Minister, the National Veteran Task Force, the National Defence Force, National Police, the Australian Defence Cooperation Programme and local authorities.

TA10 provided a multitude of education and healing interactions and experiences at the individual, small group and large group levels, including professional education and guidance, peer2peer support, physical exercise, mindfulness, meditation, exposure therapy and unique interaction with foreign communities and veterans. The program has been designed to provide a safe, nurturing and inspiring environment where veterans and their spouses have the opportunity to reevaluate their lives, envisage and plan where they want to go, and provide a range of tools to help them achieve a healthy and purposeful life. The wide range of topics covered within sessions on the program are mentioned below.

Special elements of the TA10 program included:

- Holistic Health (nurturing the mind, body, soul and relationships).
- Official Airport Welcome.
- Tour of Balide prison and National War Museum.
- 20th anniversary parade, march and reception in Dili
- Reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff aboard HMAS Choules.
- Meeting with Darren Chester, Minister for VA and Defence Minister Linda Reynolds
- Visit to historic sites in Dili, Same, Balibo, Bobonaro, Maliana, Motain.
- Community Traditional Welcome to Same.



- Participation in opening of Veterans English language Institute at Veterans University, Same.
- Commemoration and dedication ceremony at Balibo RAR Monument.
- Visit to the Timor-Leste/Indonesia Border.

Holistic Health Sessions

Holistic Health sessions included prepared sessions, discussions and activities on the following topics: mental health, exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, goal setting, forgiveness and reconciliation, resources for veterans in Australia, communication, growth mindset, PTSD, anxiety, addiction and relapse prevention, sleep management, medication and families. A number of videos were utilised including the Veterans Family Health Toolkit video series, the Debt of Honour documentary, Australian Story – The Peacemaker and The Presidents Man, A Hero's Journey and Balibo. The Timor Awakening focus of holistic health is that healing is possible, there are many resources to achieve this, that we should live in the present with a growth mindset and plan for the future.

Physical Fitness

Physical fitness is a fundamental element of the program. Fitness sessions are planned early morning on a daily basis, include village walks, stretching, mindfulness / yoga, mountain hikes, gym and own physical training. The daily program is active with walking and activities that involve movement, social interaction and stimulation. Other activities included cultural dancing on a number of occasions, and a full-length game of soccer against the Timorese Veterans at Balibo.

Official Welcome

Jorge Alves (TL Veteran Chief Coordinator), Ms Ines Almeida (Representing Minister of Veterans Affairs) and a cross section of the Timorese Veteran Community were awaiting TA10 participants on the tarmac in Dili, welcoming the Australian veterans in traditional fashion. Veterans of the Timor Awakening program were presented traditional 'Tais' and individually welcomed to country. The program was offered the special honour of processing through the VIP terminal.





Tour of the National War Museum and Balide prison

Through the history, with living Timorese survivors in their presence sharing testimonies, veterans learned of great suffering and resilience the Timorese have had to endure. Through the history and example of the survivors radiates the good values that sustained them through tough times, the resilience of their struggle and the positivity they project today. The most striking lesson is the transition of the veterans' post-war, how the Timorese reconciled with their former enemies and still living lives of dignity, honour and service. Participants met Journalist Max Stahl, who had videoed the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991 and were shown a video of Timorese history.



Welcome reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff The Australian Ambassador welcomed the Timor Awakening group aboard HMAS Choules. Ambassador Roberts and Minister Chester thanked all Australians for their service (and support from families) and at a breakfast the following day praised the Timor Awakening program in promoting health and wellbeing and developing relations between Australia and Timor-Leste. Representatives of Australian Military, and Embassy met and mingled with Australian and Timorese veterans.

Commemoration for the Fallen – RAR Memorial, Balibo

The commemoration service at the RAR monument at Balibo included an ecumenical program, Ode, Last Post and Rouse, verbal acknowledgement of remembrance for those who have fallen, Australian and Timor-Leste national anthems. All participants were invited to leave behind a black rock and take with them a white rock. The black rock they carry from the beginning of the program represents all the darkness of the past, the things unforgiven, the angst and anger, the regrets, guilt and shame. The white rock represents the choice to live for today and tomorrow, with light in your life, living a life with purpose, health and positivity.





Cultural experience

TA10 included regular immersion with Timorese culture, travelling through four Districts and experiencing a wide range of cultural activities in the cities and far reaches of the country. Traditional welcome ceremonies were prepared for participants at Dili Airport, East Timor Development Agency, Same, and Balibo Fort. Participants experienced the warm hospitable and forgiving nature of the Timorese; a culture rich in values and resilience, respect, dignity and humility. Many participants remarked they experienced a call to action in the service of others as a means of their rehabilitation. Many veterans noted in group sessions and program feedback that these veteran initiatives have inspired them to get more involved in their communities and given them an appreciation for the support we have in Australia.





NGO's & Volunteer Projects

On TA10 participants visited NGOs and volunteers throughout TL learning from their insights and projects, as well as help identify potential ways veterans can support in the future (as volunteers back in TL or for projects to raise money for). The program had lunch at the East Timor Development Agency (ETDA), a skill based independent training institution that has received significant support from Australians, especially Australian veterans. Participants enjoyed the orphan's performances and trainee hospitality. Timor Awakening participants continued to offer more positions for the "Australian Veterans Scholarship" at ETDA. Since 2018, 41 VET scholarships have been offered for descendants of Timorese Veterans, funded by individual Australian veterans (almost entirely ex-participants of Timor Awakening). Thus far over \$20,000 has been raised to educate less fortunate Timorese. More information about the scholarship can be seen here: <https://www.timorawakening.com/australian-veterans-scholarship>

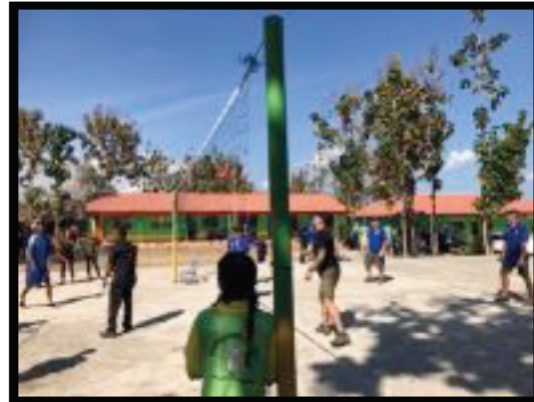


TA10 participants spent 2 days in Same (with side visit to Betano) participating in the opening of Veterans English language Institute as part of our collaboration with the Veterans University in a project called Riak Retreat. This project seeks to assist the education of the families of Timorese veterans as well as provide a place of Retreat for all veterans and their families in a beautiful setting beside a river. Further development of this project will be a part of subsequent programmes.





The TA10 group prepared and distributed 2000 basic writing kits for school children in many schools of rural communities. The resources were provided by Townsville RSL / Rotary in a program called *Kits4Kids*. Veterans also brought other gifts and educational materials that they handed out in schools, orphanages and NGOs. Many veterans realised that they can return to offer their skills, whether medical or manual labour to help others. Service for others is a key theme of Timor Awakening in rehabilitation and leading a healthier and purposeful life.



Historical Perspectives

Through the testimonies of Timorese Veterans, participants learned personal perspectives of the 24-year Timorese resistance struggle lead by FALINTIL. TA10 had Timorese Veterans join the program throughout. Many hundreds of veterans welcomed and met with Veterans throughout activities in Dili and the Districts. Participants learned how they employed guerrilla tactics, many of whom had learned from the Australia/Timorese WW2 experience, to defy unthinkable odds. Many of TA9 participants remarked of how the resilience, reconciliation, forgiveness and continued service of the Timorese veterans was an inspiration for them.





Participants visited the sacred site of the 1991 Dili Massacre, the 'Santa Cruz' cemetery, learning of the trigger that led to the historic UN endorsed 1999 referendum. At the site, wounded veteran, 'Raka', personally explained his account of what had happened that day. Raka was wounded at the massacre (shot 3 times) and testified of being proud, despite being unarmed, to have contributed to their countries path for freedom. Many other historical sites were visited, and stories told, especially locations where veterans within the group had served, an experience which proved to provide healing.



Participants visited the key sites of Australian military involvement from the time of INTERFET through to present day, including Dili, Same Batugade/Mota-ain, Balibo, Maliana, Tonabibi and Bobonaro. Many of the participants related personal stories of their deployments and their feelings of contrast witnessing the changes that have taken place. Revisiting the site of previous destruction, stress and trauma was cathartic for all veterans who have previously served in Timor-Leste. Through the remarkable development that has taken place, the vibrant village life, active economy, and especially the thousands of children going to school with such vitality and happiness, all in well-dressed uniforms, the Veterans felt proud of their contribution and felt healing of the suffering these places experienced in the past. Participants met many younger adults who were children during the suffering of 1999 to 2006 are now attending university or tertiary qualified and positive about the future of their country.

Conclusion

The feedback from participants of TA10 was uniformly positive and appreciative for the opportunity to experience profound growth and healing. Through professional mentoring and guidance, together with the extensive Peer to Peer therapy, Timor Awakening offered an experience uniquely different to other programs available for veterans. The multitude of activities created a bonded group that will remain connected through each other's journey of healing and growth. The overarching theme of hope and purpose was a feature throughout dozens of activities. Even with the realities of a troubled and traumatic past, the Timorese experience is testament to veterans that there is hope, and with purpose and support a positive future is possible. The program continues to develop with higher efficacy which is passed through participants into the wider veteran community to create an impact on a larger scale.





The occasion of the 20th anniversary of INTERFET provided opportunity for senior Australian government officials to become aware, including special comment by President Lu-Olo in his anniversary speech, of the contribution TA has made to international relations between our two countries as well as improving the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families in both countries VCA will be following up this interaction with DVA Minister Darren Chester.





Section 2: Timor Awakening 10 - Review of Participant Data

Prepared by: Mrs. Candice Carroll, Client Support Officer and Mrs. Christina Hully, Psychologist.

Data was collected from 22 participants on TA10 at two time points: Commencement of the program (13th September 2019) and the conclusion of the program (25th September 2019). TA10 was the 10th evaluated program which demonstrates the positive efficacy of the program. A high percentage of the participants showed significant improvements in their health and wellbeing in the areas of Mental Well-Being, Post-traumatic Stress, Depression, Stress and Anxiety, Moral Injury. We would like to note that we have participants who were on this program and past programs who were not ex-serving but are partners or family members of participants who were veterans. These participants did not show a level of disability or post-traumatic stress at the commencement of the program, nevertheless demonstrate improvement in other health and well-being markers.

Particularly pleasing overall was to see the improvement in Moral Injury symptoms, this is an area that none of the participants had seen or addressed in earlier treatments or programs, we assessed this by doing a pre and post deployment assessments which gave us a significant positive difference.

The anecdotal comments at the end of report reflect a fascinating diversity of positive outcomes, the program is seen to show a positive impact on the participants.

Demographics

Of the 22 participants on the deployment data was collected from 18 veterans and 4 Civilians. This report includes all the data from the TA10 participants.

Demographic data collected on the 22 participants revealed the following. 15 participants identified as male and 7 as female. The average age of participants was 48 years ($M = 48.27$ years, $SD = 8.47$ years), indicating that the average age of participants on this deployment was less than the participant of TA9 by 9 years and the age span has stayed similar (TA10: 38-76; TA9: 38-74yrs; TA8: 30-66yrs; TA7: 23-94yrs; TA6: 37-73yrs; TA5: 31-78yrs) 18 participants had a history of serving with the military services. Sixteen (16) participants had served in the army with one still currently serving, one (1) had served in the RAAF and one (1) had served in the RAN. Of these 36% reported that they had been medically discharged. At the time of departure for Timor eleven (50%) participants reported that they were retired, 9 (40%) reported that they were employed, and two (10%) participants identified as unemployed.

Family Characteristics

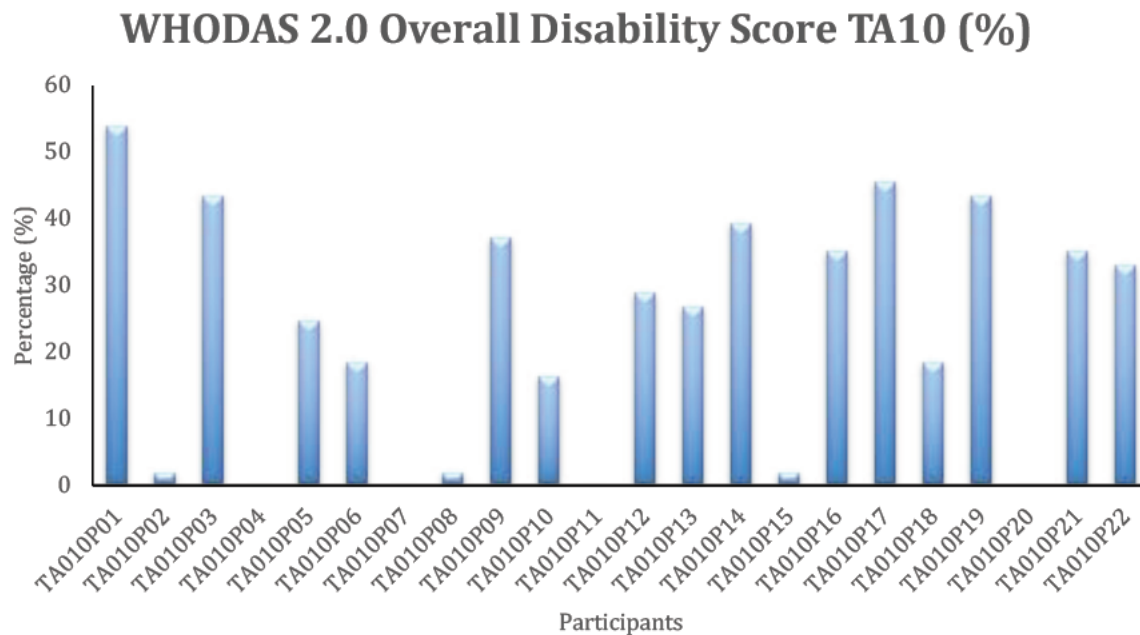
Nineteen (86%) participants identified that they were in a long-term relationship (de facto or married), and three (14%) reported being single. 22 participants provided family demographic information which indicated that twenty-one (95%) have children. Of the twenty-one participants who have children, fifteen (68%) currently have dependent offspring.





Health Status

Physical Health: TA10 participants were administered the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0 (WHODAS 2.0) 12-item version to screen overall functioning and disability due to health conditions. The WHODAS 2.0 provides an overall summary score expressed as percentage of disability experienced in daily life over the past 30 days, with 85% representing full disability due to health condition. All participants completed the questionnaire and disability scores are graphed below.



As the graph above demonstrates, there was variability in the overall functioning level of participants who engaged in TA10.

The average summary score was 23% disability. Comparison with population data available from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that our participants' average score ranks below the level of functioning to be considered a disability when compared to the general population.

This result suggests that overall this group of Timor Awakening participant's daily function was comparably greater than what has been reported for participants on the previous program (TA4 = 30.17; TA5 = 32.15; TA6 = 40.5; TA7=40.5; TA8=8.04; TA9=26) where the level of disability had between as high as 90-95% when compared with the general population. Further analysis may be required to identify if the higher average disability score is impacted by age range or health conditions reported by the participants in each individual deployment.



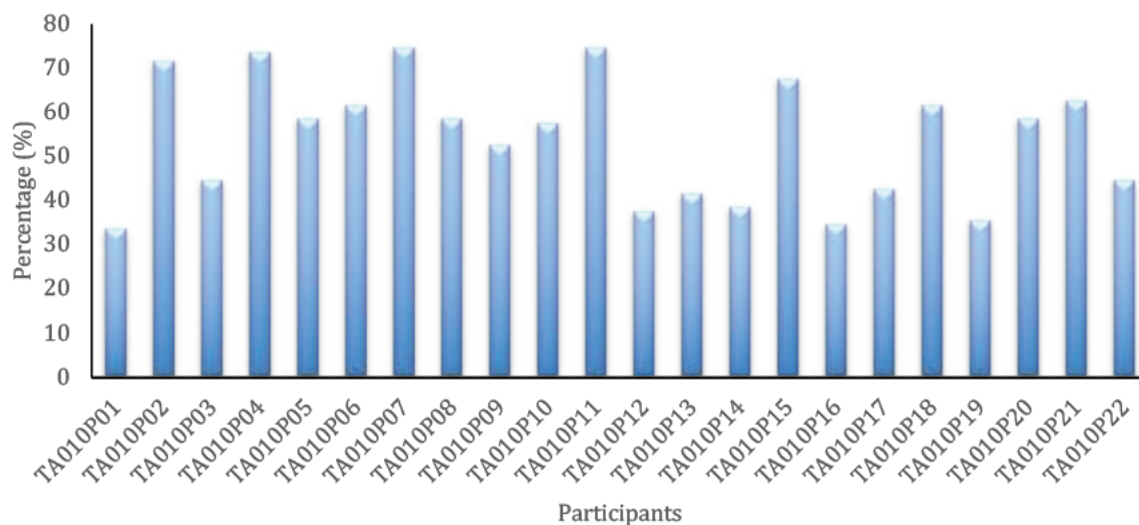


Mental Health

All TA10 participants provided information about their current and previous treatment for mental health conditions. At deployment, 50% (11) participants were taking medication for a psychiatric condition and all these participants were under the care of a psychiatrist. Of these 50% (11) were also receiving psychological treatment. one participant was receiving psychiatry treatment without medications and three participants was receiving psychological treatment alone. The psychiatric condition most reported by participants was again Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Secondary to this demographic information, participants completed the Quality of Life and Enjoyment Scale, Short Form (QLES) to provide information on their pre-deployment levels of life satisfaction. The QLES provides a summary score expressed as percentage of life enjoyment over the past 14 days, with 100% representing full life satisfaction. All participants completed the pre-deployment screening measure, the following analysis is based on the responses of 22 participants. Participant overall life enjoyment scores are graphed below.

Life Satisfaction Score (%)



As the graph above demonstrates, there was some variability in the overall life enjoyment of participants who engaged in TA10. The average summary score was marginally above 72% life enjoyment, with the lowest score at 36% life enjoyment and the highest at 100% life enjoyment. In comparison to other Timor Awakenings, this was above the range of positive life experiences at the time of deployment (TA5 Average= 61%; Range= 40- 93%, TA6 Average= 40.24%; Range= 27-78%, TA7 Average= 55.42%; Range = 36-68%, TA8 Average= 65.93%; Range= 26%-100%, TA9 Average = 68.30%; Range=33.93%-100%), indicating that the presentation of participants varies from group to group.





Section 3: TA10 Program Efficacy

Outcomes

Participants completed standardized self-report assessments at Pre- and Post-deployment to aid an understanding of the symptoms of psychological distress and general health and wellbeing of the participants undertaking the deployment to Timor on TA10. These included the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS21), the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). De-identified Pre- and Post-deployment results on each assessment area are demonstrated below.

The final assessment of participants perceptions of personal change as a result of the TA10 experience is the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) which is a measure of positive change as it is the primary aim of the Timor Awakening experience is that participants are given opportunities to make some positive changes to their mental health and wellbeing despite the impact of their time within military service in countries and situations that have had enormously negative impacts on their functioning, physically, mentally, emotionally and interpersonally. This is the first time that the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory was administered to participant both at the end of the TA experience and immediately prior to deployment. In previous assessment the assessment was only administered at the completion of the deployment as it was deemed that this did not give accurate information about the impact of the TA experience. It is the results of this final assessment which will be an initial focus of this report prior to reporting in detail any changes in mental health functioning of the participants is presented.

Post Traumatic Growth

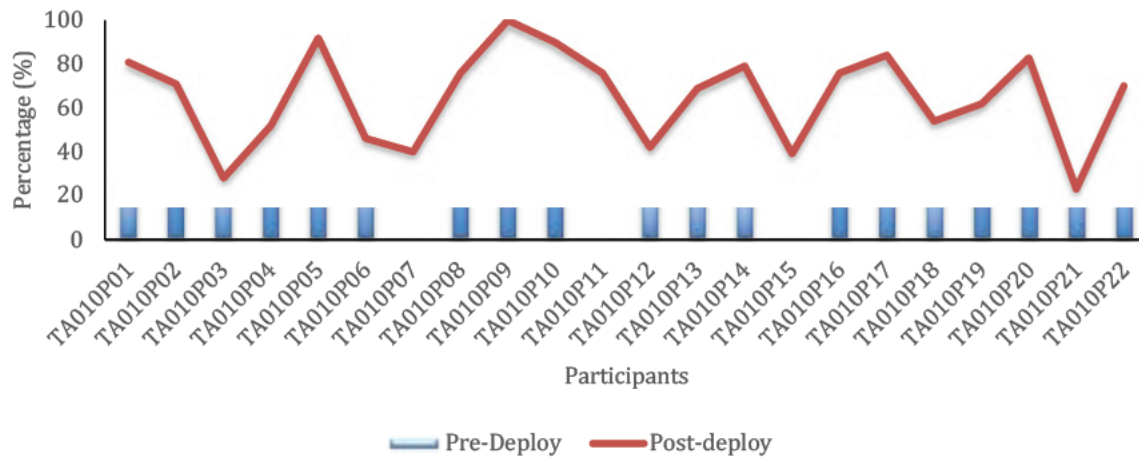
Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity and other challenges in order to rise to a higher level of functioning. Post traumatic growth occurs when individuals report a personal benefit from circumstances that represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual and pose significant challenges to their way of understanding the world and their place in it. Posttraumatic growth is not about returning to the same life as it was previously experienced before a period of traumatic suffering, but it is about undergoing significant 'life-changing' psychological shifts in thinking and relating to the world, that contribute to a personal process of change, that is deeply meaningful.

The Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) enables quick assessment of an individual's perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life. Each participant's de-identified results on the PTGI that was completed Pre-Deploy and Post-Deploy of the TA10 experience is demonstrated below. This indicated that each participant experienced some personal growth from the experience of returning to Timor.



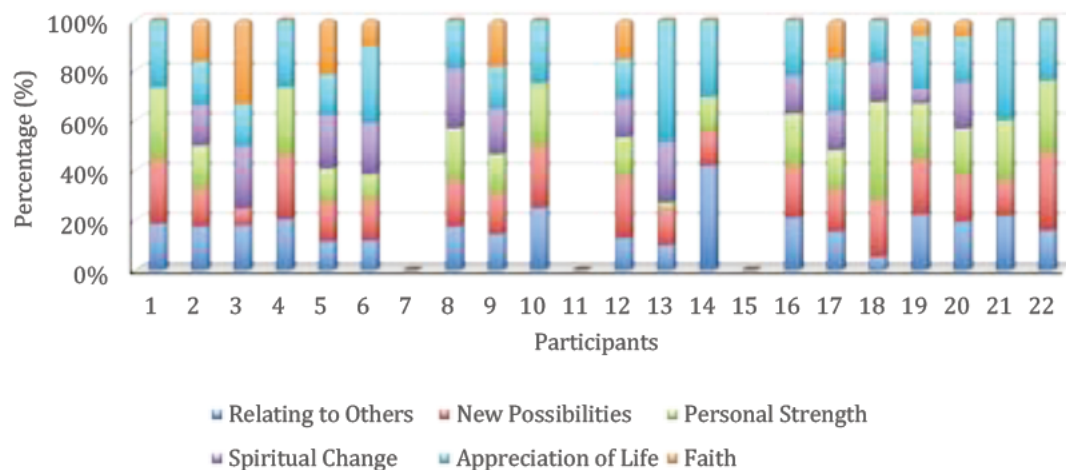


Post Traumatic Growth (%)



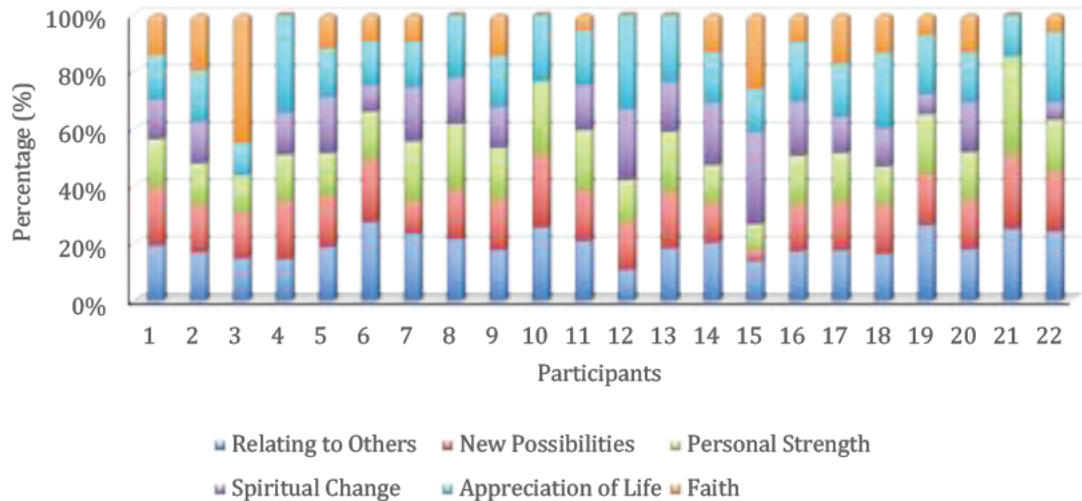
Following is a pre and post deploy graphical representation of the areas of change each participant experienced. The change indicates the percentage of the within participant change experienced by each participant and not a comparison of change between each participants.

Areas of Post Traumatic Growth in Each Participant Pre-Deploy



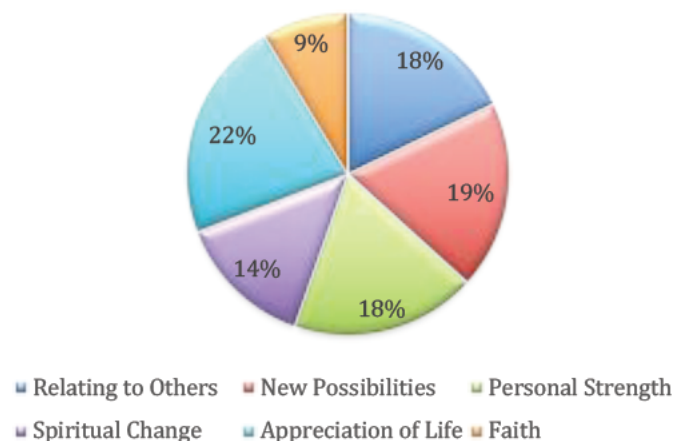


Areas of Post Traumatic Growth in Each Participant Post-Deploy



As you can see the comparison between pre and post deployment for each participant, shows improvement throughout each area for the entire group.

Overall Growth Within Group Participants Pre-Deploy





Overall Growth Within Group Participants Post-Deploy



■ Relating to Others
 ■ New Possibilities
 ■ Personal Strength
■ Spiritual Change
 ■ Appreciation of Life
 ■ Faith

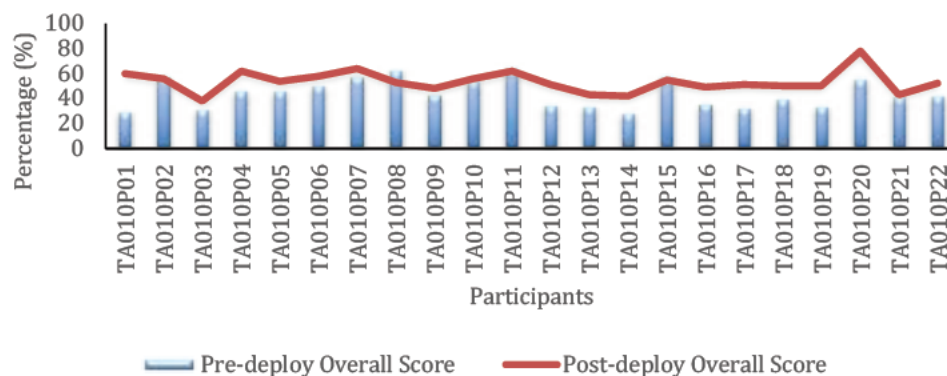
TA10 is the first Timor Awakening program for which post traumatic growth was monitored Pre and Post deployment as this is the case statistical comparison of each of the factors assessed within this instrument indicated that there is an identifiable area of growth that is significantly different. This remains consistent with the data collected from TA10. Statistical comparison of each of the factors assessed within this instrument indicated that there is no identifiable area of growth that is significantly different to any other. This remains consistent with the data collected from TA10, the first Timor Awakening experience for which post traumatic growth was monitored.

Mental Wellbeing

To support the changes reported by participants in their perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was completed at Pre and Post-deployment. The WEMWBS enables quick assessment of an individual's mental wellbeing across areas including but not limited to relaxation, energy levels, self-esteem, optimism and social connection.

Each participant's de-identified results on the WEMBWS at Time 1 and Time 2 is shown in the following graph:

Mental Well-Being



A change in score of 3 points is considered to be meaningful.





In reviewing the responses on the wellbeing scale a change of 3 points or more in this scale is considered to be meaningful. 82% (18) of the participants involved in TA10 reported an improvement in the total score at the end of the deployment, 18% (4) of the participants involved in TA10 reported no improvement in the total score at the end of the deployment. Although at this time it cannot be considered a true indication of clinical significance for each respondent, as further statistical analysis of the assessment instrument is required. Therefore, a statistical comparison of the Pre- and Post-deployment scores for the entire group was conducted to determine if the difference between the mean scores of both Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance.

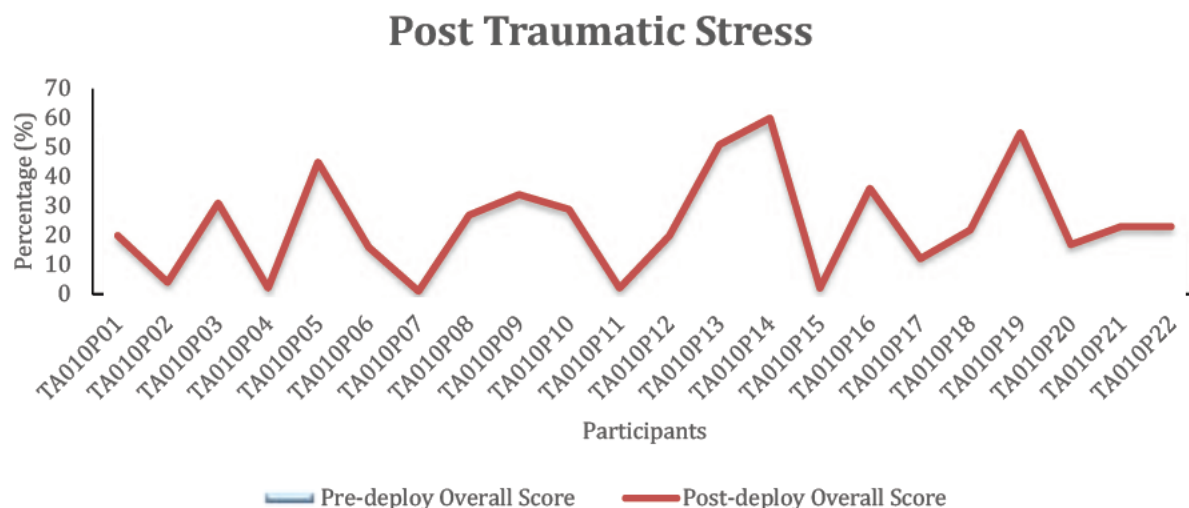
This analysis reviewed the responses of all 22 participants. A one tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant improvement in group's overall score on the WEBWBS from Time 1 ($M = 45$, $SD = 11.44$) to Time 2 ($M = 53.41$, $SD = 8.77$), $t = 4.261$, $p = .000$.

Mental Distress Assessment

Post-Traumatic Stress

Participants completed the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C) at Pre- and Post-deployment. The PCL-C is a questionnaire that is designed to assess clinical symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM5). The DSM-5 categorizes PTSD symptoms into several different criteria related to behaviours of re-experiencing, avoidance and hypervigilance and these are assessed in the PCL-C.

Each participant's de-identified results at Time 1 and Time 2 are demonstrated in the following graph:



Score >38 likely to be experiencing PTSD

Graphic representation of participants' scores on the PCL-C shows that 41% of participants were reporting clinically significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress at the time of



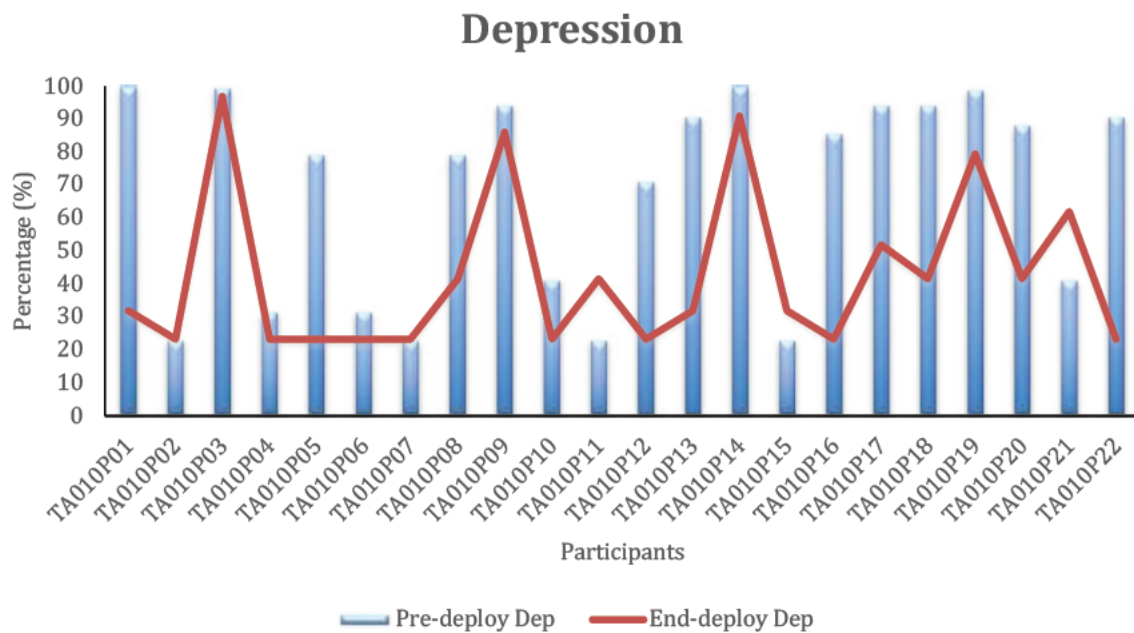


deployment to Timor. On return from Timor the number of participants continuing to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress had decreased to 18%.

However, to further understand the overall improvement of post-trauma symptoms of the group as a whole statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences between the group's Pre- and Post-deployment scores. Analysis was based on the 22 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the PCL-C from Time 1 ($M = 31.14$, $SD = 20.59$) to Time 2 ($M = 24.18$, $SD = 17.49$), $t = 2.23$, $p = .036$.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Participants completed the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS-21) at Pre- and Post-deployment - herein referred to as Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. The DASS-21 is used to screen for mental health symptoms associated with depression, anxiety and stress. It is used widely in clinical settings to guide mental health professionals and to evaluate interventions.



* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

Graphic representation shows that several the participants experienced elevated symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress at pre-deployment. It is also evident that the majority of participants reported a decrease in some or all of these symptoms at the conclusion of the tour, bringing most within the normal to mild range when compares with the general population.

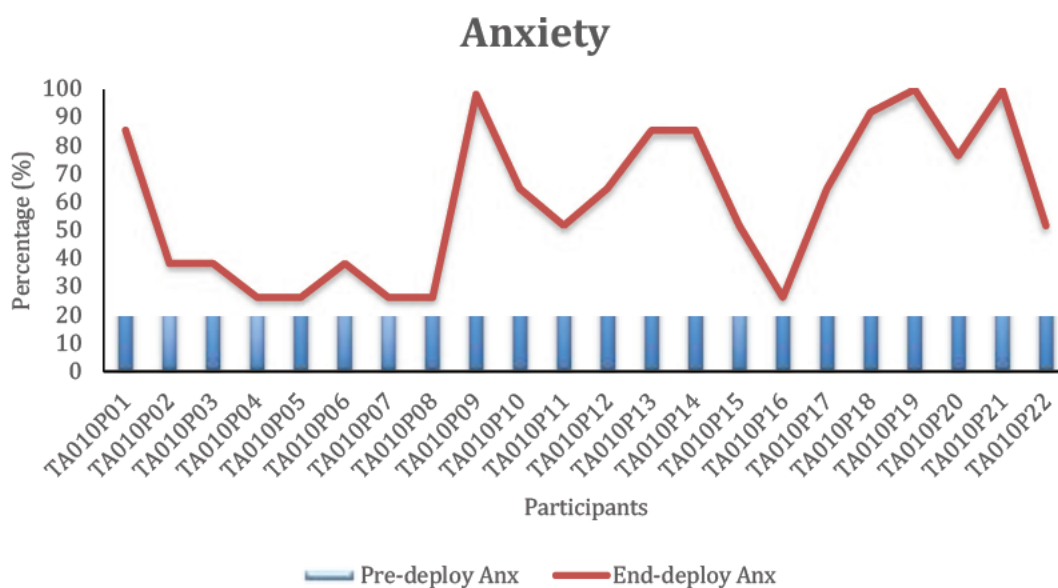
Each participant's de-identified results on subscales at Time 1 and Time 2 are shown in the following graphs. On departure 18% of the 22 participants were experiencing symptoms of depression what are considered to be of clinical concern. Post-deployment results indicated





that 5% of participants remained in this range, despite all had experiencing clinical levels of depression prior to departure.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre and Post-deployment scores for the group were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 22 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 from Time 1 ($M = 68.54$, $SD = 31.04$) to Time 2 ($M = 42.59$, $SD = 24.59$), $t = 4.22$, $p = .000$. Indicating that on this occasion there was a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of anxiety within the group.

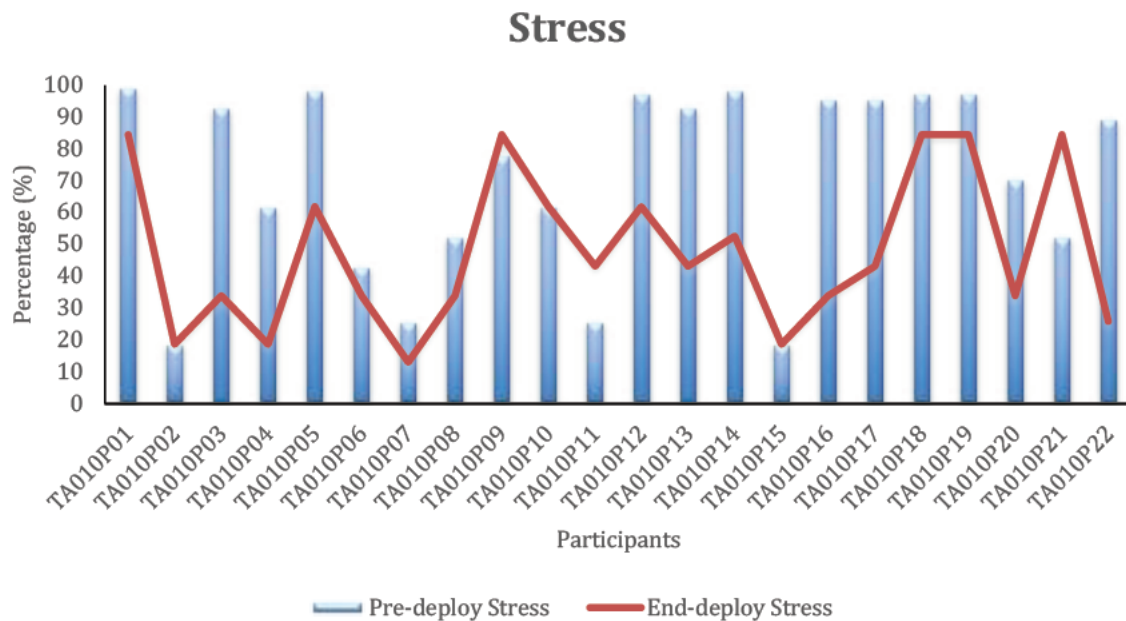


* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

On departure 50% of participants were experiencing symptoms of anxiety that are considered to be within the clinical range. Post-deployment results indicated that 13% of participants remained in this range. Three participants experienced higher levels of anxiety on the completion of TA10 than they were experiencing prior to departure. There is no available qualitative data to begin to consider the source of this increase in the level of anxiety during TA10.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 22 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was not a statistically significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ($M = 74.56$, $SD = 28.92$) to Time 2 ($M = 59.89$, $SD = 26.96$), $t = 2.73$, $p = 0.012$, indicating that on this occasion there was a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of anxiety within the group.





* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

Graphic representation shows that 38% of the participants were experiencing elevated symptoms of stress at pre-deployment. Post-deployment results indicated that no participants remained in this range.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 22 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ($M = 71.21$ $SD = 29.47$) to Time 2 ($M = 47.95$, $SD = 24.50$), $t = 4.05$, $p = .000$

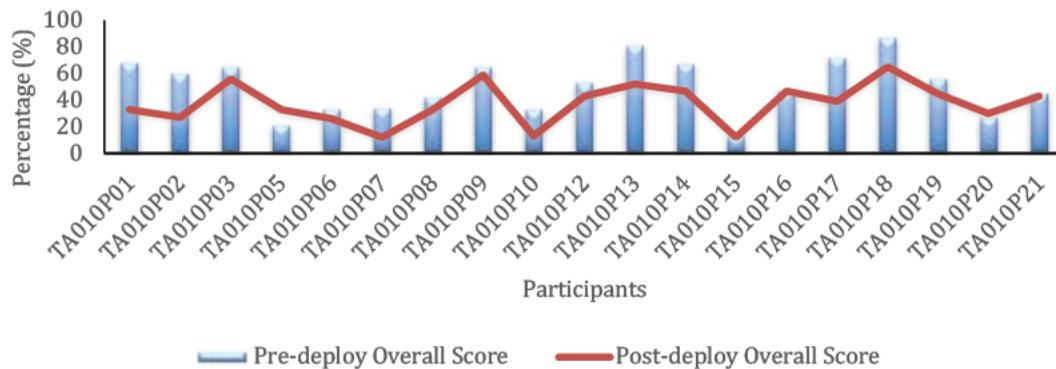
Moral Injury

19 Participants who had previously served in the Defence force completed the Moral Injury symptom Scale – Military (MISS-M) version short form. The MISS-M is a 10-item measure of moral injury (MI) designed to use in Veterans and Active serving military participants, consists of 10 theoretically grounded subscales that assess the psychological and spiritual/religious symptoms of Moral Injury: guilt, shame, betrayal, moral concerns, loss of meaning/purpose, difficulty forgiving, loss of trust, self-condemnation, spiritual/religious struggles, and loss of religious faith/hope.





Moral Injury



Considering the impact on Moral Injury on veterans is a developing area in the military psychology. According to Koenig (2017) there is opportunity for a negative psychological and spiritual impact on military personnel who in the course of work undertakes tasks that are a contravention of personal beliefs and values. In reviewing the pre-deployment and post-deployment responses of the participants of TA10 is noted that some individuals are reported high levels (>70) of moral injury pre-deploy, and post-deploy responses of the participants indicate that all participants show low levels of moral injury. These results demonstrate that there is a clinical difference between pre and post after being on the Timor Awakening program. To date there is no definitive indicator of a score that demands clinical attention. Further guidance is being sought from the author of the scale, however further enquiry of the wellbeing of the individuals with high scores is recommended.

Section 4: Post Deployment Recommendations

Post Deployment Participant Contact

At the time of preparing this report, all participants have had a follow up phone call, 2 weeks post Timor Awakening 10. Out of the 22 participants, 7 participants are still reporting significantly high symptoms of mental health concerns following the return of TA10, they have been offered support and a further follow-up will be undertaken to ensure that any improvements are maintained. Despite improvement throughout the deployment a follow-up call to all participants will be undertaken to ensure that the improvements are maintained, and that the participant is encouraged to seek further professional help and support for any ongoing areas of concern. As part of the program participants have all been invited to receive an extended course of personal coaching. As a key part of the final stage of in the in country program a 12 month personal health and well-being program was developed by each participant and mentoring provided by their personal pastoral care mentor. Both in the group session and in this private sessions each individual were given referral and recommendation to access Government and Non-government/ESO provided health and well-being support tailored to their location and personal circumstances. 3 month follow up contact will review each individual in terms of their health and well-being, their health and well-being plan and the referred support provided by ESO and external organisations.

Reference





Koenig, H. G, (2108) *Religions* 2018, 9 (3), 86-100; doi:10.3390/rel9030086. Downloaded from www.mdpi.com/journal/religions 15-4-2019.

Timor Awakening 10 – Participant Evaluation Reflections (key comments of substance)

Question: To what extent did you feel understood, listened to, and supported through-out your time in Timor-Leste?

- *I was extremely understood and listened to*
- *Very supported through the whole program*
- *I felt I was understood, listened to and supported at all times*
- *My thoughts were welcomed, and everyone seemed to be in the same boat*
- *It was great that I connected to another infantry war fighter to share same experiences*
- *To a great extent by Gary and Rowena*
- *I felt totally supported throughout the program by staff and participants alike*
- *Very well, felt I was listening too at all times*
- *A good extent*
- *High*
- *Always, not only by staff but by other participants*
- *Very, staff and participants were fantastic felt very safe*
- *I felt when I could get through some of my issues, I could take support from others*
- *Yes, I felt understood and supported*
- *Meeting Ben as my mentor before the trip was when I knew I was in good hands. Throughout the time I was supported.*
- *A huge amount, you are well supported.*
- *I felt this program was exceptional to myself and my dad.*
- *I felt extremely supported through the trip, I felt a bit of guilt and shame perhaps inferior because I am not ex-military and my experiences are vastly different to most here, but every person expressed this to reassured me that my experiences were valid and supported*
- *The whole time*
- *Very much so the circle time and general interaction of people was great people respected my need for stillness or alone time as well as need to share*
- *I felt well received and supported by the TA staff and by most of those I spoke with*
- *I felt this program was helpful to myself and dad*
- *My contributions were listened and appreciated by other TA participants, no judgement*





Question: Did the program meet your expectations and address your needs throughout your time in Timor-Leste?

- *The program exceeded my expectations*
- *Yes, I spent time experiencing what and where my husband had been and done*
- *This program went beyond what I expected*
- *This program exceeded my expectations in every way*
- *To be back 20 years later I felt 20 years younger and also a positive thought of moving forward*
- *I came here with the expectation of meeting a young boy from 20 years ago. I did not meet him I did not expect the program to be what it was.*
- *Absolutely, this is an excellent program*
- *Expectations were well met*
- *No, it exceeded my expectations and addressed needs I didn't know I had (to forgive people)*
- *Yes, I came with an open expectation*
- *I felt like someone always had my back, yes, the program met and exceeded my expectations*
- *Over expectations, I did not know what to really expect, Rowena did a great job pre trip, but I was so anxious about returning*
- *The program was above my expectations and felt it achieved more*
- *I did not know what to expect, TA is an excellent platform to experience life of Timorese veterans, to understand a countries culture and underlying values*
- *The program exceeded my expectations, I felt initially that I may not gain much value. However, with the program on a whole, it was Balibo that triggered me*
- *Yes, it helped me overcome many things. Traveling to a previous contact site and to walk the same ground peacefully. To understand Timor is at peace and that I need to put it to rest.*
- *This program is exceptional, all my needs were met and exceeded.*
- *I had no expectations of this trip, except for wanting to support my partner and share his experience. Not only did I get this but so much more personally. TA reignited my passion for teaching and also my need to continue to connect and have empathy for the students I teach.*
- *Yes, the program staff were always approachable sensitive to our situation and very professional. The changes in Timor-Leste were beyond comprehensible.*
- *Far exceeded any expectations.*
- *The program/activities well exceeded my pre-conceived expectation. I learnt about Timor-Leste and about myself; as well as what others are going through.*
- *No. I was/ am seeking closure at my 'individual' level, BUT being part of a large 'focused' group was enjoyable and easy to interact in/with*





Question: If you were to tell someone about your experience of the Timor component of the program what would you say?

- Timor Awakening made me wake up to how so many veterans are wounded by their life experience in Timor
- To do it, it is a fantastic program and very helpful in the way of healing
- I was welcomed everywhere we went
- The change in the country (rebuild), but still very poor country that needs assistance, over the top commitment to peace and forgiveness.
- Very positively, I would talk about all of the program, the Riak school and Balibo and Maliana.
- I am not the only one who has and had the feelings that I did. It was good to experience that people feel the same emotions and damage that I did.
- Meeting and interacting with the Timorese people and especially the resistance veterans.
- Visiting the place where I worked in.
- I loved learning about their history and the struggles they have been through I have a deeper respect for Timorese.
- It was spent, seeing the Timorese and the changes was great.
- The people from Timor they have so much to teach us through their example.
- I am totally aware that TA10 was an exceptionally different program as usual but listening to the Timorese and how they forgive but not forget, how proud they are of our contribution and their country and we did make a difference.
- Reconnecting with locals, meeting a fellow infantry man, seeing the smiling faces and visiting the places I have lived before.
- Interacting with and hearing from Falintil vets, seeing and learning their unconditional forgiveness.
- I have already started referring other colleagues.
- The support seeing things differently.
- Fantastic experience that kept
- The genuine joy and happiness of the people, learning about the history and connections with so many people of all stages of life. Being able to share this experience with my partner and school visits engaging in activities with the students
- I would tell them, that the changes to the country in economics and growth is amazing, that if they felt that their time here was a waste then they should come and see for themselves with the difference we made
- There are too many highlights to list from interactions with veterans to the soccer game, to learning about Timor-Leste past, seeing Riak Retreat and hearing the stories of the locals the 20th Ann celebration it was all amazing, I will be highly recommending TA to several close friends who have some angst from the past.
- Highly recommend healing process and the activities, be it meditation, big talk etc. all are very beneficial. Prior to this experiences I had the opinion that it was mostly crap! This experience has changed this ignorant mindset.
- Fantastic experience that kept surpassing and challenging me some highlights included, meeting and hugging Xanana, seeing a newborn baby, seeing Balibo movie in Balibo, high level communication that is genuine and deep which provided an understanding how wonderful people are.
- TA will educate you, as to the 'big' picture and you will be surprised and annoyed at certain behaviour. But you will be openly welcomed by all.





Question: In your opinion what could be done to improve the Timor Awakening Program?

- *Smaller groups – but can understand with the timing everyone has done a great job*
- *Noting Michael has done a great job, all the team was great*
- *Nothing **the management team is as far as I am concerned is as close to perfect as we humans could be.***
- *Exchange phone numbers before the 1st night, lesson on holistic healing, at time break into smaller groups.*
- *Slow it down.*
- *Not much, they have a very good balance of activities.*
- *Include a “free time” earlier in the program to help people connect casually.*
- *Time management and consider separate debrief for defence partners, although my partner and I care for each other we are also both vets with different problems.*
- *Separate programs with and without spouses.*
- *Unsure, I am very aware that TA10 is not typical.*
- *Work in smaller groups as it would have been great and I would of connected more with my peers of the same corps and experiences as I would have been able to share and talk more about my own experiences and issues there had without fear of causing mental issues to the non-combat corps or spouses.*
- *Provide general education/overview of various concepts under each daily category.*
- *The program is mentally exhausting however I believe the program is excellent.*
- *Need more people to do the program may save a life.*
- *Handing out the schoolbooks. I understand that we were time poor, but it would be better to hand out books through an activity in the classrooms rather than causing that chaos/mayhem on the oval. It was much calmer at the tunnel ball day.*
- ***The program itself is great and I don't feel it needs to change. The only thing I would like to see is for it to go national, so more people can experience what we have experienced.***
- *Sorry I don't have anything to add here it was amazing. Whilst at times the schedule was intense, I get why and also see the value of maximizing our time here*
- *Advise participants to bring luggage support if needed for travel. At the start explain to all that we all had different roles to play in the big picture of the various operations and that judgement and egos need to be left behind.*
- ***This is an exceptional program, you've nailed it. One of my roles in life is educationalist and this program has A+ in all categories, immersion and experience, reflection, listening and responding and allows plans for future growth, are all encompassing with this program.***
- *Difficult for TA10 when significance of visit, inclusion of 'hands on' practical activities to enable to participants to connect to the Timorese, balance of activity – reflection – rest to support recovery and coming to terms with some confronting items i.e. Santa Cruz and Max Stahl*





Question: What is one concrete thing that you will implement in your daily life for your Physical health from what you have gained from the program:

- *Continue implementing daily exercises*
- *To be more active*
- *Start the “Big Talk” with family*
- *The realization that I came away from INTERFET with a genuine desire to help people less fortunate than myself.*
- *Get back into fitness*
- *Less sugar - shop around the outside and more exercise*
- *Snacking options*
- *As per previous - PT 4 days a week*
- *Take guilt free time for myself*
- *Focus more on moving forward*
- *Sugar reduction, increase health eating habits*
- *Daily meditation, grounding myself*
- *With the help of my partner more PT*
- *Eat better find better things to snack on like carrots*
- *I will eat healthier in giving away bad foods, drinks in my diet*
- *More exercise and consistent healthy eating, taking time out regularly to sit and be*
- *To see a nutritionist and eat healthier, give up smoking in the next six months*
- *Continue to set goals for fitness i.e. keep the body moving, buy carrots*
- *Make ‘routine/regular’ time for me and for my wife and I*





Question: What is one concrete thing that you will implement in your daily life for your mental wellbeing from what you have gained from the program?

- *That keeping physically active is so necessary to continue being well mentally and physically*
- *To ground myself before working on the day*
- *Stop taking all the pills*
- *Start thinking positive and look to the future*
- *Grounding, meditation and the desire to stop being a hermit. I will get off my property and help others.*
- *Go and see a psychologist to sort through some issues.*
- *I liked the grounding techniques.*
- *Daily motivation.*
- *Take time for me before I burn out.*
- *Take guilt free time to do something for myself.*
- *Twice a day meditation.*
- *Meditation.*
- *Focus on positives and just acknowledge anything else aim to bring you down.*
- *Forgiveness.*
- *End of each day me and my son will identify 3 things that we are grateful for, using the big talk questions around the dinner table.*
- *Meditation, stop and experience the quiet and the sounds around me instead of always being in a hurry to go nowhere.*
- *Practice more grounding, don't sweat the small stuff, not focus on past in even minor things look forward forgiving quickly.*
- *Meditation as a means of relaxing and calming my emotions*
- *I am going to frame two copies of the four agreements and put one in my office and one at home and read it to remind myself what matters, to not take things personally.*
- *Exercise enables my mind and body to release 'black rocks' and enjoy the experience.*

Question: How has your time in Timor-Leste contributed towards your personal growth, goals and objectives?

- **It has made me more aware that I should pay more attention to my spiritual side.**
- **I hope it achieved some closure to my husband which in turn will improve his/our relationship.**
- **I now know where my husband was coming from.**
- **Best thing I have done, I believe I have learnt and left behind old demons, now time to look forward.**
- **It was extremely helpful in that it has changed my mindset. I now look at the positive things I came away with and the changes I will make to my life that will impact positively on my family.**
- **Timor awakening changed my life and has given me a clear view ahead for the future.**
- **Helped to move forward.**
- **Very helpful, makes me appreciate the basic things, a flushing toilet.**
- **Very helpful, given me a different way at looking at things.**
- **Very, again I feel like I am in control of my destiny.**





- **Life changing, if the people who experienced decades of war, assaults and death can forgive then I will work to do the same.**
- **It will help me to feel I achieved more of the past.**
- **I did gain significant insight into Timorese culture and values. I did gain personal growth benefit in area of forgiveness and also in being more present in discussion.**
- **I found it much more valuable then 1 year with a psychologist in a clinical environment.**
- **Extremely helpful we were shown a different way of seeing.**
- **I have been on a personal growth mindset for some time, but TA validated and reignited my resolve to continue it to be a more genuine and authentic person.**
- **Invaluable, it has given me goals and things I want to do, to help the Timorese and our veterans.**
- **TA provided a great space to stop and reflect, look deeper into myself and what I am capable of.**
- **very helpful and fulfilling, talking and listening to others has helped me wake up to the crap I have been putting up with in my family life, it will help me decide with my wife if we should stay together.**
- **very helpful, I feel I am transitioning to the next stage of my life and this has been an incredible catalyst that I will be forever grateful for.**
- **supportive – ‘big’ picture.**





Question: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about in terms of your journey and growth before this Timor Journey?

- *It made me more aware of how so many veterans are permanently damaged from their military service*
- *Amazing people running Timor Awakening*
- ***I am still struggling with the loss and grief issues a result of being medically discharged from the army. I promise to distract myself from self-pity by getting out and doing things. Maybe even volunteer work.***
- *I was stuck in a relationship but, have been able to make changes and move on to a brighter future*
- ***THANK YOU***
- *No, but **my sincerest thanks and gratitude for this amazing experience***
- *I am looking forward to returning to where our unit was in Dili and to be a major trigger for me is*
- *I feel I could mater my friends on another trip who are struggling*
- *I am interested in being support staff in future TA's, also to understand more about the programs I would support*
- *I wasn't aware of this program if it wasn't for an ex-girlfriend, none of my former colleagues knew about the program either. I was experiencing a lot of anxiety however Rowena helped me through that. My journey has been of acknowledging trauma and my dislike for the UN, with the cultural outlook of forgiveness of Timorese. I too am learning to forgive.*
- *I was going ok, but this has helped to keep me improving*
- ***Just thank you, what TA has done for both my personal life and with my partner has been wonderful***
- *My journey started in 2016 when Gary asked me to be part of TA1 and then TA2. I made excuses not to go. Finally, on TA3 I committed to going, I then met Michael and the rest of the VCA team, which I consider my close friends. My life has been enhanced by my new friends and I have learnt to be a valuable member of the team. I thank Gary, Michael and the rest of the VCA family for that. VIVA VCA*
- ***Certainly, one of the top highlights of my life to date, the program has lifted my spirit. Thank you so much for the opportunity and all the efforts and hard work behind the scenes.***
- *Whilst I felt I was rather complete, I felt something was missing. I feel greatly that this trip has been incredible timing as it has highlighted that my bigger purpose is yet to come which involves helping east Timor in any capacity I can.*
- ***I highly recommend 'couples' even (father/daughter/veteran/career/spouses/partners) attend as it provides a unique insight to 'what happened', 'where it happened' and may explain (in part) 'why' behaviour occurs.***





Photo Gallery – Dili





Photo Gallery – Riak Retreat





Photo Gallery – Cova-Lima / Suai



Photo Gallery – Balibo and TL Border





Media - Timor Awakening

A range of media has covered various aspects of the Timor Awakening program, in Australia, online and extensively in Timor-Leste. Key video offerings from the most recent down provide depth and background into the Timor Awakening Program and the dimensions of veterans health as mentioned in this submission.

3 Minute Video Timor Awakening overview – RSL QLD (2020)

<https://www.facebook.com/RSLQueensland/videos/594230674463467/>

Timor Awakening 7 Program video snapshot of the program (6 mins), 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5Xdjp5bcus>

ABC News story on TA9 the Riak Retreat project, 19 Sep 19:

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/video/sport/veterans-return-to-east-timor-to-help-them-heal/vp-AAHvwB9>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-19/war-veterans-heal-in-east-timor-tour/11525170>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/am/war-veterans-healing-through-community-work-in-east-timor/11526898>

Riak Veterans Retreat and English Language School - short videos about this project which is a joint VCAI/TL veteran long term project for Australian veterans:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N78XE6tpnRs&t=36s>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQU9rl6OvM>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/timorawakening/videos/2441330942583644/>

Timor Awakening 6 Documentary (2018): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4Z0Ls9Ik5A>

Timor Awakening 5 Documentary (2018): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmVmoiRAXpw>

Timor Awakening Documentary (2017): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pglo6BpohlY>

Other Media. A range of media covering Timor Awakening, including newspaper, magazine and journal articles can be viewed at this link: <https://www.timorawakening.com/news>