



**Submission No 15**

**Inquiry into the Care of ADF Personnel Wounded and Injured  
on Operations**

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*... helping our wounded warriors*

**SOLDIER ON**

**Submission to Joint Standing Committee  
For Defence Foreign Affairs and Trade  
“Care of Australian Defence Force personnel  
wounded and injured on operations examined”**

**10 Aug 2012**

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## 1. Introduction

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Soldier On is a new charity to support those who have been wounded on contemporary operations. The charity allows for the Australian community to connect to those that have been wounded and to support their re-integration back into Australian society.

Soldier On recognises the good work of the Australian Defence Force in their support to those that have been wounded. However, until now there has been no way in which the community can show their support and supplement current services, and provide new benefits that are otherwise outside of the scope of Defence or Government.

This document outlines the way in which Soldier On will support those that have been wounded and will identify the benefits of our programs. We are a positive organisation that will support those that have been wounded while working with other organisations that directly or indirectly support our wounded and their family.

The submission also identifies the way in which Soldier On would like to work closely with both Government and Defence to support those that have been wounded.

Soldier On has received support from a large cross section of the Australian population and has direct support from a number of eminent individuals from a range of areas. Our support has been based on our message but also on the positive way in which we identify what we want to achieve. The caring, empowerment support of our wounded is a responsibility of not just Government but the entire Australian community.

## **2. Strategy**

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### **2.1. Purpose**

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Soldier On is about Australians coming together to show their support for our physically and psychologically wounded – we will always have their backs. It's about giving those who have served our country the dignity they deserve and the chance to do and be whatever they choose through; providing access to inspirational activities, supporting rehabilitation and providing opportunities that empower individuals.

### **2.2. Values**

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1. To be strictly non-political and non-critical;
2. To always remain 'light' and never be a self-serving entity;
3. To work with the Australian Defence Force or any other agency that supports our mission; and
4. To uphold the values of the Australian Defence Force.

### **2.3. Scope**

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1. Soldier On supports Australians who have been wounded on operations after 1 January 1990.
2. Wounded is defined as any person who having served on a defined Australian Government operation has been physically or psychologically wounded as assessed by the Department of Defence or the Department of Veterans Affairs.
3. Soldier On commits itself to supporting wounded Defence personnel and Australian Government employees who participated in domestic and overseas operations and whole of government activities. The intent is to support ADF personnel and individuals from DFAT, AFP, AUSAid and the Australian Civilian Corps.
4. Physically and psychologically wounded individuals will be focus of Soldier On. Injured and Ill persons may receive support as available resources allow.
5. Soldier On will support those who are currently serving and who have been wounded and also those who have discharged from the ADF, DFAT, AusAID and AFP.

6. The scope of Soldier On may only be changed by resolution of the full Board.

### 3. Three Pillars of Soldier On

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Soldier On is built on three pillars that each fundamentally support the purpose of the charity. The pillars are; Enhance, Inspire and Empower. These pillars will help provide a direct benefit to those who have been wounded and enable community support for our wounded. Together the three pillars of Soldier On form the purpose of the charity. Figure 1 outlines that when each pillar is being supported our purpose will be achieved.

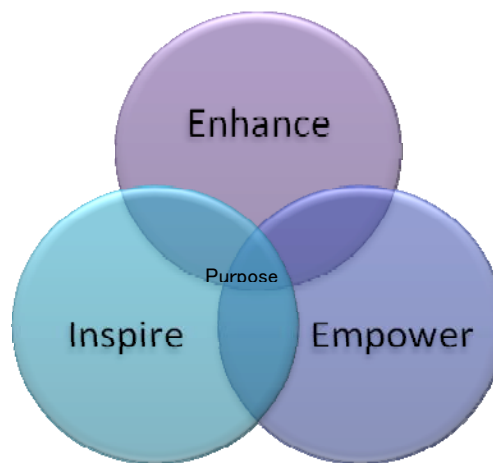


Figure 1

#### 3.1. Enhance

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##### *Current Situation*

The support supplied to wounded Australians by the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs is excellent. It is the aim of Soldier On to complement this support and engage the Australian public in the long-term rehabilitation of our soldiers and their reintegration into the Australian community.

After initial wound treatment an Australian wounded on an operation is generally hospitalised in a private hospital close to their unit or next of kin. Unlike our Allies Australia has not established a 'centre of excellence' for wounded Australians as the current number of wounded does not warrant a dedicated facility and experience has shown that rehabilitation is best achieved close to family and friends. The rehabilitation equipment wounded Australians use within private hospitals is generally supplied and supported by the hospital and in many instances has been sought through private fundraising. Although these services are good there are a number of ways in which the wounded person and their family could be

better supported through greater donations to private hospitals. Soldier On will work to fundraise and provide additional specialised equipment to private hospitals.

### *Soldier On Enhancement Strategy*

To achieve our aim of enhancing the current services that exists for our wounded Soldier On will:

1. Support the enhancement of both physical and psychological services;
2. Fund proven clinical methods of supporting our wounded;
3. Work with private organisations that already support our wounded
4. Focus on enhancing community/organisational capacity to deliver services/care/support;
5. Create an advisory committee that will identify which programs have the most amount of merit; and
6. Identify likely partnership organisations that currently provide a large amount of support to our wounded.

At no stage will Soldier On directly administer any direct clinical services. Soldier On will fundraise to enhance existing services and will not replicate current services, start new services or provide and direct clinical services.

## **3.2. Inspire**

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### *Current Situation*

Australians have a great respect for their military but due to the nature of current conflict can feel disconnected from events in theatres of war. Those that have been wounded are often not recognised by the society they live in and their sacrifice can be overlooked.

### *What Soldier On will do*

Soldier On will provide a range of challenging and adventurous activities that will inspire the wounded soldier and the Australian public. From walking the Kokoda Track, climbing Mt Kilimanjaro or learning to play a musical instrument Soldier On will help facilitate our wounded to challenge themselves and change their and our perception of what it is to be wounded. Soldier On will seek to emulate activities like the TV program 'Harry's Heroes', in which several-wounded UK servicemen and Prince Harry walked to the North Pole was a truly inspiring feat.

Inspirational not just for the wounded servicemen who completed the arduous trek, but inspirational to the entire UK public.

### *Soldier On strategy to achieving this*

To achieve our aim of inspiring both the Australian people and those that have been wounded Soldier On will:

1. In partnership with event coordinators, sporting clubs and community organisations provide a range of activities which inspire;
2. Grow our partnership with In2Adventure to allow for our wounded to compete in a range of adventure races/expeditions around Australia. (<http://www.in2adventure.com.au/>)
3. Provide a similar capability to 'BattleBack' (<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/TrainingandExercises/BattleBack/>) through giving Soldier Recovery Centres (SRC's) the ability to have WII (Wounded Injured and Ill) attend a range of activities with no cost associated.
4. Produce a range of successful mid-level expeditions in and around Australia that achieve the aim of inspiration;
5. Create 'centre-piece' expeditions that are combined with other countries wounded; and
6. Create leisure activities that will give those unable to participate in highly strenuous activities a positive outlet.

## **3.3. Empower**

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### *Current Situation*

Australian soldiers are committed and capable high achievers who have shown through their service to the nation that they want to make a contribution to society. Although inspiration activities such as climbing a mountain or completing the Kokoda track are critical to the individual, the momentum from these activities must be translated into a longer form of empowerment in which the wounded soldiers feels capable of making a continuing and full contribution to the Australian community.

### *What Soldier On will do*

Soldier On will seek to provide a range of activities that will help our wounded as they transition back into society and also when they decide to transition out of defence. Through offering employment opportunities, volunteering and up skilling Soldier On will provide a range of services to help enhance the long-term empowerment of those that have been

wounded. Many of these services will be created through connections provided by private businesses that directly support the ADF.

### *Soldier On strategy to achieving this*

To achieve our aim of empowering those that have been wounded Soldier On will:

1. Develop a program that links wounded soldiers to private companies that offer employment for wounded soldiers;
2. Identify the best way for Soldier On to facilitate this connection;
3. Allow wounded to participate in a range of activities such as volunteering; and
4. Provide options for our wounded to participate in vocational and education training.

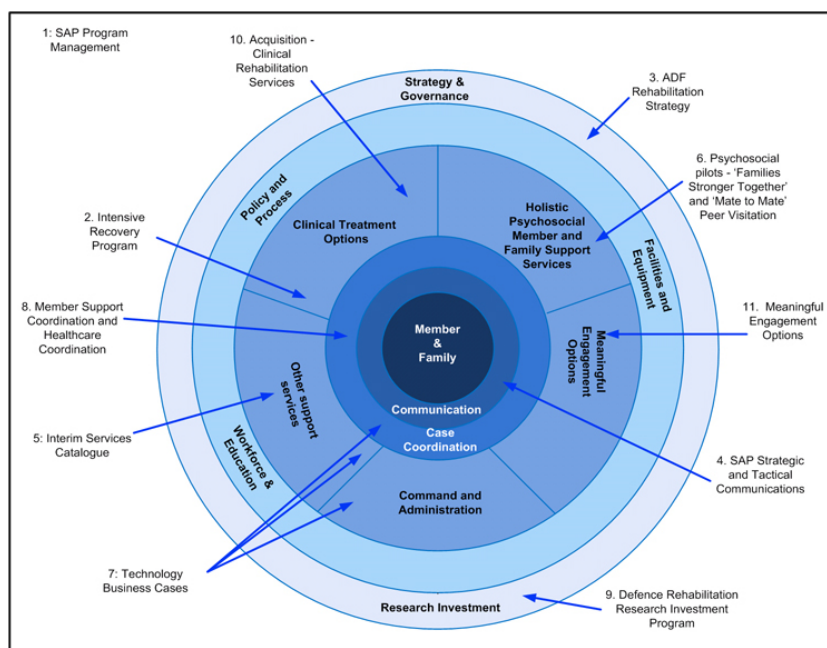
## **4. Benefits of Soldier On**

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### **4.1. Integral to Simpson Assist Program (SAP)**

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SAP is a significant and timely Defence initiative to enhance services to seriously wounded, injured and ill. Soldier On is working with Joint Health Command to ensure Soldier On supplements SAP.





### *Soldier On – A connection to the community*

SAP does not identify community support and community engagement as a core theme. Soldier On, as a charity dedicated to wounded Australians, will provide a method for SAP to engage the wider Australian community. Community programs provided through or facilitated by Soldier On will help improve wounded re-integration in the Australian community. Through Soldier On, WII in the later stages of their rehabilitation will be given opportunities to participate in the wider community in a range of activities.

### *Soldier On – Supporting the family*

At the core of SAP are both the member and family. Soldier On will provide a network for families who have had a wounded member. These mentors will help assist different members of the family as they go through different stages of rehabilitation. The intent is for this service to be online through a secure site that is similar to the US Wounded Warrior Programs 'Connect'. This is an online service that allows all contemporary wounded veterans and their families to talk in a private setting about the long road of recovery.

Soldier On will also supply simple support packs for the children and opportunities for all expenses paid family holidays. These projects will be established through partnerships with a range of Australian companies. The ability to leverage of corporate good will and accept gifts in-kind is one of the main advantages of Soldier On and highlights one of the greatest strengths we bring to both SAP and also to all wounded Australians.

## **4.2. Sharing the stories of those that have been wounded**

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Defence has a long tradition of looking after its own. This fantastic attribute unfortunately means that many of the incredible stories of heroism, strength, and recovery of our wounded are never told. Through Soldier On fundraising via our inspirational events and our program of positive PR these stories will be told to the wider public.

*“When I walk down the street, people often stare. I don’t know if I should feel proud or ashamed.” – SGT Michael Lyddiard*

Soldier On wants to ensure that the majority of Australians understand that our wounded have undergone life-changing injuries and that they deserve our support as a community. This community support will ensure that we have the most successful generation of wounded Australians in our nation’s history.

## 5. Conclusion

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Soldier On provides that Australian people the opportunity to connect directly with those that have been wounded. The object of Soldier On is not to do the work of Government but to supplement this work and allow for an emotional connection.

*Enclosure:*

1. Contribution for Wife of Wounded Soldier – Why Soldier On is necessary.

Enclosure 1:

Contribution to Joint Standing Committee for Wounded Injured and Ill

**G and R Wilson**

### **Introduction**

Signalman G was wounded on active duty in Afghanistan in 2010. Signalman G sustained life threatening injuries in a Blackhawk accident on 21 June 2010, an accident that took three Australian Soldier's lives and wounded an additional seven. Signalman G incurred injuries so serious his life hung in the balance for the weeks to come. Signalman G was in a coma for approximately two months. His family, along with the Australian Army had to give consideration to his support and care should he not wake from his coma, as was his initial prognosis.

Signalman G did wake and has recovered beyond all expectations, his battle to get well and stay well is however, far from over. Although Signalman G may appear well at first glance, it is not long before one can see the effort it that takes for him to walk and talk. Signalman G continues to get well and works hard to keep his rehabilitation on track and get back to "normal".

Signalman G and his family have learned a lot throughout the last two years and are comforted to know that there is now a charity such as *Solider On* for the reasons outlined below.

### **How *Solider On* supports/ can support those that are wounded**

The main way that *Soldier On* can and does assist those wounded members is by filling the gap between Governmental Organisations (including all Departments and Agencies in the Defence Portfolio) and Non-Governmental Organisations including but not limited to Legacy and individual Unit Welfare Trusts which primarily focus on the care and support to fallen Soldier's families. *Solider On* can assist and do so in the following ways:

- Providing access to specific and specialised rehabilitation equipment where the above organisations mentioned cannot assist;
- Assisting the wounded by assisting their family through supportive mentors that understand the trials wounded member and their family are going through and can assist them navigate through the coming days, weeks, months and even years;
- Assisting the wounded's family with ad hoc expenses including travel expenses for immediate family to be at the wounded's bedside and child care expenses to allow the wounded's family to remain by their bedside (I note that only the next of kin is covered for such travel expenses and will only receive support from the Defence Community Organisation for a

total of four weeks. Often the next of kin is the partner of the wounded, shouldn't their parents also be covered?); and

- Through fund raising, *Soldier On* is sharing the stories of those that have been wounded, this ensures that they are not forgotten by society, something that is so imperative to ultimate recovery. For their sacrifice to go unrecognised and wounded members to feel unsupported from the community they serve would lead to further health issues for the wounded members. Instead of getting well they would remain "broken" and bitter towards not only those that "broke" them but to the country they serve.

### **Why a charity such as *Soldier On* is so important**

Ultimately, as it becomes more established *Soldier On* will, by its very nature, create a community of wounded members and their families who will share stories of inspiring recovery, loss, grief and struggles to survive. It is undoubtedly beneficial for wounded members' mental health to talk to someone that understands their situation and has been in their shoes. This community will assist in the wounded's recovery and in keeping their mental health in check.

Following on from the point above, as *Soldier On* gains more momentum and wounded members continue to talk about their stories, it will assist in de-stigmatising Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) amongst the community, which will assist in more wounded members coming forward to seek support and treatment.

Finally it is important for the Australian public to be told of the struggles of the wounded men and women who served this country. While the wounded members may have left the war due to their wounds they are still fighting their own "war", perhaps in some cases, the biggest battle of their lives. They are fighting "their war" to get well and adapt to a new life style, one they never thought they would have to deal with.

### **Conclusion**

Those wounded members have stepped forward, selflessly, so that others in our society would not have to. They laid their lives on the line and the lives of their families and asked nothing in return. The very least they deserve is for the Australian public to stand up and say thank you. Thank you for your sacrifice, thank you for your service and thank you for standing up for me, I care about you and your family and I want to help you get well.

That is what we consider *Soldier On* is all about and why as a charity organisation they are so fundamental to our wounded.