



THE
oasis
TOWNSVILLE



COMPASS RESOURCE PACKAGE

A guide for those supporting the veteran community

All veterans and their families connected with The Oasis Townsville acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present, and emerging Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and acknowledge those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who serve and have served in the Australian Defence Force.

The Oasis Townsville (incorporating Operation Compass – the Ex-ADF and Families National Suicide Prevention Trial) acknowledges the special and unique characteristics of Serving Member and Families Suicide and the direct stressors and the nuisances of that Lived or Living Experience. We acknowledge those contributing to suicide prevention efforts who are survivors of a suicide attempt, have experienced suicidal behaviour, or have been bereaved or impacted by suicide. Your insights and contributions have been crucial and remain so.





I chaired The National Suicide Prevention Trial for Veterans and their Families (Operation COMPASS) for five years. The aim was to identify cultural differences in the veteran community that require a different approach to reduce the incidence of mental health problems and suicide.

The trial has now become a foundation for all activity of The Oasis Townsville.

Here is what we learned:

Connections are paramount in the veteran community due to the teams and bonds formed in service to the nation and the devotion of families to their veteran's service. Physical connection and interaction while doing something of common interest is essential. The critical design factor and prime function of The Oasis Townsville is to offer meeting and activity spaces.

Veterans and their partners trust and prefer advice and information from peers and those with lived experience of ADF service, particularly relevant when ADF members are considering transition. This drove the initiative to establish a peer network in Open Arms.

The veteran community needs support to navigate the civilian 'sea of help' that is available to support them. The Oasis Townsville is a one-stop-shop for referral to the best services in Townsville.

Veterans and their families need a physical location where they feel safe and respected, at least in a physical location where others of their community gather when needed. This was a crucial factor in establishing The Oasis Townsville.

There is a lack of appreciation of the sacrifices of ADF service in the sector that cares for ex-serving veterans. There is a need for the education of providers, especially GPs, on how to support veterans and their families best, especially where there are multiple allied health professionals involved.

Health promotion is essential, but it needs to be camouflaged as being more about everyone helping others, harnessing the helper ethos that prevailed while serving in the ADF, including on operations and supporting disaster relief in Australia.

More social prescription options for health professionals are needed. The Oasis Townsville is increasingly performing this function.

Veterans and their families, and most young people for that matter, respond best to campaigns, rather than belonging to organisations in the traditional sense. The #CheckYourMates Campaign had exposure and acceptance across significant parts of the veteran community.

A layer of support for veterans is missing between DVA and the thousands of organisations that claim to have veterans as one of their beneficiaries. The former is not listening, and finding an appropriate organisation among the latter is challenging.

Spending taxpayers' money requires evidence, even if generally it is widely accepted that a particular activity works to reduce the problem. This drove the demand for a Census question relating to ADF service, which is now driving the location of the additional 10 veterans' and families' hubs around Australia.

Lieutenant General John Caligari AO, DSC (Ret'd)
Chair, The Oasis Townsville

INTRODUCTION

This resource includes evidence-based and innovative activities from Operation Compass that have assisted in saving lives.

In addition to this guide, online resources are available at www.theoasistownsville.org.au



How to use this guide

This guide has been developed specifically for those supporting the veteran community. One of the key lessons from Operation Compass is that for any activity, formal or social, large or small, must be veteran-led. Use the activities and lessons from this guide, and get veterans in your community involved to tailor these and make them work for your community.

Resources are available online at www.theoasistownsville.org.au to download, learn from, and be inspired by. These are real activities, run by real people, with real experience, and this guide allows you to stand on the shoulders of those before you.

Share your lessons far and wide, so that together we can assist each other to participate in a thriving community.




At The Oasis Townsville, we strive to create a haven for veterans and their families based on a simple yet powerful philosophy of happiness. Drawing inspiration from the experiences of Operation COMPASS and the wisdom of Immanuel Kant, we understand that true happiness can be found by embracing three fundamental elements: someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to.

At The Oasis, we recognise the importance of meaningful connections and relationships in fostering happiness. We believe that having someone to love and who loves you in return is a fundamental human need. Our centre provides a supportive community where veterans and their families can find companionship, understanding, and a sense of belonging. Through group activities, peer support programs, and events designed to encourage social interactions, we strive to cultivate an environment where lasting bonds can be formed.

Equally vital to our philosophy is the notion of having something to do. Engaging in fulfilling activities not only provides a sense of purpose but also promotes personal growth and self-worth. We offer a range of programs and resources tailored to the unique interests and talents of our community members. Whether it's participating in vocational training, pursuing hobbies, or engaging in recreational activities, we aim to empower veterans and their families to discover new passions and enjoy a sense of accomplishment.

Finally, we understand the significance of having something to look forward to. Having goals, dreams, and aspirations gives us a sense of purpose and fuels our motivation. At The Oasis, we support veterans and their families in setting and achieving personal milestones. Through goal-setting workshops, mentoring programs, and access to resources for education and career development, we aim to inspire a sense of hope and optimism for the future.



Veterans in Australia are people who are serving, or have served in the Australian Defence Force. The veteran community includes veterans, their families, friends and colleagues. By sheer numbers, this mean many towns and cities in Australia are veteran communities.

At The Oasis - Townsville, we are proud to offer three core programs designed to cater to the needs of the veteran community:

Connections Program

Our purpose-built Homebase serves as a central hub for the veteran community in Townsville. We facilitate a wide range of activities within our facility, both organized by ourselves and conducted by various organizations, groups, and individuals dedicated to serving veterans. We provide a welcoming and supportive venue where veterans can engage in activities they love, surrounded by friends who understand their experiences. All groups that cater to the veteran community and can demonstrate significant participation are welcome to use our space free of charge.

Education and Employment Program

We are committed to assisting members of the veteran community in finding meaningful work through our Education and Employment Program. Our goal is to support veterans in starting their own businesses, becoming self-employed, or securing employment in businesses that understand and support their unique needs during the transition period. We collaborate with government entities, educational institutions, industry peak bodies, and businesses to bring together valuable resources and opportunities for employment. Whether it's finding a volunteer role, participating in a Connections Program, or pursuing other avenues, we aim to guide veterans towards fulfilling and rewarding work.

Plans Development Program

Life often presents unexpected challenges and opportunities, and our Plans Development Program is dedicated to helping all members of the veteran community better prepare for the future. Whether transitioning from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to civilian life or navigating other potential life-changing events, it is essential to have thoughtfully considered "what-if" scenarios. Through this program, we provide guidance and support from experienced members of the veteran community who possess the necessary skills to help individuals make informed decisions. By investing time in proactive preparations, veterans can navigate unexpected events or seize opportunities with greater confidence and clarity.

VETERAN FAMILY CENTRE GUIDE

Veteran and family centres, wellbeing hubs or wellbeing services play a critical role in providing comprehensive support and care to veterans and their families as they navigate the unique challenges associated with military service and transitioning to civilian life. Recognising the significance of these centres, this resource package aims to assist organisations in establishing their own veteran and family centres by offering guidance, insights, and practical resources based on the experiences of successful hubs.

The journey of setting up an effective hub requires careful planning, collaboration, and an understanding of the specific needs of the veteran community. This resource package follows a six-step guide process to provide a structured approach to the establishment of these centres.



Step 1: Getting Governance Right

Governance refers to the processes, activities and relationships that make sure your organisation is effectively and properly run. Your organisation can demonstrate 'good governance' by having practices and procedures in place that help it work effectively. The roles and responsibilities of those in your organisation should be clearly understood. This includes those of responsible people, as well as staff, volunteers and members.

Establishing a solid governance structure is essential for the effective and sustainable operation of a veteran and family centre or wellbeing hub. Your funding partners will generally dictate what model of governance is required to meet the needs of the funding body. In addition, it is ideal to consider alternative funding strategies, and sustainability planning to ensure the long-term success of the centre. You will need to consider if you are not-for-profit community owned organisation, government authority or privately owned entity when making governance decisions.

Good governance goes beyond your charity's rules and processes. It involves a culture of accountability and transparency and supports your organisation to work towards achieving its key objectives. A great resource to learn more is www.acnc.gov.au

Step 2: Adapting and Creating Your Own Service Model

Tailoring services to meet the unique needs of the local veteran community is crucial. This step provides guidance on conducting needs assessments, designing effective programs, and ensuring staff members possess the necessary skills to deliver comprehensive support.

By working collaboratively with services in your local area, you can ensure your service model will meet the needs of your funding body, meet the needs of the veteran community and work seamlessly with well-established services already in place.

Step 3: Co-Designing Your Centre with Veterans and Families

Involving veterans and their families in the decision-making and design processes of the centre fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that services are responsive to their needs. This step offers strategies for engaging and empowering veterans and families and creating inclusive and welcoming physical spaces.

The focus here is to do it 'with' veterans and their families not 'for' veterans and their families. By having open and honest conversations every step of the way, you can ensure your services will be valued by veterans.

Step 4: Developing an Outline Plan

Developing a well-defined plan is essential to guide the establishment and growth of the Veteran and Family Centre. This step helps organisations set clear goals and objectives, outline implementation strategies, and establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and make necessary adjustments.

Community consultation is essential when creating this plan. We recommend ensuring you can fit this plan onto one A3 page. This will ensure you keep the summary of the information succinct enough to be understood in a short time frame. There are many examples on the internet of one-page plans. You can take one of these and customise it for your centre or start afresh. Remember, the aim here is to provide a plan that can be understood by your community.



Step 5: Implementation

Once your veteran-informed plan is in place, whether you are calling your service a centre, hub or any other name, it will remain a dream until the actions are implemented. By using the example activities in this resource package, you can move from planning to action.

We recommend documenting your activities with written summaries and photographs so you can create visibility of the Veteran community. Of course, any promotional activity needs to be carried out in a respectful manner, acknowledging privacy when required and avoiding photographing sensitive activities. By sharing the appropriate activities on social media, you can engage a wider audience.

Step 6: Review and Refine

At each milestone, ensure you have established a review process. This can be formal or informal, depending on your governance structure and processes. You may need to provide a formal review at certain milestones for your funding bodies. Once the review process is undertaken, ensure you look for ways to improve and implement those as soon as possible. It is through this continuous improvement process, the feedback from your local veteran community will shape your activities, providing more valuable actions and impactful service.





THE 9 PRINCIPLES OF VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION

We must recognise and acknowledge the national impact of suicide across the community and within the veteran community.



Suicide is often preventable and requires much more than a focus on intervention at the point of crisis. We need to focus on upstream wellbeing support and connection.



Community collaboration and inter-agency support and cooperation at the local level is paramount.



A holistic community led approach, non-clinical and clinical, supported by all is needed to combat suicide.



We need to empower and equip veterans and their families to help and support each other. We are the first line of defence.



The input, knowledge and wisdom of veterans and families with the lived experience of suicide is critical.



A holistic community-based suicide prevention strategy, supported by the entire community, is needed to reduce suicide.



Having a trained community to help prevent suicide and assist during postvention is vital.



If tragedy strikes, we need to better support the families and mates of those affected.







LESSONS LEARNED

There have been many lessons learned through Operation Compass. The more that is shared, the more that lessons can be applied, and services improved.

LESSONS LEARNED

There have been many lessons learned through running Operation Compass and embedding it into The Oasis Townsville. Following is a summary, that you can use to build upon to assist in creating a thriving community in your area.

1. Ensure veterans play a leading role.

This includes connection-based activities as well as administrative and operational activities. If you don't have a veteran to perform a role, then have them consult on how best to do it.

2. Use evidence-based activities.

These are activities that have scientific evidence of effectiveness. You can learn more at blackdoginstitute.org.au

3. Explore innovative activities.

Trial your own activities and learn from the experience, reviewing and improving as you go.

4. Don't be all things to all people.

An effective Veteran Wellbeing Centre is a service that works in with the existing community services and refers veterans to other professionals where appropriate.

5. Celebrate your success.

Local media will want to know what wonderful things your centre is up to and how you are assisting the community. Keep them involved by celebrating milestones and success.

6. Share your lessons.

Just as this guide shares the lessons from Townsville, continue to add to the body of work by sharing your stories and lessons so we can all improve and better serve the veteran community. Celebrate the success of individual journeys.

7. Holistic Approach

Embrace a holistic approach that addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing of veterans and their families. Provide integrated services and programs that cater to their diverse needs or work closely with others.

8. Person-Centered Care

Prioritize person-centered care by actively involving veterans and their families in decision-making, program design, and service delivery. Respect their unique experiences, preferences, and goals.

9. Collaborative Partnerships

Foster collaborative partnerships with government agencies, mental health organisations, veteran support networks, community groups, and other relevant stakeholders. Leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks to enhance the impact and reach of the centre.

10. Suicide Prevention Focus

Embed a strong focus on suicide prevention throughout all aspects of the centre's operations. Develop evidence-based strategies, awareness campaigns, and early intervention programs to promote mental wellbeing and prevent suicide.

11. Culturally Sensitive Approach

Recognise and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences within the veteran community. Ensure that services and programs are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and accessible to all veterans and their families.

12. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

Implement a robust system for monitoring, evaluating, and continuously improving the centre's programs and services. Regularly assess outcomes, collect feedback, and adapt approaches based on data and evidence.

13. Trauma-Informed Care

Adopt a trauma-informed approach that recognises and responds to the potential impact of trauma on veterans and their families. Create a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing, resilience, and recovery.

14. Peer Support Networks

Facilitate peer support networks and opportunities for veterans and their families to connect, share experiences, and provide mutual support. Foster a sense of community and belonging within the centre.

15. Wellbeing Promotion

Promote overall wellbeing through educational workshops, physical activities, creative outlets, and social engagement. Encourage healthy lifestyles, stress management, and personal growth among veterans and their families.

16. Sustainability Planning

Develop a comprehensive sustainability plan that includes diverse funding sources, long-term partnerships, and strategies for financial stability. Continuously explore opportunities for revenue generation and resource optimisation.

17. Ongoing Professional Development

Invest in ongoing professional development for staff members to enhance their knowledge and skills in serving the veteran community. Stay abreast of emerging research, best practices, and innovations in the field.

18. Data Privacy and Confidentiality

Maintain strict data privacy and confidentiality protocols to ensure the protection of veterans' personal information. Comply with legal and ethical standards to build trust and foster a safe environment for seeking support.

By embracing these lessons, veteran and family wellbeing centres can create a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the overall wellbeing of veterans and their families while effectively addressing their unique challenges.





EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

By engaging veterans through connection based activities, lives were saved. Included here are a sample of the activities supported by Operation Compass during the trial. Take them, tailor them, learn from them and get veterans to lead similar activities in your area.

ACTIVITY

#CheckYourMates

#CheckYourMates – Prevention through Connection, is a call-to-action digital campaign encouraging veterans to check in with mates in three simple steps:

1. Connect to others
2. Yarn to listen and
3. Motivate to act.

#checkyourmates

 @theoasistownsville

 @checkyourmates_



Aim

Encourage social connection, increase well-being, destigmatise help-seeking behaviours and reduce the rate of suicides in the ADF community.

The Operation Compass experience

What we did

#CheckYourMates was born during a conversation at an Operation Compass BBQ and has had such success it has been implemented by the DVA under the name #Check5. It is especially successful in engaging the hard-to-reach young male veterans.

The social media campaign is critical to the success of this activity, so we focused heavily on gaining reach using short videos, personal stories, and local identities. We also engaged professionals to produce:



- a launch video
- social media tiles, a Facebook profile frame, social media banners, webpage, media release, promo flyers
- Facebook ads and Linked In ads
- radio and newspaper ads.

We kicked off with a #CheckYourMates launch event and then released one to two videos per week for eight weeks across social media platforms. We then ramped up the call to action in the lead up to ANZAC Day using the media. Throughout the campaign we continued to collect positive stories, quotes and videos for use on social media and the website.

The initiative has reached over 5 million people on social media, with an additional reach of nearly 1.3 million emerging from #CheckYourMates inspired campaigns.

Implementation

How you can run an activity like this



The #CheckYourMates initiative has gained national and international attention so will not likely require the same level of marketing investment in your location. However, it is important to continue promoting the message on social media to reach those often difficult to reach younger veterans. Sharing positive local stories has proven successful and is recommended to reinforce the three important steps.



ACTIVITY

GP Training

A series of education events and resources for General Practitioners, Practice Nurses and Practice Managers around defence veteran health pathways, processes, prevalent health issues, culture, barriers and enablers that impact upon them accessing the necessary care.



Aim

Equip General Practice professionals across Australia with the knowledge, confidence and resources to deliver effective and appropriate health care for defence veterans.

The Operation Compass experience

What we did



Operation Compass engaged Northern Australia Primary Health Limited to deliver training to GPs throughout NQ and then to a national audience via video conferencing. Educational events are delivered face to face, as online self-paced courses, via online modules, and as dinner education events.

Training information and registration is available on the NAPHL website at <https://www.naphl.com.au/veterans>. The page also includes a series of marketing materials that encourage veterans and their families to attend GP appointments and identify themselves as ex-serving personnel. A literacy pack is also available for GPs.



Implementation

How you can run an activity like this

The success of the program has exceeded expectations. It is therefore recommended that a similar model be used to implement the program in other locations.



ACTIVITY

Farmer assist

Farmer Assist is an initiative to engage veterans in providing physical support to local farmers.



Aim

Involve socially isolated veterans to provide purpose, promote social connection and physical activity and to improve mental health outcomes.



The Operation Compass experience

What we did

Farmer Assist was run in three one-week blocks to assist farmers whose properties have been drought affected. Veterans performed tasks like general labouring, repairs and fencing.

This initiative showed that the act of collaborating with peers to perform a service was often its own form of indirect help for those involved with the program. It also demonstrated the psychosocial benefits of helping and belonging. Feedback tells us that the farmers benefited a great deal from the initiative, but not nearly as much as the veterans did.



Implementation

How you can run an activity like this

After a career serving others, veterans can often be engaged or re-engaged by calling on their preparedness to serve and the members of the community that often need assistance are our farmers.

Veterans assisting farmers through tough times is a great activity to promote belonging and have our vets feel needed and appreciated. Results are even better when the initiative is veteran led, where a group pulls together to coordinate logistics such as transport, meals, accommodation and to source necessary tools and materials.

Participants can assist with work such as fencing, clearing, mechanical maintenance, fire breaks, or even house maintenance. It is recommended to have a range of activities requiring different levels of physical fitness to support participation for those with lower physical or health capacity.



ACTIVITY

Cycling

A cycling program that involves both group cycling classes and outdoor group rides, followed by a coffee catchup and chat.



Aim

Promote social inclusion and interaction to help improve the physical and mental health of veterans, using group cycling sessions.



The Operation Compass experience

What we did

Operation Compass engaged a local provider of cycle spin classes to provide a static bicycle training program and funded veterans to participate. Veteran led outdoor rides were also held over the weekends.

The provider offered group physical training, via cycle spin classes, 3-5 classes per week with a coffee catch up for participants afterwards. Emergency Services personnel also participated, and a Lived Experience Ambassador attended so veterans could discuss concerns.

In response to Covid-19 an online delivery platform was developed so participants could continue to participate from home via virtual classes.



Implementation

How you can run an activity like this

Your cycling program can be as structured or informal as your community would like. As we did at Operation Compass, you could engage a local provider of cycle spin classes and fund your veterans to participate in weekly classes.

Alternatively, you might already have keen cyclists within your veteran community who are willing to organise group rides to finish at a local café for a group coffee and chat. Or, offer both if the interest is there. The focus is on encouraging consistency of participation and connection via the group chat.



ACTIVITY

Art workshops

Veterans and families participate in weekly art workshops.



Aim

Encourage social connection, build self-esteem, improve mental health and provide a sense of achievement for veterans.

The Operation Compass experience

What we did



We sourced a local not-for-profit provider of art classes, which ran for six months, and funded veterans to attend. No experience or skill was necessary to participate. The artworks created were displayed at local art shows and then installed permanently at The Oasis Townsville as public art pieces where they are proudly displayed.

Our participants not only developed new skills or uncovered hidden talents, but they also made important connections with the community. This has improved their mental health and overall wellbeing.

Implementation

How you can run an activity like this

No matter what level of experience the participants have, art provides everyone with the opportunity to express themselves, and this method is often a lot easier than talking to someone.



The art workshops can be led by a professional artist, or an art therapist, or be simply a committed social group coming together regularly to enjoy art. And it can be any type of art, like painting, sculpting, pottery, playdough, collage, or whatever the group decides.

By coming together to create art, participants are connecting with others. Allow participants time to chat with others before, during and after class. A great idea is to provide tea and coffee afterwards so participants can stay for cuppa and a chat.



HELP IS AVAILABLE

Help is available now

Call 000
if in immediate danger

Free Counselling (24/7)

For all current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families

Open Arms

Veterans & Families Counselling
1800 011 046

Safe Zone Support

This is a free anonymous counselling line
1800 142 072

Lifeline Australia

13 11 14

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

VETERAN

/ˈvet(ə)rən/

Commonly accepted definition of a veteran in Australia:
A veteran is any person who has rendered one day's full-time service.

Additional resources

Data: Veterans in the 2021 Census:
first result - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
aihw.gov.au

An Analysis of Veteran Data:
Is life better or worse after serving in the defence force?
indaily.com.au

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au

The Oasis Townsville - Veteran and Family Centre
www.theoasistownsville.org.au

The Oasis Townsville - Operation Compass
www.theoasistownsville.org.au/operation-compass

THANKS

Thank you to the volunteers, staff, collaborating professionals, researchers, practitioners, Australian Defence Force, Department of Health, North Queensland Primary Health Network, The Oasis Townsville, Operation Compass, Black Dog Institute, Townsville community, families and friends, your support is greatly appreciated.

To the veterans of Townsville - your service to this great country is greatly appreciated and your service to the community as a veteran is valued. Together we can continue to participate in a thriving community and prevent suicide through connection with one-another.





At The Oasis Townsville, we remain committed to supporting veterans and their families in their journey towards happiness and fulfillment. Through our programs, services, and unwavering dedication, we strive to create an environment where the three elements of happiness are nurtured, and lives are positively impacted. Together, we can continue to build a community where love, purpose, and anticipation thrive.



theoasistownsville.org.au