

# Forging new memories



Tharwa Valley Forge Veteran and Families maker program instructor Adam Fromholtz shows Sgt M the art of blacksmithing. Photo: Jay Cronan

A workshop is giving an alternative way to deal with the struggles of PTSD, Cpl Sebastian Beurich reports.

AS HE forged a piece of metal in the fires of his workshop, Sgt M was also forging himself a new path in life, one hammer strike at a time.

While recovering from a back injury sustained on deployment, he developed PTSD after being unable to engage in regular coping mechanisms.

After working through a number of meaningful engagement programs with his rehab consultant, he found a seven-day blacksmithing course which gave him the skills and tools needed to establish his own forge in his garage.

"When I'm working in my forge, everything else is out of my mind. Everything is blocked out, I don't think about the stuff causing me troubles, I'm just focused on bashing or grinding metal," he said.

"A lot of the stuff that's available [in the other programs] is geared at pensioners – ceramics, glassblowing and stuff like that – it didn't really interest me.

"When I found out about the blacksmithing course, I basically burst into my rehab consultant's office, shoved it in his face and said 'this is it, this is exactly what I want to do'.

"It's something I can do, and it gave me something to do afterwards as well, which is important.

"It's great to go off and do something for a few days or a week, but I needed something to capture my interest and take me forward."

Sgt M did his course at the Tharwa Valley Forge – the world's largest bladesmithing school, located 30 minutes from Canberra.

His course is now one part of a program aimed at veterans, current serving personnel, and importantly, their families.

The Tharwa Valley Forge Veterans and Families Maker Program received seed funding from DVA and are aiming to provide 100 places on knife-making, blacksmithing, leatherworking and bow-making courses, starting from next year. While the first round is

only open to Canberra region residents, the program manager hopes to make it a national program, using the Cuppacumbalong Homestead just down the road.

Mark Toogood, ex-soldier and program manager at Tharwa Valley Forge, said the program wasn't necessarily about learning how to do something, it's about having an experience.

"When you come to our program, you're making memories with your family, your spouse, your children, or even with a mate," he said.

"It's money in the bank for down the track. When you're out of the service you've got these good

Mr Toogood disagreed, saying while blacksmithing comes across as "blokey", the forge has had an almost equal gender split of students since 2003 – with 40 per cent women.

The courses, he said, are an introduction to creativity for people who aren't in touch with their creative side, or who don't realise they have one.

"We get men coming to the forge and saying they're not into art, or they hate drawing, they just want a chance to hit some hot metal," he said.

"When we ask them what they want to make, they tell us they want to make a knife, and then draw

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– Mark Toogood, program manager

memories, and this is something to build a new identity on as you're going through your life.

"People tend to look back [on their service] with rose-coloured glasses, it's all about the good times and the mates, so they don't really move on.

"I've seen a lot of people get stuck and develop a sort of 'veteran' identity, which isn't a bad thing, but there's more to them beyond being a serviceperson."

Sgt M said the program is something he could see a lot of veterans engaging in, simply because it's a "blokey" activity.

"I'm sure macramé is fantastic and good for your mind, but I'm not a macramé sort of person," he said.

"Bashing and grinding steel, it's absolutely brilliant. I don't have any ambition to be the world's greatest blacksmith or knife-maker; it's just something I can do."

for us. It gives them license to access their creative side."

Sgt M said the items he makes aren't pretty, but they're functional and things he'd never had an understanding of how to make.

They also give him a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, which he lost during his PTSD treatment.

"Every time I use something I make, or set it up, or even look at it when I walk into my forge, I have this thought of 'yeah, I made that'," he said.

"When you're trying to deal with depression on a daily basis, you're looking for something to make you feel a little bit more worthwhile.

"This is the sort of place where it's not about your service, it's not about your rank or anything like that, it's purely about coming out and experiencing something."



Project Director of the Defence Seaworthiness Management System Capt Colin Dagg, left, Executive Director of the Office of the Defence Seaworthiness Regulator Karen Roberts, CN VAdm Tim Barrett, CDF ACM Mark Binskin, Acting Associate Secretary Rebecca Skinner, DCA Maj-Gen Rick Burr, Head of Navy Engineering and RAdm Collin Lawrence at the official launch of the system.

## 'Innovative and flexible' system

### Cpl Sebastian Beurich

THE recent introduction of the Defence Seaworthiness Management System will allow operators to be more "innovative and flexible" in the way they manage their day-to-day maritime operations.

The new system, which replaces the Navy's Technical Regulatory System, will bring all Defence Maritime operations under a single authority and regulator – the Office of the Defence Seaworthiness Regulator.

CN and new Defence Seaworthiness Authority VAdm Tim Barrett said the new system was a world-leading approach which was goal-based and outcome-focused.

"Historically, maritime regulation has been highly prescriptive which, at times, has hindered Defence doing what it needed to," he said.

"This new approach allows operators to be innovative and flexible in how they manage hazards and risks."

Project Manager of the Defence Seaworthiness Management System Cdre Dagg said he was incredibly proud of the team that designed the system, and the system itself.

"The system is a culmination of significant research, analysis, peer review and incredibly hard work by the design team," he said.

"There is an increasingly complex legislative environment surrounding

maritime operations, as well as the need for the management of the capability life cycle of maritime systems, which leads to an administrative overhead.

"Now, all of the legislative and management requirements of maritime systems are rolled into the new Seaworthiness Management System, which lets the subject matter experts tell us how they will achieve the desired outcome."

The system is being implemented across all Defence organisations that are involved in maritime operations, including Army, Navy, Air Force, DSTG, E&IG and CASG.

It came about as an answer to a number of reviews which identified the need for a consistent and systematic approach to managing seaworthiness to meet tasking requirements and stop the cycle of 'crisis driven reform'.

"Defence is different to many commercial organisations – we often work in dangerous operating environments, so we need a regulatory system which could accommodate our role in keeping the nation safe and protecting our way of life," VAdm Barrett said.

"The system empowers capability managers and operators to define how they will deliver the required outcome, what they need to deliver it and the information they need to make decisions on the seaworthiness of their mission systems."

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