

Submission: Inquiry into suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel

From: John & Karen Bird (Parents of Jesse S. Bird 1RAR 8527349 - Afghanistan - Veteran)

Attention: Senators of the Australian Parliament



Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to record our thoughts on behalf of our family and to make a submission to the Senate Enquiry into Suicide by Veterans and ex-service Personnel.

Our son Jesse, joined the Australian Army in 2007. He was an elite level athlete, booming with charisma and self confidence and proud to be a member of the ADF. He was deployed to Afghanistan in June of 2009 and returned to us in February 2010. The confident young man who went away - did not return the same person. Instead, Jesse returned affected by a cocktail of nightmares, anxiety, shame, remorse, damaged shoulders, self-medicating alcohol and cigarette addiction. Told to move on and not to talk to family about his experiences, he fought his demons and he tried to settle back into life at 1RAR Townsville. Jesse's life spiralled downhill during 2011/2012 and without family support since this time, he would no doubt have become a statistic. (He had applied for some time off to seek some help privately but this was denied him by the army - he was left with no option but to resign with no plan put in place for his future).

He has been in and out of relationships and work since his self discharge from the army in 2012. Jesse has been diagnosed with PTSD - He has been endeavouring to seek assistance from DVA for the last eighteen months without success - it seems to him and us that the level of bureaucracy is intentionally obstructionist and unedifying. The jungle of paperwork, the lack of follow-up and the non-existent support has contributed to his deteriorating mental health. He is involved with VVCS and is currently involved in a 12 Week PTSD Specific Counselling program which finishes in early December. Jesse has not received any money what-so-ever from DVA or Centre-link to help him survive and without our financial and emotional help he would be on the street or worse.

This whole experience has taken a serious toll on our family. We have been self-employed business owners and employers on the Gold Coast for more than twenty five years. We have paid our taxes, and have always been "lifter's" - to coin Joe Hockey's phrase. It beggars belief to us that we can send our young men and women overseas in the defence of our nation and fail to support those who are damaged by this process. Our politicians of all persuasions, are ready to stand at attention at War Memorials around the country and lay expensive wreaths and offer platitudes in all our names whilst our suffering Veterans are screaming - some loudly but many more silently - at deaf ears for help. This confounds us all. We say deaf ears - because surely this must be the case - because if it wasn't "why is all of this so"?

Thank you in anticipation of immediate change of policy

John, Karen, Brendan & Kate Bird

P.O. Box 288

Main Beach Qld 4217