

15 November 2021

To whom it may concern

It has come to my attention that Xperiences / SMEAC are bidding to be appointed as the Lead Organisation for the South East Queensland Veteran Wellbeing Centre, as such I would like to show my support to the Xperiences team and the organisation as a whole. From my research It seems that the Veteran Centre being proposed by DVA is almost identical to the model that Xperiences / SMEAC have been pursuing for some years with their facility on the Ewen Maddock Dam, named the Veteran Transition Facility (VTF).

I'm a veteran of the Royal Australian Navy who transferred to the Naval Reserve in 2018. Like many veterans separating from full time service, my transition to civilian life was filled with many challenges, highs and lows. Upon separating I began full time tertiary study in Paramedic Science, as such, this commitment required flexible employment. Throughout my studies I found difficulties finding employment, many employers did not recognise my skills gained through military service and believed I was too qualified for entry level positions or under qualified for experienced positions. Additionally, I struggled adjusting to workplace and University culture, many veterans I have spoken to share these feelings. Through discussions with other veterans studying at tertiary institutions, I have found it common place to feel "out of place" at university. A combination of significantly reduced discipline, when compared to military service and a lack of understanding of veterans, leads to these feelings.

I first came into contact with Xperiences in 2020 and was offered an opportunity for casual work in the corporate training and events area of their organisation. I believe Xperiences were highly effective in utilising many of my skills and experiences, not recognised by formal qualifications. They recognised my ability to command, control and instruct large groups from many demographics, including, troubled youth and mentally impaired. They also recognised my ability to adapt to new and unforeseen situations and in-still discipline and camaraderie in groups. Furthermore, Xperiences fostered an environment that made me comfortable in my workplace and allowed for a progressive transition into civilian life.

Xperiences was highly flexible with my university and reserve services commitments, on all occasions they placed my personal and career growth over their organisation. For example, they placed me contact with SOTER International, a veteran run charity focused on health promotion through preventing death and injury from traumatic injuries. SOTER International's values, beliefs and core purpose aligned perfectly with my personal and career aims, SMEAC allowed me time off work and even paid for me to attend events with SOTER International. Additionally, SMEAC gave me time off work to attend exams and extra curricular university activities at every instance.

I am truly thankful to SMEAC for the positive impact they had on my life and believe that they are well placed to expand their operations to further support veterans like myself.

28 November 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is (retracted) and I'm writing this letter as the wife of an Army Veteran. I think its important for you to hear from the wife of a veteran about how our lives have changed for the better as a result of Xperiences / SMEAC.

My husband Jack*, served 8 years in the Army RAAOC leaving in 1995.

During this time, he reached the rank of Corporal in Field Force Units.

He Served with 102 Field Workshops Lavarack Barracks Townsville,

52 Combat Supply Enoggera Barracks Brisbane.

3 BASB Lavarack Barracks Townsville.

Served as a Unit Physical Training Instructor and an Unarmed Combat Instructor.

Deployed to Bouganville via HMAS Tobruk on Operation Lagoon 1994 SPPKF

Jack's* variety of military skills kept him on the Island of Bouganville for the duration of the operation as opposed to soldiers back on HMAS Tobruk.

Jack's* transition to civilian life... looking back now he left as a direct result from his experience in Bouganville. He came back a different man. Problems surfaced and Jack* and I did not understand what he was dealing with. He met with an Army Psychologist once.

Subsequently he left in October 1995 and buried his experiences deep inside.

In civilian life he struggled to maintain a 'normal' existence obtaining employment in 'high risk' jobs as in Security. Then a contract job lasting 10 years at Range Control at Kokoda Army Barracks Canungra. Continuing struggling with an undiagnosed mental condition. This is where Dean was when he imploded with the inevitable 'trigger'.

The nightmare began... we found no support. Initial civilian Doctors let him down not recognising the scope of his mental health. Dean went to Veteran Affairs Southport Qld and was turned away with the woman at the counter saying, 'we can't help you, you're not a veteran'. As a consequence, we lost our home to the bank with financial troubles.

We were on our own, family and friends fall away. Then the merry go round of Government Departments, G.P.'s. Psychologists, Psychiatrists with all the paper work filling out forms.

Basically, stumbling through the process and jumping through hoops.

No one military personal could navigate their way through, without any assistance and especially with undiagnosed PTSD.

Fortunately for us I was and am competent in administration and computers.

This is only a snippet of the minefield we have had to navigate on our own.

In short Jack* has been diagnosed with PTSD, is TPI with a Veteran Gold Card.

We are now on the Sunshine Coast and found Xperiences / SMEAC.

XPERIENCES HAS BEEN A GOD SEND...

Transitioning military personal need XPERIENCES with all the proposed support.

Human beings need purpose, to be active and useful. Jack* now having been given purpose again especially with like minded people has brought the light back into his eyes. With Jack's* on going care and support from his Psychologist, DVA and SMEAC I am glimpsing a resemblance of the man he once was. I have supported Jack* to the best of my ability though it has taken its toll over the years.

Xperiences has also impacted my life for the better, knowing he has the support of Xperiences being part of the crew. He has found a brotherhood again to utilize his skills which he enjoys so much brings a sense of peace. I myself have met with some of the Xperiences crew and it feels like family. Jack* and I are now both starting to actually enjoy life again as opposed to just surviving.

If Xperiences and their Veteran Wellbeing Centre can do for other veteran families and the veteran, what they have done for our family, then they should be given all the support they can. No other organisation has helped us like they have. I will forever be grateful...

Yours Faithfully,

Wife of a Veteran

*Name changed for privacy reason

22 November 2021

To whom it may concern

My name is ***RETRACTED** and I am an Australian Army veteran, having spent 8 years in service including a tour of Afghanistan.

I left the Army in 2015 on the basis of a medical discharge. At the time of discharge I was near physically and mentally incapable of surviving, I couldn't take care of myself, I was under financial duress, I was often illiterate due to stress and I felt hopeless, lost and overwhelmed regarding a tangible future for myself.

I am aware that Xperiences has been persevering for some years to secure the property on the Sunshine Coast with a view to creating a Veteran Transition Facility, where they can expand the incredible assistance they give to veterans.

I felt compelled to write this letter as a letter of thanks to the team who took me in when I was in need and ready to receive assistance. At the time I was enduring divorce, I was managing an alcohol and tobacco addiction, I was facing difficulties gaining access to my children and had nowhere to live. Despite a very successful military career, I felt lost and unsure where to turn or where to seek help.

I met Ray and others in 2018 and that's when things started to improve. It wasn't long before they helped me find accommodation, gave me employment through their adventure experiences business and provided me with mentorship and a sense of family.

Joining them, I felt like I belonged again and I soon regained a sense of purpose. Unlike the experiences I'd had with other veteran support organisations, I wasn't turned away, I wasn't told to contact someone else, I wasn't asked to jump through administrative hoops. I was brought into the fold and given support, kindness and friendship in an environment that was familiar enough to feel safe yet different enough to know I had fresh opportunities and I was supported to grow.

I worked with them for 2.5 years, learning tangible employment skills as well as being supported to overcome socially limiting anxieties / patterns in a safe and supportive environment. I felt fun for the first time in years and was being nourished to develop personally and professionally.

I am currently writing this letter from Norway, where I am completing a Bachelors in Arctic Adventure Tourism as well as learning Norwegian. When I met Ray I was literally living in a cupboard, addicted, struggling and stuck. If it had not been for Ray and the team, I cannot imagine where I would have ended up.

With every word of this letter I am grateful for Ray's generosity, mentorship and mateship. I urge you to deeply consider supporting Ray's vision so he can even further support the Veteran community.

Yours sincerely

VETERAN
