

# Timor Awakening 8 Program Report

24 February to 6 March 2019

*Prepared by Veterans Care Association, 29 April 2019*

Holistic Care of Body Mind & Soul for Veterans, Families & Carers  
Reg. Charity No: CH2629 | ABN: 97 213 464 172



# Qualitative Report – Timor Awakening 8

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## Section 1: Timor Awakening 8 – Summary of Activity

Prepared by: Project Director, Michael Stone

**Timor Awakening 8 (TA8)** was conducted from 24 February to 6 March 2019. The 12-day holistic health program included 1 day in Darwin, 6 days in Dili and 4 days throughout rural areas of Timor-Leste (TL) including the Districts of Liquica and Bobonaro. The Timor Awakening Program is a holistic health and well-being program of rehabilitation and renewal for veterans and their families. The program promotes values, identity, purpose and spirituality in each of our lives, as a solid foundation for health and happiness.

TA8 included 27 Australians (22 Veterans, 4 spouse/carers and 1 civilian specialist) and 15 Timorese Veterans. TA8 was supported in Timor-Leste by the TL Office of the Prime Minister, the National Veteran Task Force, the National Defence Force, National Police and local authorities.

TA8 provided a multitude of education and healing interactions and experiences at the individual, small group and large group levels, including professional education and guidance, peer2peer support, physical exercise, mindfulness, meditation, exposure therapy and unique interaction with foreign communities and veterans. The program has been designed to provide a safe, nurturing and inspiring environment where veterans and their spouses have the opportunity to reevaluate their lives, envisage and plan where they want to go, and provide a range of tools to help them achieve a healthy and purposeful life. The wide range of topics covered within sessions on the program are mentioned below.

Special elements of the TA8 program included:

- Holistic Health (nurturing the mind, body, soul and relationships)
- Official Airport Welcome
- Tour of National War Museum and Balide Political Prison / Chega! Exhibition
- Welcome reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff
- Visit to the Timor-Leste National Rehabilitation Centre and Wheelchair Basketball
- Visit to historic sites in Dili, Aidabasalala, Balibo, Bobonaro, Maliana, Motain
- Community Traditional Welcome to Aidabasalala
- Commemoration and dedication ceremony at Balibo RAR Monument
- Visit to the Timor-Leste/Indonesia Border (Meet with Indonesian soldiers and police)
- Timor-Leste National Veterans Day Parade, March and Lunch
- Reception by Nobel Peace Laureate and Former President José Ramos-Horta





**Holistic Health Sessions.** Holistic Health sessions included prepared sessions and activities on the following topics: mental health, exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, goal setting, forgiveness and reconciliation, resources for veterans in Australia, communication, growth mindset, PTSD, anxiety, addiction and relapse prevention, sleep management, medication and families perspective. A number of videos were utilised including the Veterans Family Health Toolkit video series, the Debt of Honour documentary, Australian Story – The Peacemaker and The Presidents Man, A Hero's Journey and Balibo. The Timor Awakening focus of holistic health is that healing is possible, there are many resources to achieve this, that we should live in the present with a growth mindset and plan for the future.

**Physical Fitness.** Physical fitness is a fundamental element of the program. Fitness sessions are planned early morning on a daily basis, include village walks, stretching, mindfulness / yoga, mountain hikes, gym and own physical training. The daily program is active with walking and activities that involve movement, social interaction and stimulation. Other activities included cultural dancing on a number of occasions, a lengthy game of wheelchair basketball at the National Rehabilitation Centre and a full-length game of soccer against the Timorese Army at Balibo.

**Official Welcome.** Brigadier General Maunana (F-FDTL), Jorge Alves (TL Veteran Chief Coordinator), Ms Ines Almeida (Representing Minister of Veterans Affairs) and a cross section of the Timorese Veteran Community were awaiting TA8 participants on the tarmac in Dili, welcoming the Australian veterans in traditional fashion. Veterans of the Timor Awakening program were presented traditional 'Tais' and individually welcomed to country. The program was offered the special honour of processing through the VIP terminal.

**Official Tour of the National War Museum and Balide Political Prison/Chega! Exhibition.** Veterans were officially welcomed by the leadership of the Timor-Leste National War Museum and the Balide Prison / Chega! Exhibition Museum. Through the history, with living Timorese survivors in their presence sharing testimonies, veterans learned of great suffering and resilience the Timorese have had to endure. Through the history and example of the survivors radiates the good values that sustained them through tough times, the resilience of their struggle and the positivity they project today. The most striking lesson is the transition of the veterans' post-war, how the Timorese reconciled with their former enemies and still living lives of dignity, honour and service.

**Welcome reception by the Australian Ambassador and Australian Defence Staff.** The Australian Ambassador and his wife, Peter and Lisa Roberts, welcomed the Timor Awakening group to their official residence. Ambassador Roberts thanked all Australians for their service (and support from families) and praised the Timor Awakening program in developing relations between Australia and Timor-Leste. Representatives of Australian Military, Police and Embassy met and mingled with Australian and Timorese veterans.





### Visit to the Timor-Leste National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) and Wheelchair Basketball.

Timor Awakening was welcomed again by the staff and students of the national rehabilitation centre. This is the primary centre in Timor-Leste that manages the support of all people with disabilities; physiological and mental. The staff at NRC are hard-working and have an incredible energy to support their community. Many of the staff also live with considerable disability. The veterans were given prime examples and role models of people with disabilities continuing to work with identity, purpose and dignity. The visit also gave participants perspective of their own disabilities and the choices they have to manage to live a life with disability. The visit included a full game of wheelchair basketball with the Timorese national wheelchair basket team, which brought great joy and pride for all Timorese and Australians.

**Commemoration for the Fallen – RAR Memorial, Balibo.** The commemoration service at the RAR monument at Balibo included an ecumenical program, Ode, Last Post and Rouse, verbal acknowledgement of remembrance for those who have fallen, Australian and Timor-Leste national anthems. All participants were invited to leave behind their black rock and take with them a white rock. The black rock they carry from the beginning of the program represents all the darkness of the past, the things unforgiven, the angst and anger, the regrets, guilt and shame. The white rock represents the choice to live for today and tomorrow, with light in your life, living a life with purpose, health and positivity.



**Timor-Leste National Veterans Day – 3 March 2019.** Timor Awakening were official guests of the Timorese President and Government of Timor-Leste for the second Timor-Leste Veterans Day commemorations. The Day included a full military and police parade and speeches, an impressive flag raising ceremony, a veteran's march through the capital Dili, and a number of cultural displays, speeches and lunch at the National Conventional Centre. The Australian veterans were specially mentioned by the President in his address, by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Michael Stone was invited to offer a speech on behalf of Australian Veterans. The President of Timor-Leste and Minister of Veterans Affairs both acknowledged and thanked the support and solidarity from Australian Veterans through the Timor Awakening program.

**Welcome by Nobel Peace Laureate and Former President José Ramos-Horta.** Former Prime Minister, President and Nobel Laureate, Jose Ramos-Horta hosted the TA group at his personal residence thanking the participants for their friendship and service. The participants were honored to be welcomed into the home of Jose Ramos-Horta and hear many stories from past and present of his efforts for peace and humanity. The participants were presented the history of Jose Ramos-Horta throughout the program, the incredible challenges he has faced and his contribution to Timor-Leste and the world. It was a highlight to meet him in person and be inspired by his example of forgiveness, humility, hard work and service.







**Cultural experience.** TA8 included regular immersion with Timorese culture, travelling through 3 Districts and experiencing a wide range of cultural activities in the cities and far reaches of the country. Traditional welcome ceremonies were prepared for participants at Dili Airport, ETDA, Aidabasalala, Balibo Fort and Veterans Day, Dili. Participants experienced the warm hospitable and forgiving nature of the Timorese; a culture rich in values and resilience, respect, dignity and humility. Many participants remarked they experienced a call to action in the service of others as a means of their rehabilitation. Many veterans noted in group sessions and program feedback that these veteran initiatives have inspired them to get more involved in their communities and given them an appreciation for the support we have in Australia.

**NGO's & Volunteer Projects.** On Timor Awakening 8 participants visited NGOs and volunteers throughout TL learning from their insights and projects, as well as help identify potential ways veterans can support in the future (as volunteers back in TL or for projects to raise money for). The program had lunch at the East Timor Development Agency (ETDA), a skills based independent training institution that has received significant support from Australians, especially Australian veterans. Participants enjoyed the orphan's performances and trainee hospitality. Timor Awakening participants continued to offer more positions for the "Australian Veterans Scholarship" at ETDA. Since 2018, 31 VET scholarships have been offered for descendants of Timorese Veterans, funded by individual Australian veterans (almost entirely ex-participants of Timor Awakening). Thus far over \$20,000 has been raised to educate less fortunate Timorese. More information about the scholarship can be seen here: <https://www.timorawakening.com/australian-veterans-scholarship>

The TA8 group prepared and distributed 2000 basic writing kits for school children in many schools of rural communities. The resources were provided by Townsville RSL / Rotary in a program called *Kits4Kids*. Veterans also brought other gifts and educational materials that they handed out in schools, orphanages and NGOs. Many veterans realised that they can return to offer their skills, whether medical or manual labour to help others. Service for others is a key theme of Timor Awakening in rehabilitation and leading a healthier and purposeful life.

**Historical Perspectives.** Through the testimonies of Timorese Veterans, participants learned personal perspectives of the 24-year Timorese resistance struggle lead by FALINTIL. TA8 had Timorese Veterans join the program throughout. Many hundreds of veterans welcomed and met with Veterans throughout activities in Dili and the Districts. Participants learned how they employed guerrilla tactics, many of whom had learned from the Australia/Timorese WW2 experience, to defy unthinkable odds. Many of TA8 participants remarked of how the resilience, reconciliation, forgiveness and continued service of the Timorese veterans was an inspiration for them.





Participants visited the sacred site of the 1991 Dili Massacre, the 'Santa Cruz' cemetery, learning of the trigger that led to the historic UN endorsed 1999 referendum. At the site, wounded veteran, 'Raka', personally explained his account of what had happened that day. Raka was wounded at the massacre (shot 3 times) and testified of being proud, despite being unarmed, to have contributed to their countries path for freedom. Many other historical sites were visited and stories told, especially locations where veterans within the group had served, an experience which proved to provide healing.

Participants visited the key sites of Australian military involvement from the time of INTERFET through to present day, including Dili, Aidabasalala, Batugade/Mota-ain, Balibo, Maliana, Tonabibi and Bobonaro. Many of the participants related personal stories of their deployments and their feelings of contrast witnessing the changes that have taken place. Revisiting the site of previous destruction, stress and trauma was cathartic for all veterans who have previously served in Timor-Leste. Through the remarkable development that has taken place, the vibrant village life, active economy, and especially the thousands of children going to school with such vitality and happiness, all in well-dressed uniforms, the Veterans felt proud of their contribution and felt healing of the suffering these places experienced in the past. Participants met many younger adults who were children during the suffering of 1999 to 2006 are now attending university or tertiary qualified and positive about the future of their country.

**Conclusion.** The feedback from participants of TA8 was uniformly positive and appreciative for the opportunity to experience profound growth and healing. Through professional mentoring and guidance, together with the extensive Peer to Peer therapy, Timor Awakening offered an experience uniquely different to other programs available for veterans. The multitude of activities created a bonded group that will remain connected through each other's journey of healing and growth. The overarching theme of hope and purpose was a feature throughout dozens of activities. Even with the realities of a troubled and traumatic past, the Timorese experience is testament to veterans that there is hope, and with purpose and support a positive future is possible. The program continues to develop with higher efficacy which is passed through participants into the wider veteran community to create an impact on a larger scale.





## Photo Gallery - Dili







## Photo Gallery – National Rehabilitation Centre Visit and Wheelchair Basketball







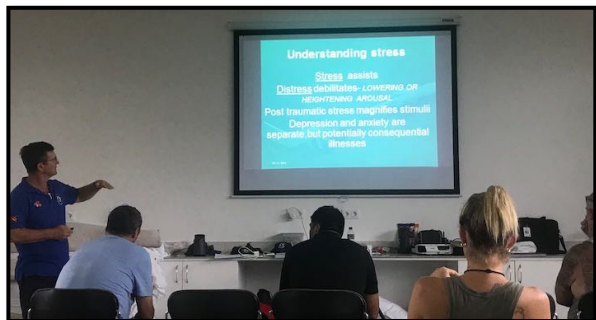
## Photo Gallery – Aidabasalala Traditional Welcome and Commemoration







## Photo Gallery – Balibo and TL Border







## Photo Gallery – Timor-Leste Veterans Day







## Section 2: Timor Awakening 8 - Review of Participant Data

**Prepared by:** Mrs Candice Carroll, Client Support Officer and Mrs Christina Hully, Psychologist.

Data was collected from 25 participants on TA8 at two time points: Commencement of the program (23<sup>rd</sup> February 2019) and the conclusion of the program (6<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

### Demographics

Of the 25 participants on the deployment data was collected from 20 veterans, and 5 Civilians This report includes all the data from the TA8 participants.

Demographic data collected on the 25 participants revealed the following. 17 participants identified as male and 8 as female. The average age of participants was 44 (M = 44.76 years, SD = 7.26 years), indicating that the average age of participants on this deployment was less than the participant of TA7 by 13 years and the age span has decreased approximately by 50% (TA8: 30-66yrs; TA7: 23-94yrs; TA6: 37-73yrs; TA5: 31-78yrs) 20 participants had a history of serving with the military services. Thirteen (16) participants had served in the army, one (3) in the Navy and one (1) had served in the RAAF. Of these 28% reported that they had been medically discharged. At the time of departure for Timor seven participants reported that they were retired, thirteen (52%) reported that they were employed, five identified as unemployed.

### Family Characteristics

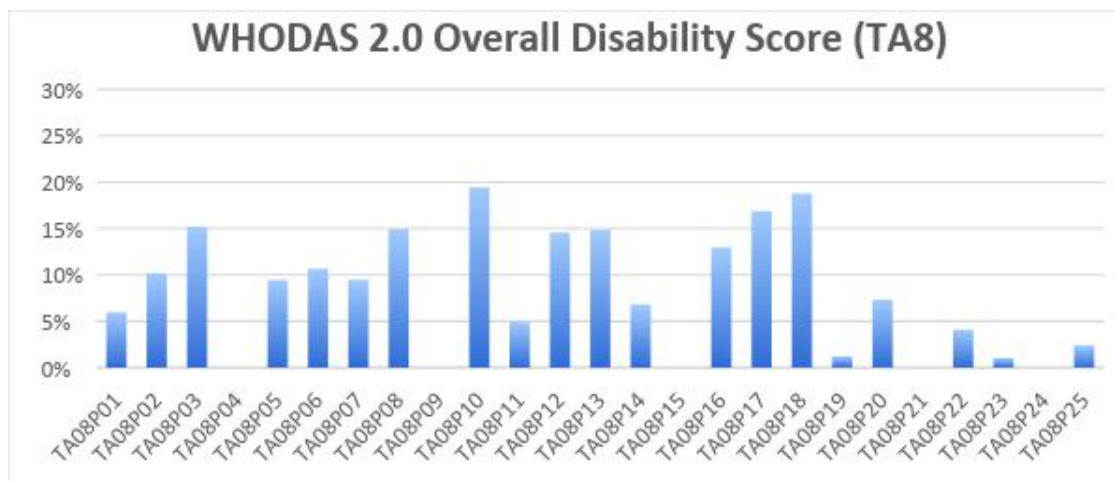
68% (17) participants identified that they were in a long-term relationship (de facto or married), four reported being divorced and four singles. 25 participants provided family demographic information which indicated that 76% (19) have children. Of the 19 participants who have children, 95% (18) currently have dependent offspring.

### Health Status

#### Physical Health:

TA8 participants were administered the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0 (WHODAS 2.0) 12-item version to screen overall functioning and disability due to health conditions. The WHODAS 2.0 provides an overall summary score expressed as percentage of disability experienced in daily life over the past 30 days, with 60% representing full disability due to health condition. All participants completed the questionnaire and disability scores are graphed below.





As the graph above demonstrates, there was variability in the overall functioning level of participants who engaged in TA8.

The average summary score was 8% disability. Comparison with population data available from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that our participants' average score ranks below the level of functioning to be considered a disability when compared to the general population.

This result suggests that overall this group of Timor Awakening participant's daily function was comparably better than what has been reported for participants on the previous two programs (TA4 = 30.17; TA5 = 32.15; TA6 = 40.5; TA7=40.5) where the level of disability was between 90-95% when compared with the general population. Further analysis may be required to identify if the higher average disability score is impacted by age range or health conditions reported by the participants in each individual deployment.

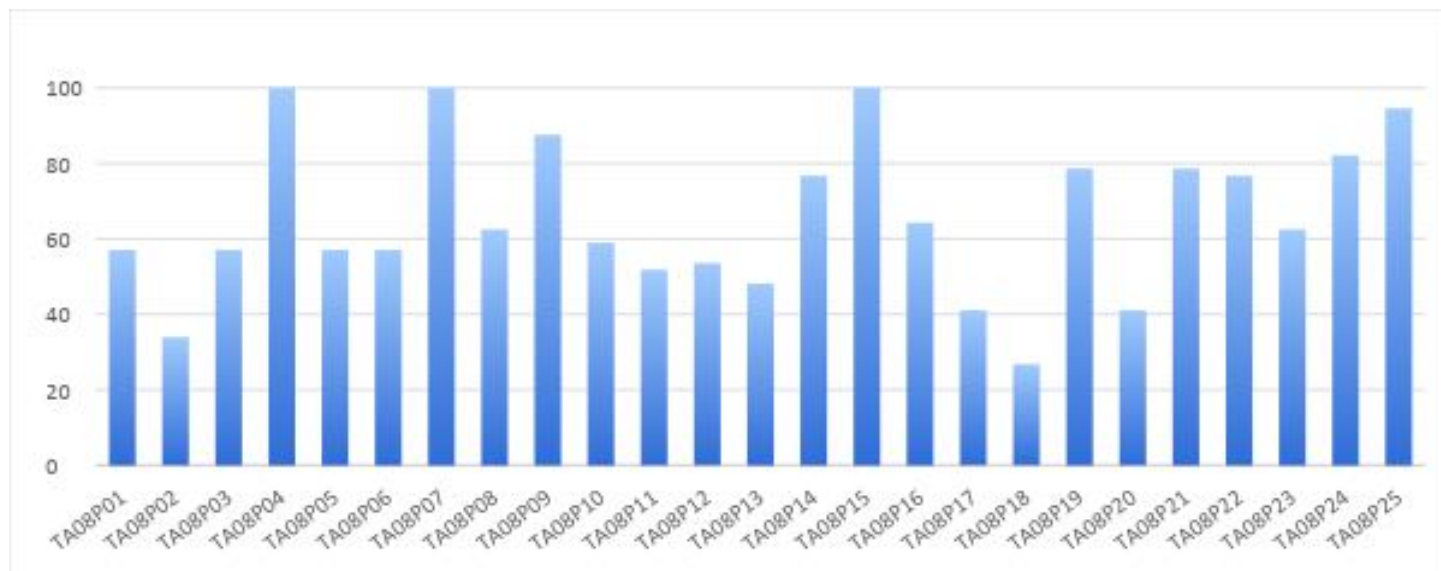
## Mental Health

All TA8 participants provided information about their current and previous treatment for mental health conditions. At deployment, 40% (10) participants were taking medication for a psychiatric condition and all these participants were under the care of a psychiatrist. Of these 36% (9) were also receiving psychological treatment. Three participants were receiving psychiatry treatment without medications and four participants was receiving psychological treatment alone. The psychiatric condition most reported by participants was again Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Secondary to this demographic information, participants completed the Quality of Life and Enjoyment Scale, Short Form (QLES) to provide information on their pre-deployment levels of life satisfaction. The QLES provides a summary score expressed as percentage of life enjoyment over the past 14 days, with 100% representing full



life satisfaction. All participants completed the pre-deployment screening measure, the following analysis is based on the responses of 15 participants. Participant overall life enjoyment scores are graphed below.



As the graph above demonstrates, there was some variability in the overall life enjoyment of participants who engaged in TA8. The average summary score was marginally above 65.93 life enjoyment, with the lowest score at 26% life enjoyment and the highest at 100% life enjoyment. In comparison to other Timor Awakenings, this was above the range of positive life experiences at the time of deployment (TA5 Average= 61%; Range= 40- 93%, TA6 Average= 40.24%; Range 27-78%, TA7 Average= 55.42%; Range = 36-68%), indicating that the presentation of participants varies from group to group.

## Section 3: TA8 Program Efficacy

### Outcomes

Participants completed standardized self-report assessments at Pre- and Post-deployment to aid an understanding of the symptoms of psychological distress and general health and wellbeing of the participants undertaking the deployment to Timor on TA8. These included the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS21), the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). De-identified Pre- and Post-deployment results on each assessment area are demonstrated below.

The final assessment of participants perceptions of personal change as a result of the TA8 experience utilising the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) as a measure of





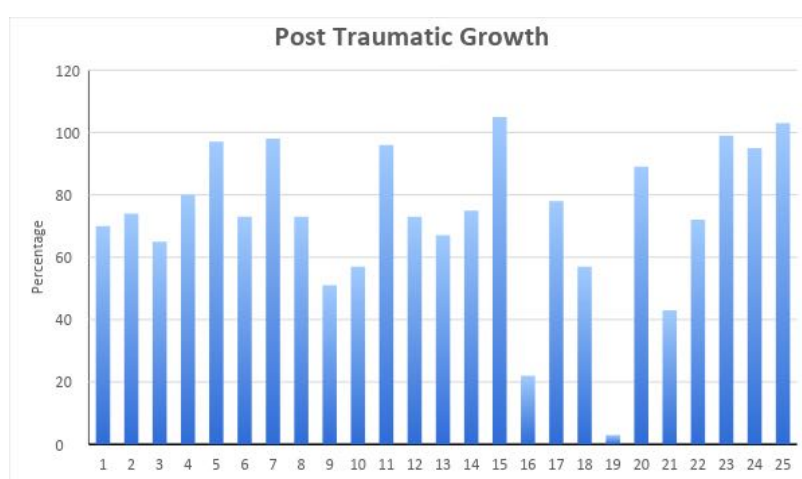


positive change is included in this report as it is the aim of the Timor Awakening experience that participants will be given the opportunity to make some positive changes to their mental health and wellbeing despite the impact of their time within military service in countries and situations that have had enormously negative impacts on their functioning, physically, mentally, emotionally and interpersonally. It is the results of this final assessment which will then be presented before the assessment of the mental health functioning of the participants is presented in detail.

## Post Traumatic Growth

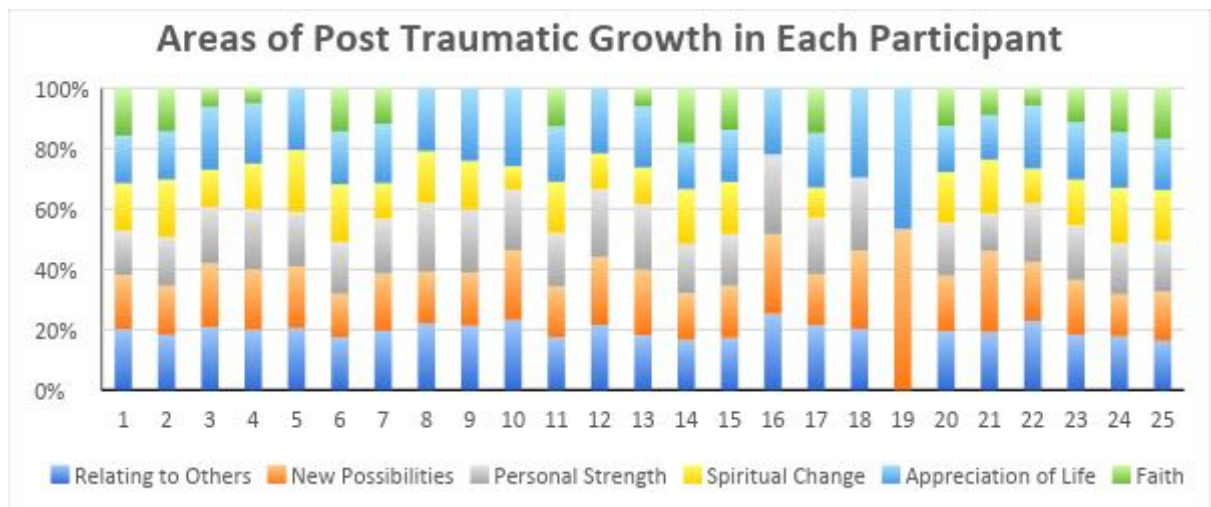
Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity and other challenges in order to rise to a higher level of functioning. Post traumatic growth occurs when individuals report a personal benefit from circumstances that represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual and pose significant challenges to their way of understanding the world and their place in it. Posttraumatic growth is not about returning to the same life as it was previously experienced before a period of traumatic suffering, but it is about undergoing significant 'life-changing' psychological shifts in thinking and relating to the world, that contribute to a personal process of change, that is deeply meaningful.

The Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) enables quick assessment of an individual's perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life. Each participant's de-identified results on the PTGI that was completed at the end of the TA8 experience is demonstrated below. This indicated that each participant experienced some personal growth from the experience of returning to Timor.

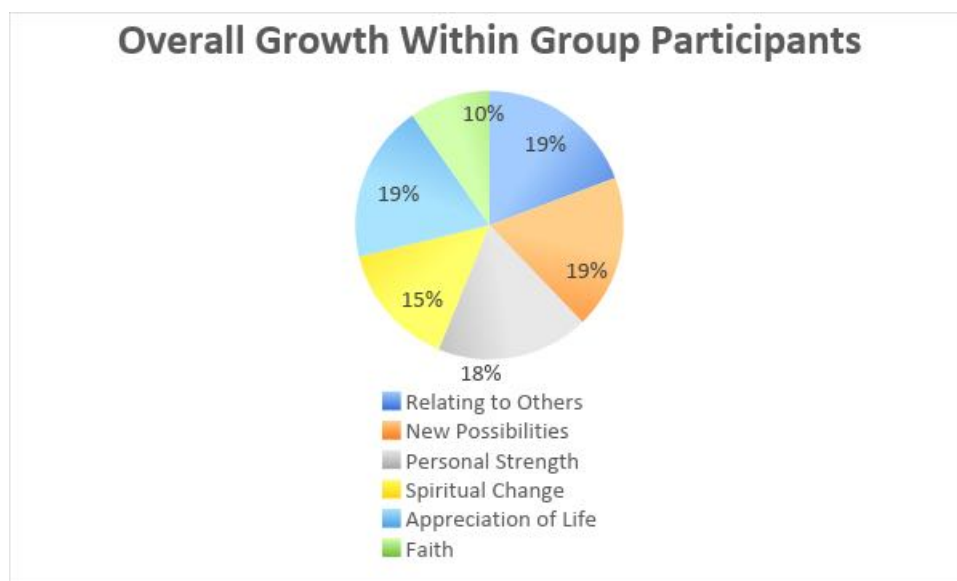


Following is a graphical representation of the areas of change each participant experienced. The change indicates the percentage of the whole change experienced by each participant, not a comparison of change between each participant.





Improved relationships with others, New Possibilities and Appreciation of Life are the three areas of greatest change on average for the entire group.



Statistical comparison of each of the factors assessed within this instrument indicated that there is no identifiable area of growth that is significantly different to any other. This remains consistent with the data collected from TA8, the first Timor Awakening experience for which post traumatic growth was monitored.

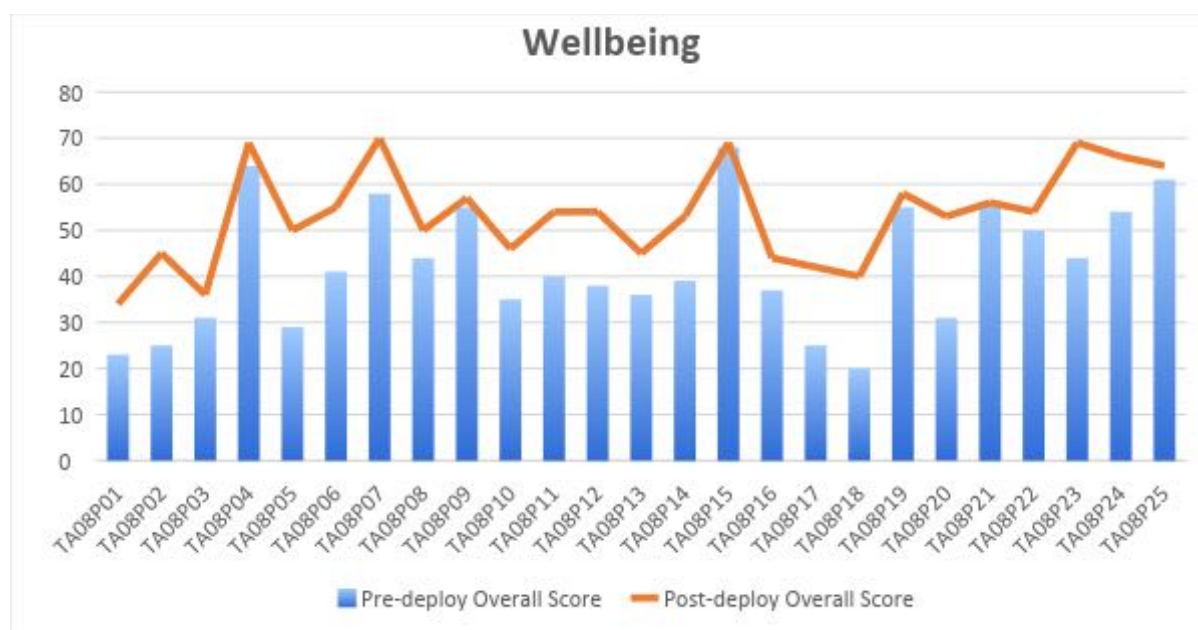
## Mental Wellbeing

To support the changes reported by participants in their perceived change in personal strength, world view and appreciation of life the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was completed at Pre- and Post-deployment. The



WEMWBS enables quick assessment of an individual's mental wellbeing across areas including but not limited to relaxation, energy levels, self-esteem, optimism and social connection.

Each participant's de-identified results on the WEMBWS at Time 1 and Time 2 is shown in the following graph:



*A change in score of 3 points is considered to be meaningful.*

In reviewing the responses on the wellbeing scale a change of 3 points or more in this scale is considered to be meaningful. 100% of the participants involved in TA8 reported an improvement in the total score at the end of the deployment. Although at this time it cannot be considered a true indication of clinical significance for each respondent, as further statistical analysis of the assessment instrument is required. Therefore, a statistical comparison of the Pre- and Post-deployment scores for the entire group was conducted to determine if the difference between the mean scores of both Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance.

This analysis reviewed the responses of all 15 participants. A one tailed *t*-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant improvement in group's overall score on the WEBWBS from Time 1 ( $M = 42.4$ ,  $SD = 13.7$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 53.3$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ),  $t = 7.54$ ,  $p = 8.691$ .

## Mental Distress Assessment

### Post-Traumatic Stress

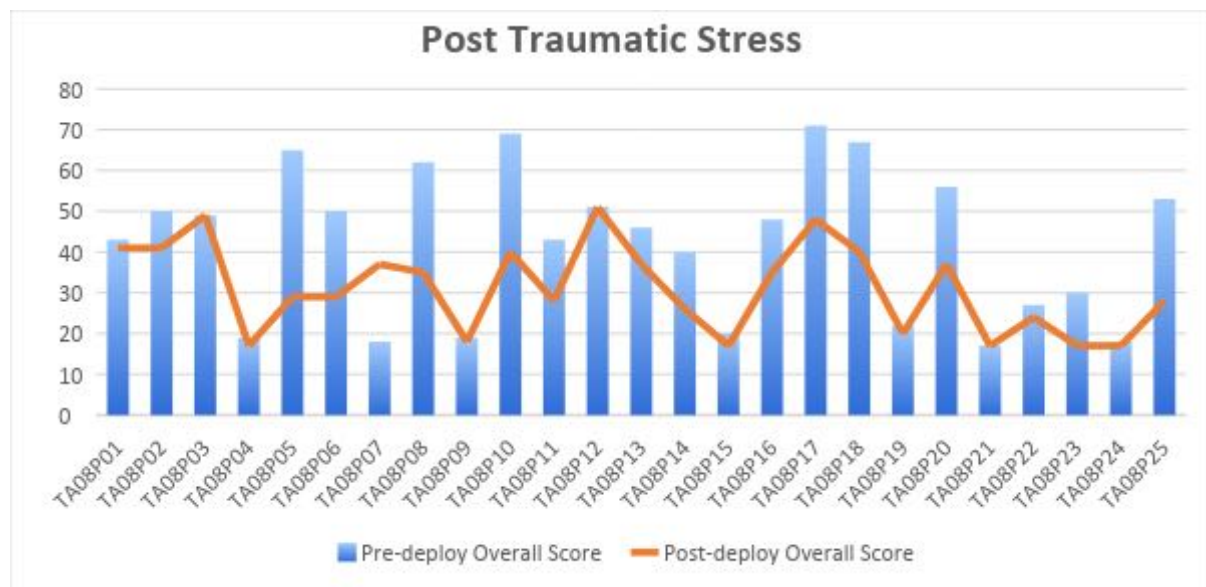






Participants completed the Post-Traumatic Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C) at Pre- and Post-deployment. The PCL-C is a questionnaire that is designed to assess clinical symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (DSM5). The DSM-5 categorizes PTSD symptoms into several different criteria related to behaviours of re-experiencing, avoidance and hypervigilance and these are assessed in the PCL-C.

Each participant's de-identified results at Time 1 and Time 2 are demonstrated in the following graph:



*Score >38 likely to be experiencing PTSD*

Graphic representation of participants' scores on the PCL-C shows that 64% of participants were reporting clinically significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress at the time of deployment to Timor. On return from Timor the number of participants continuing to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress had decreased to 36%. However, to further understand the overall improvement of post-trauma symptoms of the group as a whole statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences between the group's Pre- and Post-deployment scores. Analysis was based on the 25 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed t-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the PCL-C from Time 1 ( $M = 42.12$ ,  $SD = 18.08$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 31.12$ ,  $SD = 10.96$ ),  $t = 4.34$ ,  $p = .0002$ .

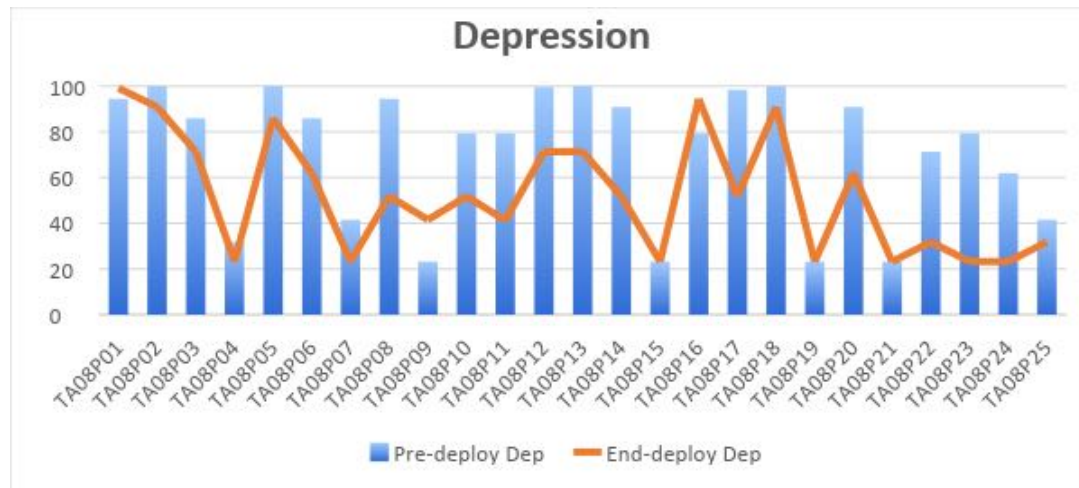
### Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Participants completed the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21-Item Version (DASS-21) at Pre- and Post-deployment - herein referred to as Time 1 and Time 2,





respectively. The DASS-21 is used to screen for mental health symptoms associated with depression, anxiety and stress. It is used widely in clinical settings to guide mental health professionals and to evaluate interventions.



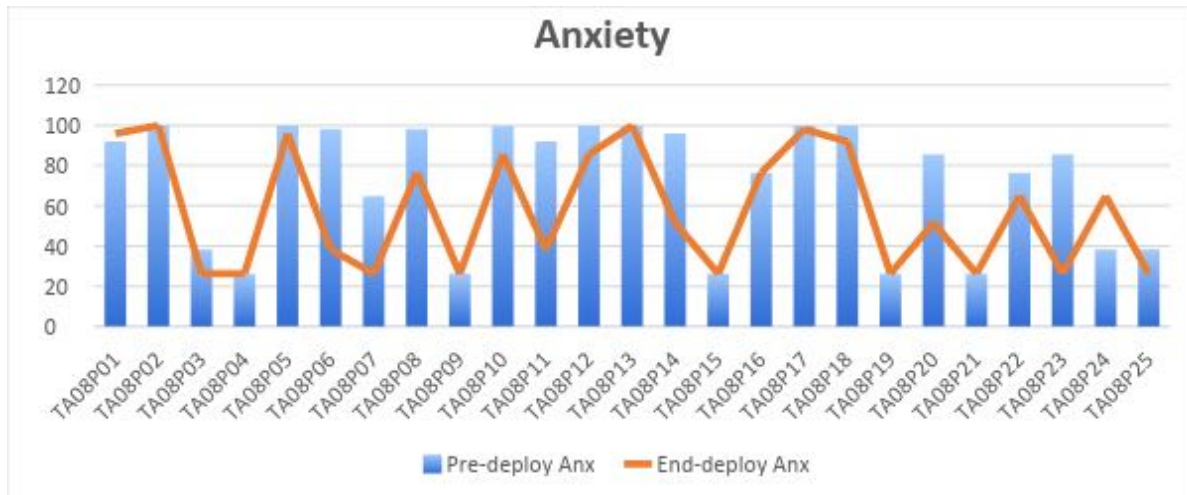
\* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

Graphic representation shows that several the participants experienced elevated symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress at pre-deployment. It is also evident that the majority of participants reported a decrease in some or all of these symptoms at the conclusion of the tour, bringing most within the normal to mild range when compares with the general population.

Each participant's de-identified results on subscales at Time 1 and Time 2 are shown in the following graphs. On departure 40% of the 25 participants were experiencing symptoms of depression what are considered to be of clinical concern. Post-deployment results indicated that 8% of participants remained in this range, and all had been experiencing clinical levels of depression prior to departure.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre- and Post-deployment scores for the group were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 25 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed t-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in the group's overall scores on the Depression subscale of the DASS-21 from Time 1 ( $M = 71.95$ ,  $SD = 28.88$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 52.60$ ,  $SD = 26.10$ ),  $t = 4.91$ ,  $p = 5.109$ . Indicating that on this occasion there was not a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of anxiety within the group.

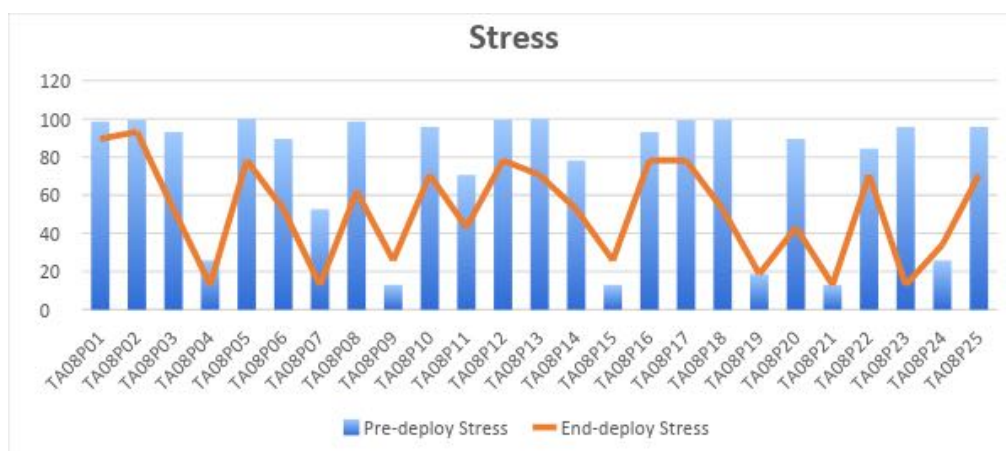




\* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95

On departure 40% of participants were experiencing symptoms of anxiety that are considered to be within the clinical range. Post-deployment results indicated that 20% of participants remained in this range. One participant experienced higher levels of anxiety on the completion of TA8 than they were experiencing prior to departure. There is no available qualitative data to begin to consider the source of this increase in the level of anxiety during TA8.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 25 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed t-test demonstrated that on average, there was not a statistically significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Anxiety subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ( $M = 72.40$ ,  $SD = 30.64$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 58.02$ ,  $SD = 29.85$ ),  $t = 3.28$ ,  $p = .0031$ , indicating that on this occasion there was not a clinically significant improvement (reduction) in the symptoms of anxiety within the group.



\* Elevated Range > 78; Clinical Range > 95



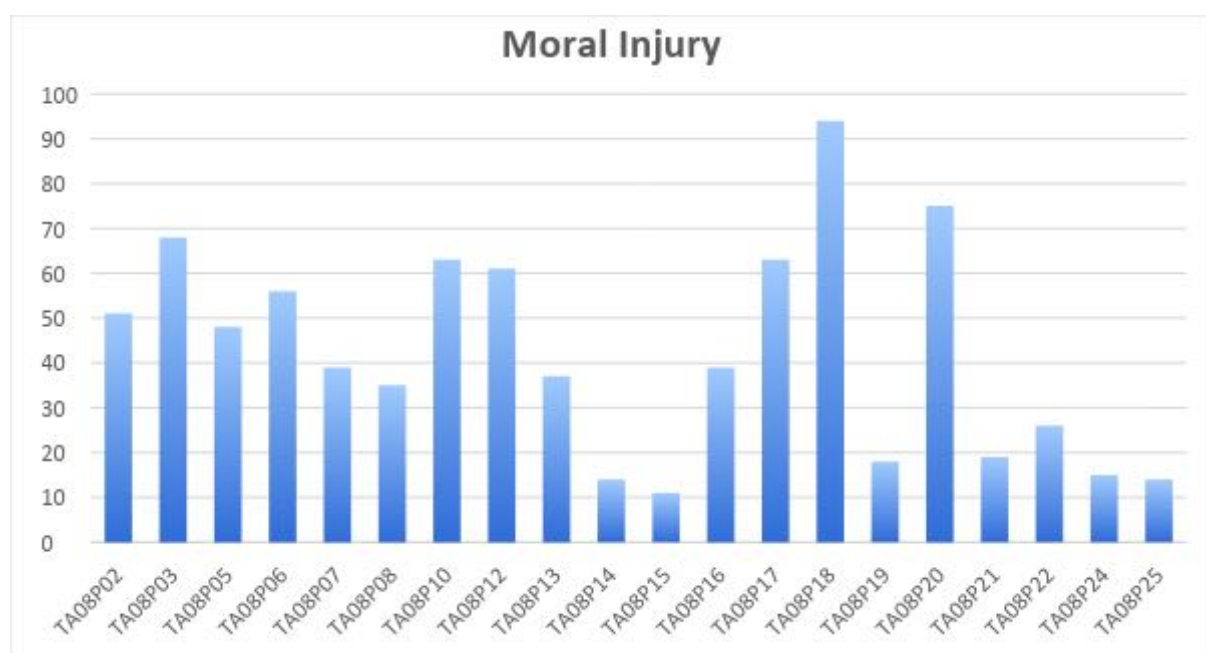


Graphic representation shows that 68% of the participants were experiencing elevated symptoms of stress at pre-deployment. It is also evident that the majority of participants report a decrease in some or all of these symptoms at the conclusion of the tour, bringing more than half (54.54%) within the normal range when compares with the general population.

Further statistical analysis of the scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 was conducted to examine if the difference between Pre- and Post-deployment scores were of clinical significance. Analysis was based on the 25 participants who provided data at both time points. Two tailed t-test demonstrated that on average, there was a significant reduction in participants' overall scores on the Stress subscale of the DASS21 from Time 1 ( $M = 73.73$   $SD = 33.71$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 51.71$ ,  $SD = 26.12$ ),  $t = 5.13$ ,  $p = 2.965$

### Moral Injury

20 Participants who had previously served in the Defence force completed the Moral Injury symptom Scale – Military (MISS-M) version short form. The MISS-M is a 10-item measure of moral injury (MI) designed to use in Veterans and Active serving military participants, consists of 10 theoretically grounded subscales that assess the psychological and spiritual/religious symptoms of Moral Injury: guilt, shame, betrayal, moral concerns, loss of meaning/purpose, difficulty forgiving, loss of trust, self-condemnation, spiritual/religious struggles, and loss of religious faith/hope.





Considering the impact on Moral Injury on veterans is a developing area in the military psychology. According to Koenig (2017) there is opportunity for a negative psychological and spiritual impact on military personnel who in the course of work undertakes tasks that are a contravention of personal beliefs and values. In reviewing the responses of the participants of TA8 is noted that some individuals are reporting high levels (>70) of moral injury. To date there is no definitive indicator of a score that demands clinical attention. Further guidance is being sought from the author of the scale, however further enquiry of the wellbeing of the individuals with high scores is recommended. Padre Gary Stone is following up the individuals with the highest scores.

## Section 4: Post Deployment Recommendations

### Post Deployment Participant Contact

At the time of preparing this report all TA8 participants had received at least one follow up contact, and eight have commenced life coaching.

Ongoing evaluation of the impact of the Timor Awakening experience including participant's psychological and emotional functioning and progress in their Personal Health and Wellbeing Plan will occur after three and six month intervals. Gathering days are occurring on 27 April and 8 June.

From this particular group of participants, intentional detailed follow-up and support is being offered to the following participants who reported significantly high symptoms of mental health concerns following the return from TA8:

TA08P01	TA08P02	TA08P05	TA08P13	TA08P17
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The following participants presented to TA8 with high levels of emotional distress and reported moral injury symptoms. Despite improvement throughout the deployment it is recommended that follow-up be undertaken to ensure that the improvements are maintained:

TA08P18	TA08P20
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These issues have been individually addressed in dialogue with them by our Life Coach at TA plus one month, who will also monitor their progress in the next six months. Indeed all participants have had this service offered to them. Most have shown interest into intensive life coaching once per fortnight for six months.





All other participants will get a follow up interview at TA plus 3 months and plus six months. All of these already have GP and other clinicians and we have invited participants to debrief them on the results of their TA experience with a view to an integrated health and wellbeing outcome

Additionally all clients have been advised in comprehensive workshop of the whole spectrum of collaborative organisations that can support them in their proximity. Particular emphasis has been given to joining or re-engaging with RSL sub branches and Mates4mates.

Reference Koenig, H. G, (2108) *Religions* 2018, 9 (3), 86-100; doi:10.3390/rel9030086. Downloaded from [www.mdpi.com/journal/religions](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions) 15-4-2019.

## Section 5: Participant Testimonials

The following written feedback is a sample of what was provided by participants at the Post-deployment assessment time-point:

### 1) How would you say you are feeling today in comparison to how you were feeling before coming on this trip?

- \* Positive
- \* The content during circle time – forgiveness, has me open for change.
- \* I am feeling much better
- \* Happier knowing that there is hope
- \* I feel more relaxed, I also feel more positive towards other people and I endeavour to be more included with my family
- \* Much more grateful
- \* A lot more relaxed, and sleeping better
- \* I feel like my mind has been really opened to what the Timorese have endured for so long and their amazing ability to turn the destruction, pain and sorrow they endured into a positive force to forge a future for their country.
- \* More relaxed.
- \* Feeling more relaxed and calm.
- \* Grateful, relaxed.
- \* Clearer head and more relaxed.
- \* Optimistic about the future.
- \* More content within, but a new determination/intent on required tasks for future.
- \* More positive and purposeful
- \* Less anxious, greater level of appreciation for veteran support
- \* I have learnt so much on this trip, I feel very privileged to have been on this trip and has helped me make peace with myself
- \* Very grateful and my anxiety has reduced

### 2) What aspect of the trip have you enjoyed the most?







- \* Meeting the Timorese people and experiencing their happiness despite such adversity.
- \* I enjoyed Aidabasala community cultural ceremonies the most.
- \* I enjoyed the Veterans Day Commemorations and Mota'ain border Visit.
- \* The people and their kind words.
- \* Relating with the people of Timor.
- \* Journey out to the western border.
- \* Balibo and the stops along the way there, really enjoyed not being in the city.
- \* Interacting with Timorese Veterans and community.
- \* I enjoyed hearing the experience of the Timorese and wish there had been more opportunities to hear the experiences of the Timorese woman during the resistance.
- \* Interaction with Timorese and the soccer and marching.
- \* I enjoyed the national Veterans Day, getting time to socialise with local communities and the children and seeing my husband more relaxed and communication more.
- \* Bonding with other veterans and being welcomed by the locals.
- \* The soccer match, hot springs, the hospitality of the Timorese people.
- \* Interacting with new people.
- \* Hot springs, interaction with the Timorese veterans.
- \* The veteran's day and interacting with the people is what I enjoyed the most.
- \* Some awesome experiences, getting out and meeting people, getting back to Balibo, Bategada, 20 years later.
- \* Balibo, Maliana, and the border visit.
- \* The whole experience has been amazing, but my highlights were Timorese people and veterans, the many places we were able to visit the happiness and love they showed us is with me forever.
- \* Seeing marriages grow close again. Listening to everyone's stories, seeing the positive effect Michael and Gary have with the Timorese people.
- \* Comradery, like-minded people.

### 3) What benefit have you received from this experience?

- \* Seeing my husband get closure and healing on some events that happened here that had such a negative impact on our lives for 19 years.
- \* To see how powerful forgiveness is.
- \* Better appreciation of what I have in my life.
- \* Sharing positive feelings with others.
- \* A more focused approach towards people and to respect others wishes.
- \* Having a better feeling of gratefulness, having a better attitude of understanding other people's problems and I am less judgemental and more open to other people.
- \* Being able to experience this with my husband as an equal participant rather than an add on.
- \* Feel like we achieved something from our deployments, also now I have new good memories to focus on, instead of hell.
- \* I have a better appreciation for what my husband went through in 1999 and can see that he is a lot calmer having seen the transition that has occurred.
- \* Realisation that tour had a great effect, knowing that my two tours had a positive impact on people of East Timor.
- \* Personal growth, more positive mindset and less guilt with myself.
- \* Being loved and supported
- \* Professional development, more understanding of veteran's challenges, perspective and insight into my own life and way of being
- \* Made many new connections
- \* Becoming connected with people





- \* *Getting out and seeing Timor, meeting the people in TA, see places I was 20 years ago how they have changed.*
- \* *How to start relaxing around others.*
- \* *Connections with veterans can continue.*
- \* *I have realised that not only forgiving the people who have done you wrong but learning to forgive oneself for me is key.*
- \* *Reminds me how lucky I am to have what I do that simplicity is often the best and to have no expectations.*
- \* *Education about East Timorese history, their struggle and I reconciled with a high school friend.*

#### 4) If you were to recommend this experience to others what would you say?

- \* Do it, it will be one of the best experiences you will ever have.
- \* Push pass your resistance and keep an open mind and allow yourself to re-write your story on Timor Leste – it's Beautiful
- \* Be open and participate, you get out what you put in!
- \* It's a good way to process and move forward
- \* Do it, it will open your eyes to relate to people who have nothing but gives all
- \* Just do it, its unique, positive, educating experience, cultural
- \* Wonderful program with cultural experiences that money cannot buy, with realistic expectations on effectiveness of tools for rehabilitation
- \* Great holistic experiences better than inpatient courses, and helps build new experiences and memories.
- \* I would say that it is a valuable experience and that it really can help veterans see the positive again after the destruction, pain and sorrow that conflict can bring. It really is hard to imagine any other war-torn country being able to turn things around so dramatically and with such positivity.
- \* It was needed and I highly recommend this experience.
- \* Highly recommend for personal growth, and for couples especially for reconnecting, re-evaluating life and making more positive contributions in everyday life.
- \* It's well worth it, the hardest is applying.
- \* Do the program. It will be tremendously valuable to you.
- \* That it is a fantastic opportunity to learn about yourself, coping mechanisms, and the external support networks available.
- \* Awesome!! Do it!!
- \* I'd give advice about how to approach it, have your mind right and know what you want.
- \* I would definitely recommend this trip and tell people it is very rewarding and a positive experience
- \* Come with an open mind as it is not a terrible place we seen many years ago
- \* This program is for veterans and their families, it is an experience like no other. Please come and embrace this for yourself you will not regret it
- \* Definitely! I would do this again and I would have my husband with me
- \* I don't think it is for everybody, but it is mostly worthwhile, great for couples

#### 5) What improvements / changes in lifestyle would like to focus on in the future?

- \* Positive self-thought, health and relationships
- \* Patience, communication and positive self-talk
- \* Enjoying being with my kids more and living in the present
- \* Relationships and exercise
- \* To be a better father and husband and a better person towards others
- \* My diet and being healthy - apply the four agreements.
- \* Mindfulness and healthy diet and exercises.
- \* Nutrition and the soul.
- \* More volunteer work with veterans and people of Timor (Rehab centre)
- \* Contributing more within the community, spending more time with my husband and doing things for me like extra schooling and new activities.





- \* Better health choices, ask for help when needed and not try to do it myself.
- \* Make a better effort in my relationship.
- \* Be more grateful, set clearer goals, utilise veteran's resources to full extent.
- \* To drink less alcohol, experience more to be more present in the moment and dedicate more attention to my wife.
- \* Complete holistic approach to better myself in relationships.
- \* Less work, more involvement in Timor, learning the hire a house for weekends, start to get involved into the community.
- \* Trying to improve my fitness and interpersonal communications interaction.
- \* Accept where I am at today is ok, mindfulness, listen to warning signs of our god.
- \* I would like to focus more on meditation and breathing.
- \* Strength, health and slowing down.

#### 6) Is there any message you would want the financial sponsors of TA to hear?

- \* Unique program achieving excellent results in the veteran community that definitely contributed to reducing the incidence of veteran suicide
- \* Keep supporting the program. I have had four hospital visits for mental health issues and this program has been more effective in my recovery process.
- \* This is a pathway to a longer life.
- \* I felt very included from the start and felt like a genuine participant, this is the first program I have ever felt included.
- \* The staff are and have done a brilliant job in coaching and nurturing members through the program they are very approachable and are very knowledgeable.
- \* Don't ever stop supporting TA, it is one of the best programs to help veterans and their partners, more should get behind the TA.
- \* This is the only program that has encouraged and embraced equal participation of spouses/ partners. Being able to experience and participate together sets us up for greater chances of success.
- \* The programme is beneficial to members who are having issues with their mental status, there is no better cure than to take members back to where their issues began.
- \* This program works it has a profound effect on not only veterans, but their families. We are so grateful for having the opportunity to participate in this wonderful life changing trip.
- \* Thank you to everyone involved in organising and funding these trips – you make a huge, positive difference in so many people's lives.
- \* This experience is extraordinary and has helped many veterans and their families to work through their issues and bring them closer together.
- \* If it saves one life, which I believe it has, then I think it is worth it.

#### END REPORT

