Recruitment of Advocates, Full Time Employment.

This document is simply the thoughts of the Author, put to paper in the interest of generating further informed discussion.

Over the years I have noticed that it is not unusual for recruited paid full time Advocates to only remain within the RSL for a short period of time. This does not apply to all as some of our paid staff have been working for some years within this profession.

Some, however, have only remained for a short period of less than two years and left the position with some dissatisfaction.

Recruitment Process

The past policy has been to recruit people who generally respond to an advertisement within their local area and have some military experience, most likely within an administration branch. They generally have a limited knowledge of the expectations of the job and the nature of the beast that they will be dealing with.

“Suitable” training is provided after recruitment.

Sometimes this process is successful and sometimes it is disastrous.

In the past there has been difficulty recruiting people within some geographical areas for a variety of reasons.

Transition from Volunteer to Paid Employee seems to rarely occur. It is suspected that the reason for this may be that the Volunteer is already of an advanced age and in receipt of benefits that would be forfeited should that person revert to paid employment. Flexibility of working hours may also contribute.

Training

In conjunction with the above the Ex-Service community is going through a restructuring of Advocacy Training currently offered by the Training Information Programme (TIP). It is expected that there will be a restructuring within the for-
seeable future. It is expected that within the replacement process there will be a solid move toward Competency Based Training (CBT)

**Shift in Military Benefits**

As well as the above there has been a shift within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in two areas that may have a long term effect on recruitment of both Volunteer Advocates and Paid Employees.

DFRDB as a superannuation scheme ceased in the late 1980’s. Under this scheme people could opt out of the ADF with a pension after 20 years’ service. Under Com-Super, the new scheme, benefits are available after 65 years of age.

The Vietnam Veteran with 20 years Military Service would be eligible for Service Pension entitlements at 60 years of age. Often these relatively young Veterans would be looking for somewhere to volunteer their time to assist their fellow Veteran.

There were no large operational deployments between 1972, end of the Vietnam War, and the commencement of deployments to Timor in 1999. During the 27 years between these two dates it is estimated that there were less than 1000 operational deployments where service pension eligibility would be an option.

The second event is the introduction of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act of 2004 (MRCA). This act replaced or was a combination of the Veterans’ Entitlement Act (VEA) and the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. (SRCA).

The MRCA legislation lifts the bar for an invalided Veteran being classified Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (T&PI). Basically a person classified T&PI under this legislation is quite significantly damaged possibly both physically and emotionally. The likelihood of coping with the physical and emotional rigors demanded by the position as a Veterans’ Advocate in either a volunteer or employed capacity is less likely than a person granted a similar status under the VEA.
Another issue worthy of note is that the current Paid Employees and the Volunteers of the RSL in Queensland are ageing.

Of further concern is the standard of training that has been received in the past with no emphasis on competency and an acknowledgement that most Advocates possess a better understanding of VEA as opposed to the SRCA and the newer MRCA requirements.

Under both legislations the liability process is essentially the same but entitlements under MRCA are significantly different and managed in a different manner. For example Com-Super entitlements for medically discharges has an impact on MRCA and SRCA recipients but not on VEA recipients. The level of impact can vary from case to case.

**Suggested Way Forward.**

A career in Veterans’ Advocacy is somewhat limited to working within an Ex Service Organization (ESO). Full time employment within such an industry is also extremely limited to ESO’s that are economically large enough to sustain an employed workforce. Within Queensland the RSL may be the only option for such paid employment. Recruiting and training for such employment is a little ad-hoc and only thought about when a particular need becomes apparent. There is no defined career path to attract a person to consider such an option post service and work toward such a position as a method of transition to the civilian workplace.

With that in mind it is suggested that recruiting could commence within the ADF to attract people who are considering a transition within the next 24-48 months with the following thoughts in mind:

- A Key selection criteria could be developed to allow people to develop the skills and knowledge of what they would be working toward.
- Geographical location of positions available would also need to be identified and support to move to those locations.
- A needs analysis would also need to be completed to establish exactly the skills needed once the person transits rom the ADF.
A career management system would also need to be developed to identify career options and further training availability should one desire to move on to perhaps a position as a Services Member on the Veterans’ Review Board. This training could be in the form of assistance in obtaining a Law Degree or some other recognized qualification.

The training of people recruited directly from service could have a high emphasis within the computer generated On Line Training and a high emphasis on MRCA legislation.

With the above in mind it may be possible to recruit people into a position and sponsor them through the transition process. There may be privacy issues in dealing with workplace face to face training but this could be resolved in the same manner that rural medical practices are utilized to train undergraduate medical students. That is to advise people that there is training going on at the moment and permission is sought to allow the trainee to observe the interview/hearing/etc. process.

**Conclusion.**

The above is generated to stimulate discussion only and is not intended as a “finished product” but as a start point for the development of a defined career path for highly motivated members of the service and ex-service community.

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