



Afghanistan: Looking after your wellbeing

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 Read the full edition of VA News Summer 2021 (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/assets/VA-News/VA-News-2021-Edition-4-Summer.pdf>) 

New Zealand Defence Force personnel withdrew from Afghanistan earlier this year, and the deployment has now concluded. However, that deployment and the fall of Afghanistan has evoked feelings that will remain with our veterans for some time.

It has been a difficult year for all of us, but for our veterans of the Afghanistan deployment there will be ongoing reminders of their service there, of the people that they met and who remain there, and colleagues that they lost on deployment.

If you are an Afghanistan veteran, we would like to encourage you to think about your wellbeing and if you can, take some steps to maintain it, and if required it is OK to seek support.

These steps can be quite simple and straightforward. We asked some of our Afghanistan veterans what things they do for their personal wellbeing.

Joe Rae was in Afghanistan in 2012, as the Command Post Signaller, based mostly at COP Romero, and when he saw a television report showing a Taliban flag being raised on the Government building, “It was fairly destroying seeing Bamiyan, in particular, fall. It makes you feel like the work and effort that went in was all in vain. I suppose at least they had peace for a number of years, so it does count toward something.”

Maintaining his well-being is important for Joe.

“A key step for me is chatting to my mates. They’re the ones that have been there too, they understand and you can vent your feelings and frustrations. A psychologist that I once saw told me the more you speak about the experiences, the more it can help. Each time it’s recounted it strips a little piece of emotion off it, slowly healing you over time.”

Charles (Chaz) Dewes was in Afghanistan in 2003 (Kabul) and then again in 2008 (Bamiyan). He was very clear about what he was doing there.

“For a cause... to provide stability, peace and to rebuild. To support the survivability of a nation, its people and their culture. To create a better life, a safe place.”

When he returned in 2008, he saw dramatic progress within the country. New infrastructure, more confident people and an awakening culture.

“We witnessed our success in the land and its people. Our aim was now a reality but in achieving this aim, in this land, we lost friends.

“After 20 years of operations in Afghanistan, was it worth it? I believe in what we did, our aim and the end state, the reconstruction of a nation and its people. We did what was needed to be done and the sacrifices that were made were not in vain.

“To the men and women who I was fortunate to serve alongside, you were awesome, be proud of what we achieved and don’t ever think less or let anyone say otherwise.”

“Ko mātou ā koutou, mō-rehu-rehu e, whai ake nei, I tae koutou, ki te mura o te ahi. He kō-hatu-hatu, repo-repo, kiri- kiri e... paru-paru, nga-here, tomo-taua e. Mau-mahara tonu tātou, ki a rātou, mau-mahara tonu tātou, ki a rātou.”

Chaz believes in Te Whare Tapa Whā, “I try to ensure all my sides are equal, balanced, in harmony with each other. If one side is affected, I address it. Being in touch with my Te Ao Māori beliefs has helped a lot. It has kept me grounded, especially between the worlds of Tū and Rongo, and Te Whare Tapa Whā.

Te Taha Wairua. Te Taha Hinengaro. Te Taha Tinana. Te Taha Whānau.

“Beat the taniwha while it is still young. Get on top of it – patua te taniwha koi kūao.”

Wayne Higginson was in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2004, part of Op Rua 1, part of the US JTF 180 based in Kabul, and he also feels that the Kiwis over there should be proud of their time there.

“We did all that we could in Afghanistan. It is the long game. We did our best, but like all Kiwis would do, I’m thinking about the people still there.”

Did he have a way to look after himself?

“Talk it over with mates. The people that you were there with. You don’t need an excuse for a catch-up, but this is as good a time as ever.”

Wayne Nepia feels similarly to Wayne Higginson — “My feeling is of disappointment and sadness for our Afghani comrades. As a soldier, we do what is asked of us and move on, but for the Afghan people this was years of change, hope, opportunities and building their own country, that was sadly taken away from them.”

Wayne aims for a good balance of work, family and lifestyle. “Stay connected with people who matter. Lifestyle — wellbeing is all about eating right and staying physically fit.”

Taking care of your wellbeing is important and asking for support is OK. For more wellbeing tips have a look at our mental

wellbeing page.

Read our mental well-being page (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/get-support/ex-serving/your-mental-wellbeing/>)

Or Contact us (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/contact-us/>)

For more support, you can text 1737 to begin a conversation with a counsellor.

Other support can be provided by:

- NZDF4U 0800 693 348
- Lifeline Aotearoa 0800 543 354
- Samaritans 0800 726 666
- Contact RSA's District Support Managers.

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