

Veterans awake to brighter future

More than 70 Australian veterans took part in the life-changing Timor Awakening Program during 2017.



Timor Awakening Program Director Michael Stone and Veterans Care Association President Gary Stone with some of the program participants – wearing their new polo shirts provided by Bolton Clarke.

Organised by the Veterans Care Association (VCA), and supported by Bolton Clarke, the innovative program takes war veterans back to the country where Australian soldiers played a key role in the successful struggle for peace and independence.

The circuit-breaker experience is designed to awaken veterans to the potential for a healthy and productive future using a combination of holistic health education, personal and group engagement, peer-to-peer support, pastoral care, mentoring and historical commemoration.

During the latest 11-day tour, participants experienced the breathtaking physical scenery and visited key sites to reflect on the historic moments in the lives of the Timorese people and the Australian troops who supported them. The tour, including individual counselling and group interactions, was led by a team of experienced mental health and pastoral care professionals.

Today, the tiny island nation of Timor-Leste, just 700 kilometres north of Darwin, is experiencing rapid growth and renewal.

“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,” said Timor Awakening Program Director Michael Stone, who first deployed to East Timor in 1999 and went on to become a senior advisor to the Timorese Government during peace negotiations.

“Few places in the world harness the capacity to experience history with the actual survivors and instigators of key events and the Timorese veterans are an exceptional example of resilience, rehabilitation and reconciliation.”

The Timor Awakening marked the start of a 12-month health and wellbeing plan, including tracking mentoring and support for the veterans and their families.

The adventure tour included cultural activities in six different districts giving participants a deep insight into Timorese culture. The veterans also visited several non government organisations and volunteer projects to see the work being done to build capacity in the community and to identify ways veterans can participate in the future.

The program is for all veterans, not just those who served in Timor-Leste and has included veterans from all operations since the early 1960s to recent deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bolton Clarke is one of Australia’s biggest providers of services for veterans, supporting more than 35,000 veteran clients each year. We are proud to be sponsoring and working closely with a number of groups like the VCA to support the veteran community.