

Vietnam veterans' health the focus at Christchurch Expo

More than 90 Vietnam veterans have attended a health expo in Christchurch organised for them by Veterans' Affairs New Zealand.

Working in partnership with Rannerdale Veterans' Trust, Veterans' Affairs brought together providers and support organisations so that Vietnam War veterans in the area could find information about support and services available to them.

The veterans were able to meet Veterans' Affairs case managers and local service providers, and were offered seminars and brief assessments to support independent daily living.

Head of Veterans' Affairs Bernadine Mackenzie said bringing together Veterans' Affairs and affiliated organisations was a great way for local Vietnam veterans to get information face to face.

"We know there's real value in sitting down with our veterans and talking to them about what they need," Ms Mackenzie said. "With our staff and local service providers at this sort of event veterans can get their questions answered on the spot, and can often get immediate access to specialist providers. It helps us to make sure that they are getting the support they need for independent daily living."

Veteran Bruce Young said the expo worked very well.

"When I was told I needed to see someone, they were already there," Mr Young said.

Donna Moore, from Aspire Canterbury, which has been providing support to Christchurch's disabled community for more than 30 years, said it was a privilege to be part of the expo.

"We've been able to reach and help a wider range of people, who we will now be able to continue to support in their own communities."

Ms Mackenzie said the focus on Vietnam veterans was part of the commitment of Veterans' Affairs, and the Government, to support the group.

"We came to Christchurch because a number of Vietnam veterans live in the area, and we wanted to reach as many people as we could while we were here," she said.

"Given the success in Christchurch we'll be taking this format to other centres, with Auckland next."

Steve Shamy, from Rannerdale Veterans' Trust, applauded the event.

"This is the power of collaboration," he said. "We've all come together, led by Veterans' Affairs, with the common theme of supporting veterans to support themselves. We can see them reconnecting with old mates, and talking to their local support organisations together."

"We wouldn't have had such a great turnout without having a local veteran on the ground, working with us to encourage veterans to participate."

That veteran was Ross Milne.

"As a Vietnam veteran myself I understand their background," Mr Milne said. "I want to make sure they have access to the support they need, not only from Veterans' Affairs and the providers but also from each other."

Ms Mackenzie said the focus was on supporting the veterans in the way that best suited them.

"Veterans had told us that they wanted to be able to access information about services and support within their own community, and where possible, face-to-face. This weekend's expo was a direct result of that feedback."

Organisations at the expo included Included: Veterans' Affairs New Zealand, HealthCare New Zealand, Aspire Canterbury, Green Cross Health, Bay Audiology, Royal New Zealand Returned and Services Association, Age Concern, Canterbury District Health Borad, Sport Canterbury, Pegasus Health, NZDF Force Financial Hub, and Perpetual Guardian.

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