

The Cuppacumbalong FOUNDATION

Connect Create Renew

Veteran Family Blacksmithing

Budget Submission 2026–27

Community Participation and Wellbeing Program for ACT Veteran Families
through Blacksmithing Courses

Executive Summary

The Cuppacumbalong Foundation, a registered charity, seeks funding of **\$25,000–\$28,000 per year for up to five years** to deliver a **community participation and wellbeing program for Veteran families** through blacksmithing courses, facilitated by **Tharwa Valley Forge**. This program addresses the unique challenges Veteran families face, particularly that operational commitments often limit opportunities for consistent family engagement.

Since 2019, the Foundation has successfully delivered similar programs via ACT Community Services Directorate grants. Lessons learned from these programs directly inform this submission: Veterans and their families often miss out on meaningful, intergenerational engagement due to service demands, and there is a clear need for structured, ongoing programs that foster connection, skill-building, and wellbeing. The program has also proven beneficial for families with neurodivergent members, providing a structured, sensory-engaging environment that supports participation, collaboration, and positive shared experiences.

The proposed workshops are designed for **one adult Veteran and one young person (aged 12–16) per family**, offering a safe, hands-on environment to collaboratively create **heirloom-quality items**. These items serve as lasting reminders of shared achievement, reinforce teamwork, and provide tangible evidence of family connection. The program encourages youth leadership within the courses, builds confidence and responsibility, and provides participants with valuable time away from screens and digital distractions.

The program is supported by **strong partnerships with Defence School Mentors**, who have actively supported past programs and assisted with participant engagement and management. Their involvement allows families to participate without needing to share personal information with another organisation, strengthening trust and ongoing connections between families, mentors, and the program.

All program delivery will be managed by the volunteer Board and staff of The Cuppacumbalong Foundation, with administrative support from Tharwa Valley Forge. **All funding will go directly to courses and participant materials**, ensuring maximum value for money and negligible overhead.

Program objectives include:

- Strengthening intergenerational bonds between Veterans and their children.
- Providing multi-year, structured opportunities for family participation to overcome barriers caused by operational commitments.
- Creating informal peer networks among Veteran families.
- Building leadership, confidence, and practical skills in young participants.
- Supporting families with neurodivergent members through structured, inclusive, hands-on activities.
- Promoting wellbeing, social connection, and community engagement in a non-clinical, inclusive setting.
- The provision of multi year funding provides a sense of security around program delivery.

This program is fully **ready to commence**, leveraging existing facilities, skilled instructors, and a proven governance model. For a modest investment, the ACT Government will support the **prevention of social isolation, strengthen family resilience, and enhance community participation among Veteran families**, while directly advancing the ACT Wellbeing Framework and community wellbeing priorities.

Challenges Faced by Veteran Families

Previous Cuppacumbalong Foundation programs have highlighted several persistent challenges for Veteran families in the ACT:

- **Limited engagement with formal services:** Many families do not regularly access mental health, counselling, or community support services, often due to stigma, privacy concerns, or the demands of operational service.
- **Social isolation:** Veterans and their children can experience disconnection from their local community, particularly during periods of operational commitment or relocation.
- **Lack of suitable shared activities:** Families need **safe, non-clinical opportunities** to spend meaningful time together, reconnect, and build resilience.

Currently, very few programs in the ACT:

- Facilitate participation of a Veteran and a young person (aged 12–16) together.
- Provide **hands-on, skill-based learning** that fosters collaboration, achievement, and confidence.
- Occur in a **natural, heritage, outdoor setting**, which enhances wellbeing and engagement.
- Encourage **informal peer connection** in a supportive, stigma-free environment.

As a result, many Veteran families miss out on opportunities to strengthen intergenerational bonds and develop informal support networks. **Practical, skill-based programs**, such as blacksmithing courses, offer a proven way to engage families where formal mental health or counselling services may not. These activities naturally foster connection, teamwork, and social participation, directly addressing the gaps identified through previous program experience.

Contribution to ACT Wellbeing Outcomes

This proposal supports **preventative wellbeing** by fostering connection, resilience, and social participation among Veteran families before formal mental health or community interventions are required. By providing structured, hands-on, intergenerational activities in a safe and inclusive setting, the program directly contributes to key ACT Government priorities, including:

- **Social connection and community participation:** Encouraging Veteran families to engage meaningfully with each other and the wider community.
- **Mental health prevention:** Reducing the risk of social isolation and family stress through structured, supportive activities.
- **Support for Veterans and their families:** Offering targeted opportunities that respond to the unique challenges of service life.
- **Inclusion and belonging:** Providing an accessible, non-clinical environment that meets the needs of diverse families, including those with neurodivergent members.
- **Community engagement:** Strengthening informal peer networks and fostering ongoing connections across the Veteran community.

By aligning directly with the **ACT Wellbeing Framework**, the program helps deliver measurable social and emotional outcomes, providing high-value, preventative support that reduces pressure on formal services while enhancing community cohesion.

Program Description and Delivery

The Veteran Family Blacksmithing Program, delivered by **The Cuppacumbalong Foundation** in partnership with **Tharwa Valley Forge**, provides structured, hands-on workshops designed to strengthen family connection, intergenerational bonds, and community participation. The program is targeted at **one adult Veteran and one young person (aged 12–16) per family** and is delivered at historic Cuppacumbalong Homestead, providing a natural, outdoor setting that enhances wellbeing and engagement.

Program Structure

- **Frequency:** courses offered in each ACT School holiday period over multiple years to provide consistent, reliable opportunities for family engagement.
- **Activities:** Participants collaborate to create **heirloom-quality items**, building practical skills while reinforcing teamwork, communication, and shared achievement.
- **Youth Leadership:** Young participants are encouraged to take on progressive leadership roles during workshops, fostering confidence, responsibility, and decision-making skills.
- **Screen-Free Engagement:** Workshops provide valuable time away from digital devices, encouraging present-moment attention and hands-on collaboration.
- **Inclusivity:** The program has proven beneficial for families with **neurodivergent members**, offering structured, sensory-engaging activities that are adaptable to diverse needs.
- **Informal Peer Support:** Families interact naturally with other Veteran families, creating informal peer networks that extend beyond the workshops.

Partnerships and Delivery

- **Tharwa Valley Forge:** Skilled instructors provide expert facilitation and ensure safe, structured delivery.
- **Defence School Mentors:** Trusted mentors support participant management and engagement. Their knowledge of families' circumstances allows families to participate comfortably without having to share sensitive information with another organisation, strengthening relationships between mentors, families, and the program.

Governance and Administration

- Program delivery, logistics, and reporting are managed by **Cuppacumbalong Foundation volunteer Board and staff**, with administrative support from Tharwa Valley Forge.
- **All funding is applied directly to workshops and participant materials**, ensuring maximum value for money and no additional overhead.

Expected Outcomes

The program delivers measurable benefits aligned with the ACT Wellbeing Framework and community priorities:

- Strengthened intergenerational bonds between Veterans and their children.
- Increased social connection and reduced isolation within Veteran families.
- Enhanced family resilience through shared achievement and collaborative learning.
- Youth leadership development in a supportive, skill-based environment.
- Inclusive participation for families with neurodivergent members.
- Community engagement and informal peer networks across the Veteran community.
- Preventative wellbeing outcomes, reducing potential demand on mental health and community services.

Key Features

- Multi-year program ensures families can consistently participate despite operational service commitments.
- Heirloom quality items provide tangible reminders of family achievement and teamwork.
- Structured, non-clinical activities create a safe environment for meaningful connection.
- Ready-to-deliver program leveraging existing facilities, infrastructure, and expert instructors.

This section flows logically from your Problem Statement (“Challenges Faced by Veteran Families”) and your Wellbeing Outcomes section, positioning the program as:

- Evidence-informed
- Policy-aligned
- Low-risk, high-value
- Ready to commence immediately

Budget and Value for Money

The Cuppacumbalong Foundation seeks \$25,000–\$28,000 per year for up to five years to deliver the Veteran Family Blacksmithing Program.

ITEM	2026-27 to 2027-28 (2 years)		2028-29 to 2030-31 (3 years)	
	ACT Funded	In-Kind	ACT Funded	In-Kind
Funded courses	\$25,200 per year		\$28,000 per year	
Administration & Project Management Approx 100 hours each year		\$8,000 per year		\$10,000 per year
Total Per Year	\$33,200		\$38,000	
	\$66,400 (2 years budget)		\$114,000 (3 years budget)	
Program Grand Total	\$180,400			
Total Budget Submission Request	\$134,400			

NOTE: 3 families per course, 14 courses per financial year (3 courses per short school holiday period plus 5 courses per Summer holiday period). All course costs have been guaranteed by Tharwa Valley Forge for the life of the program

Value for Money

All requested funding will be directed to **direct workshop delivery and participant materials**.

Program governance, coordination, reporting requirements, and logistics will be undertaken by the **volunteer Board and staff of the Cuppacumbalong Foundation**, with administrative support from **Tharwa Valley Forge**. This ensures that the maximum proportion of funding is applied directly to participant experience and program outcomes rather than overheads.

The program leverages:

- Existing workshop facilities and equipment at Cuppacumbalong and Tharwa Valley Forge
- Experienced, qualified instructors already delivering community programs
- Established relationships with Defence School Mentors for participant engagement
- Proven governance and reporting capability through the Foundation’s successful delivery of ACT CSD-funded programs since 2019

As a result, the ACT Government investment enables a **fully operational, ready-to-deliver program** with minimal establishment cost, low risk, and high wellbeing return.

For a modest annual investment, the program provides sustained, preventative wellbeing benefits for Veteran families, reducing the likelihood of future demand on mental health, family, and community services while strengthening community participation and connection.

Conclusion

The Cuppacumbalong Foundation's Veteran Family Blacksmithing Program offers the ACT Government a **practical, low-cost, and ready-to-deliver initiative** that strengthens intergenerational bonds, reduces social isolation, and supports the wellbeing of Veteran families in a meaningful and engaging way.

Informed by experience delivering ACT-funded programs since 2019, this proposal responds directly to identified challenges faced by Veteran families — particularly the impact of operational commitments on family connection and participation in community life. By providing structured, hands-on workshops in a safe, heritage setting, the program creates opportunities for shared achievement, youth leadership, peer connection, and inclusive participation, including for families with neurodivergent members.

Delivered in partnership with Tharwa Valley Forge and supported by Defence School Mentors, the program is underpinned by strong community relationships, proven capability, and sound governance. With administration and reporting provided in-kind by the Foundation and its partners, **all funding is directed to participant experience and program delivery**, ensuring exceptional value for money.

For an investment of \$25,000–\$280,000 per year, the ACT Government can support preventative wellbeing outcomes that strengthen family resilience, build community connection, and reduce reliance on formal services — directly advancing the ACT Wellbeing Framework and community participation priorities.

This is a modest investment with lasting impact for Veteran families and the broader ACT community.

Wellbeing Impact Assessment (WIA)

Delete any grey explanatory text prior to finalising the WIA.

Veteran Family Blacksmithing Program – Community Participation and Wellbeing Initiative		Choose an item.			
Purpose of proposal					
<p>This proposal seeks funding of \$25,000–\$28,000 per year for up to five years to deliver a structured, intergenerational blacksmithing program for ACT Veteran families in order to strengthen family connection, reduce social isolation, and improve community participation and preventative wellbeing outcomes.</p>					
Wellbeing domains and impact description					
Access and connectivity	Economy	Education and life-long learning	Environment and climate	Governance and institutions	Health
Housing and home	Identity and belonging	Living standards	Safety	Social connection	Time
Primary domain		Impact description			
Choose an item Social connection		<p>This proposal has its most significant impact on social connection by creating structured, non-clinical opportunities for Veteran families to reconnect with each other and the wider community.</p> <p>The program directly reduces social isolation by fostering intergenerational collaboration between Veterans and their children, while also creating informal peer networks among Veteran families. It provides a stigma-free environment where connection occurs naturally through shared practical activity.</p> <p>Direct impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased family connection and communication • Reduced isolation among Veteran families • Development of informal peer support networks <p>Indirect impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced reliance on formal mental health and community services • Strengthened engagement between families and Defence School Mentors • Increased community participation in heritage and outdoor environments <p>Trade-offs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal; time commitment required from participants. 			
Other domains					
<p>Health - The program supports preventative mental health and emotional wellbeing through structured, sensory-engaging, hands-on activity proven beneficial for families, including those with neurodivergent members.</p> <p>Identity and belonging - Workshops in a heritage setting strengthen participants' sense of belonging, purpose, and connection to community and shared history.</p> <p>Education and life-long learning - Participants develop practical skills, confidence, and youth leadership capabilities through progressive learning in workshops.</p> <p>Time - The program provides dedicated, screen-free, quality time for families whose service commitments have often limited opportunities for shared engagement.</p>					

Evidence base and data

Provide evidence that your proposal will have the wellbeing impacts described above. Note that it is not enough to only provide evidence that the issue exists.

Evidence	Source	Type of evidence
Successful delivery of similar programs since 2019	Cuppacumbalong Foundation ACT CSD grants	Program delivery evidence
Observed strong engagement from Veteran families	Program records and feedback	Practice-based evidence
Benefits for neurodivergent participants	Instructor and participant feedback	Observational evidence
Support from Defence School Mentors	Ongoing partnership	Community partnership evidence
Research showing skill-based group activity improves wellbeing	Established wellbeing literature	Research evidence

What don't we know?

Formal longitudinal data has not yet been collected. This can be addressed through simple pre- and post-program participant surveys and feedback forms as part of implementation.

Measuring wellbeing outcomes

How will the Government know this proposal has achieved the anticipated wellbeing impacts?

Your thinking on this does not need to be finalised – this is an opportunity to set out ideas about what may need to be measured in order to understand whether this proposal has had the anticipated impact.

What is the measurable outcome?

Increased family connection

Reduced social isolation

Youth confidence and leadership

Ongoing peer connection between families

Participation of neurodivergent family members

How will you measure it?

Participant surveys and feedback

Self-reported participant data

Instructor observations and feedback

Follow-up surveys

Participant feedback

Evaluation

Yes. Wellbeing impacts can be evaluated through participant surveys, attendance records, and qualitative feedback collected across the program period.

Who is impacted?

Direct: ACT Veterans and their children aged 12–16 (estimated 42 families per year).

Indirect: Defence School Mentor network, wider Veteran community.

Will the proposal have a different or disproportionate impact (positive or negative) on any groups?

Positive disproportionate impacts for:

- Children and young people
- Carers and families
- People with disability (neurodivergent participants)
- Veterans experiencing social isolation

• Estimate the number of Canberrans in each group who would be impacted by the proposal (for example using ABS data).

Gendered impacts

The program is inclusive of all genders.

Potential hidden gender benefit: structured shared activity may particularly support male Veterans who are less likely to engage in formal wellbeing services.

Data can be collected via participant registration.

Impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The program is open and inclusive.

No specific engagement has occurred yet. Opportunity exists to engage with OATSIA during implementation if required.

Impacts on future generations

Strengthened family relationships, youth leadership skills, and heirloom items create lasting intergenerational benefits beyond the program duration.

Will the proposal have an impact on or be impacted by climate change?

Emissions reduction

No significant emissions impact.

Adaptation and risk management

Workshops occur in existing facilities with established safety and weather contingency planning.

Cross-portfolio collaboration and partnerships

This proposal involves collaboration across:

- Community Services (family wellbeing)
- Veterans support
- Education (Defence School Mentors)
- Heritage and environment (Cuppacumbalong setting)

Strong existing partnerships with Tharwa Valley Forge and Defence School Mentors ensure effective cross-portfolio impact.



To whom it may concern,

Re: Letter of support for The Cuppacumbalong Foundation

I am writing to attest to the incredible work that The Cuppacumbalong Foundation provides through the Blacksmith Courses offered to Australian Defence Force (ADF) children and their families.

Since 2022, our school has been fortunate enough to be offered places for ADF students to attend a free Blacksmith course alongside a parent. I have worked closely with Amanda and other staff to share this opportunity not only within my own school community, but also with other schools across the ACT and NSW.

The feedback from families has consistently been extremely positive. The course provides such a unique and meaningful experience. Not only do Defence families learn a new and specialised skill, but they are also given the opportunity to spend quality time together, creating lasting memories. This is particularly important for Defence families, who face unique challenges including frequent postings, parental absence due to deployments, and, for some, mental health challenges associated with service life.

At my school alone, I have many families eager to participate in this program. I also work closely with a wide network of Defence Student Mentors across the ACT and NSW who would love to be able to offer this opportunity to their families.

The Cuppacumbalong Foundation does outstanding work in supporting the Defence community, and it would be wonderful to see many more Defence families able to experience the Blacksmith course in the future.

Warm regards,

Tamara Turner
Defence School Mentor
Amaroo School