

Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Portia Havill, New Zealand Defence Force

Corporal Portia Havill has led change within the New Zealand Defence Force's as a champion of positive sexual ethics and respectful relationships.

Four years into her career as an Air Warfare specialist at the Royal New Zealand Airforce Auckland Base she is making a big impact well beyond the day to day efforts required to perform her job to lead significant culture change.

Portia walks the talk in both military and civilian circles through leadership responsibilities including delivering diversity and inclusion training to her Defence Force peers and senior managers as a Sexual Ethics and Respectful Relationships Champion.

Portia carries out her work, under "Operation RESPECT," a strategy designed to eradicate unacceptable and unwanted behaviours towards the women and men of the NZDF. It was launched in 2016.

Research highlighted some areas where personnel said they felt more uncomfortable and vulnerable, such as when alcohol is being consumed and outmoded initiations into sporting clubs.

Operation RESPECT training confronted these types of issues, and incorporated 'bystander training' so that all personnel could make a difference when they saw or heard things that just weren't right.

"Portia arrived at Operation RESPECT training with an inquisitive mind and a determination to know more about the cultural issues our organisation was facing and what she could do about it," says Dr Denise Lievore, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the NZDF.

"She identified that while a few of her colleagues shared her views, the wider concept of Operation RESPECT was at risk of being misunderstood if personnel were not fully engaged in relevant and honest discussions about the issues of diversity and inclusion in the workplace," she says.

Portia took her opportunity to lead change within the RNZAF Base Auckland community when the second stage of Operation RESPECT was launched in the form of Sexual Ethics and Respectful Relationships (SERR) training for all military and civilian personnel.

Portia volunteered as a SERR Military Champion for the Base and set out to initiate courageous conversations and to challenge attitudes and behaviours. She began demystifying the term "harmful sexual behaviour" and encouraged her audiences to see it as a societal issue, with the best chance of change coming from within our own immediate daily interactions.

"Corporal Portia Havill is certainly an asset to NZDF," says Denise. "She is showing exceptional qualities as a junior military leader who abounds in positivity and respect for everything and everyone she is involved with.

“The relationships and close bonds she forms with people, young and old, through these activities reflect extremely well on the NZDF and make people consider the Defence Forces as a career choice where great things are happening in the diversity and inclusion space.”

As well as her work with SERR, Portia also introduces new personnel in her trade to RNZAF Base Auckland and the Squadron, coaches school hockey teams, leads her local church group in activities and supports young people through the Red Frogs network, a support programme for young people.

Portia’s dedication and commitment to the SERR cause has allowed her to continue promoting a culture of respect throughout her workplace at 5 Squadron. The impact of her message, along with the way she encourages both junior and senior colleagues to keep the conversations going, have seen 5 Squadron as an early adopter of a culture that values respectful and inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

“Corporal Portia Havill is certainly an asset to NZDF,” says Denise. “She has stepped up as a junior leader within the RNZAF and without a doubt “walks the talk” by demystifying and translating the topic of harmful sexual behaviour, enhancing positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusiveness within the NZDF and caring for others in our wider society.”

Portia is now expanding her influence to other areas of Base Auckland that she has regular contact with.