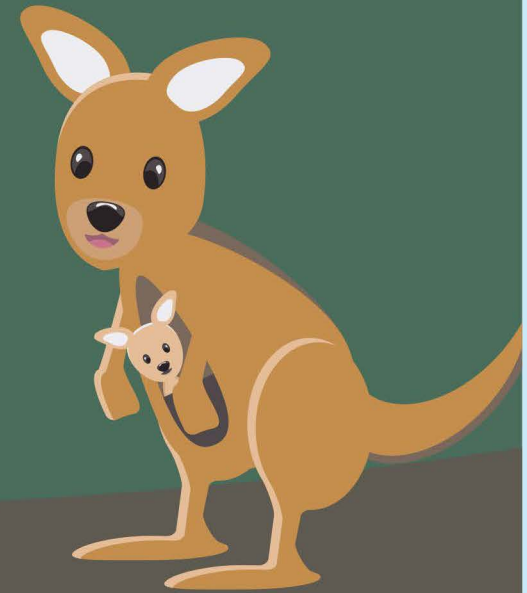
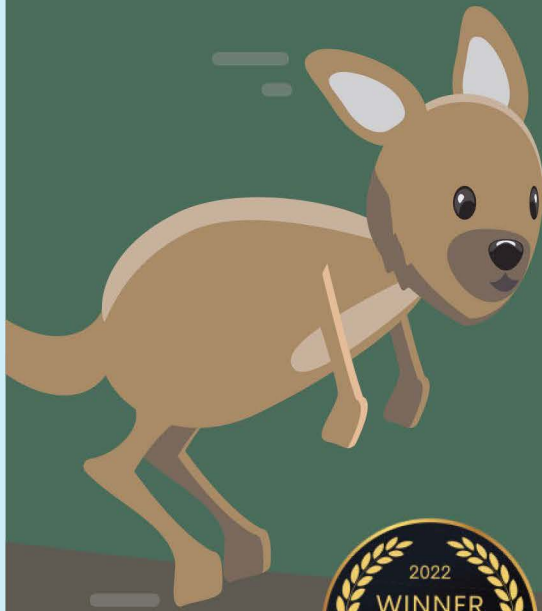


And so, things have been a bit different

Oliver's Story

by Marg Rogers and Amy Doyle



illustrated by Raph Roberts



## Foreword

Marg Rogers has blended compassion with research, and love with knowledge. This book covers a difficult but necessary topic for those who fight for our freedom, and for the families that keep the home fires burning. Wounded armed forces members coming home to a family with children has been, and continues to be difficult, but with books like this, I believe that we can make it easier for families to better navigate a difficult path to healing.

I deployed to Afghanistan when I had a young child at home, and I had friends and colleagues who were injured in war who returned home to their families. Now, as a Veteran, I am happy that resources like this fabulous book are available to help, not only children, but all members of the extended family, to understand that the journey to recovery can't be done alone. It is only with love, compassion, and patience that we can help our heroes mend the visible and invisible wounds.

As the new Managing Director at the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR), I am proud of the work done to see projects like these get into the hands of Canadian military families.

Maj. (Ret'd) Paul Hook,  
Managing Director,  
Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR)

“Hi, we are here to  
share this story with you!”



Dad

Loves: Hugs, Trees



Mom

Loves: Cooking, Jumping



Grandma

Loves: Baking, Flowers



Oliver

Loves: Bike riding, Adventures



Sophie

Loves: Giggles, Naps

## Last month

Dad came home early  
which was such a big surprise.



We were so happy to see him and  
Mom had tears in her eyes.



# They said

he had been injured.  
But how could that be true?



Yet there he was, just as they said,  
injured, tired and sore too.



And so,

things have been a bit different,  
since Dad came back home.



It's the little things I notice  
like he wants to be alone.



Mom is always busy,

doing all those things Dad did  
before he went away.



It's been hard for us to adjust  
now Mom hardly has time to play.



They talk a lot,

Mom and Dad, and it means  
I have to wait.



It's hard to believe anyone  
could have so much to say.





And so,

things have been a bit different,  
since Dad came back home.



## And now Mom spends

lots of time, talking on the phone.



First appointments have to be made,  
then lots of tests need to be done  
and Dad can't go alone.



Appointments take so long,

and tests are much the same.



I'm getting to know all the staff,  
they even know my name.



Mom is looking tired now,

And sometimes I hear her sigh.



Last night while helping my sister, Sophie,  
I saw a tear roll out of her eye.



# I hear mom crying

late at night  
so I know she's feeling sad.



And sometimes I hear Dad shout;  
he really does sounds mad.



There's even been some tears,

a tantrum and two fights.

But thankfully that's just the adults  
and us kids have been alright.



And so,

things have been a bit different,  
since Dad came back home.



And Dad is really jumpy

at every sudden sound.



He's also very grumpy  
when we forget to 'keep it down'.





And he asks funny questions,

about things he already knows.



Mom says 'Just answer him again',  
and calls it 'memory loss',  
but on and on it goes.



# And to top things off

down the street,  
some people stop and stare.



Didn't anyone tell them  
it's rather rude to glare?



And so,

things have been a bit different,  
since Dad came back home.



And well,

I am not sure I really like  
the way things are right now.



I don't know what to do  
but I want to help somehow.



It was alright before,

But will it be okay once again?



And mostly,  
I just can't work out what I need to do  
or how to do it, or when.



And so,

I ask my Grandma,  
because she's very smart



She asks me how I'm feeling,  
so I tell her from the heart.



Grandma listened and she nodded

as I told her how I feel.



She hugged me when I cried a bit.  
She said, "Dad needs time to heal."



And then,

Grandma asked to see Mr. Fuzzy,  
my beloved teddy bear,



I've had him for forever,  
and I take him everywhere!





“Did you know...” Grandma said,

“I gave you Mr. Fuzzy on the day  
that you were born



He looked a little different then,  
he wasn't quite as worn.



She said,

“But, life is sometimes bumpy,  
your Mom’s repaired him  
a time or two.

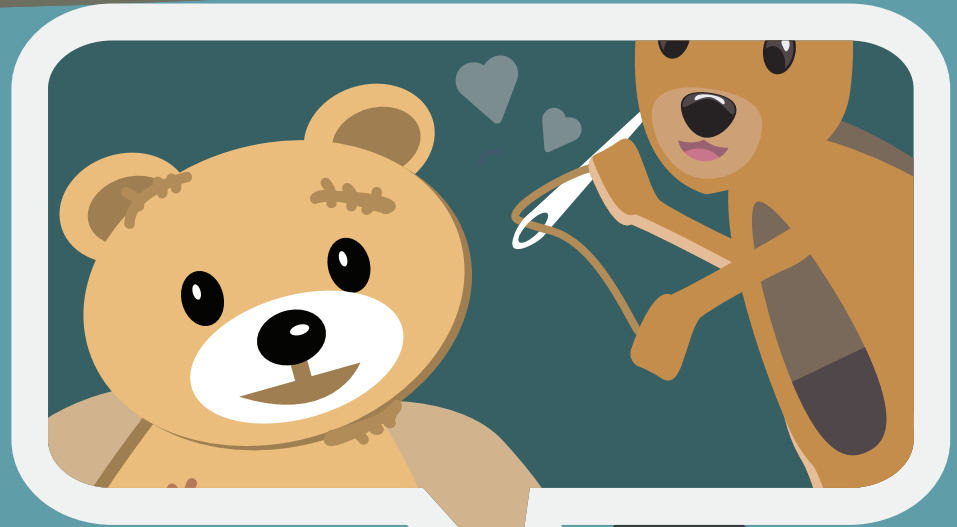


He’s lost a lot of fur now,  
but he’s still loved by you!”

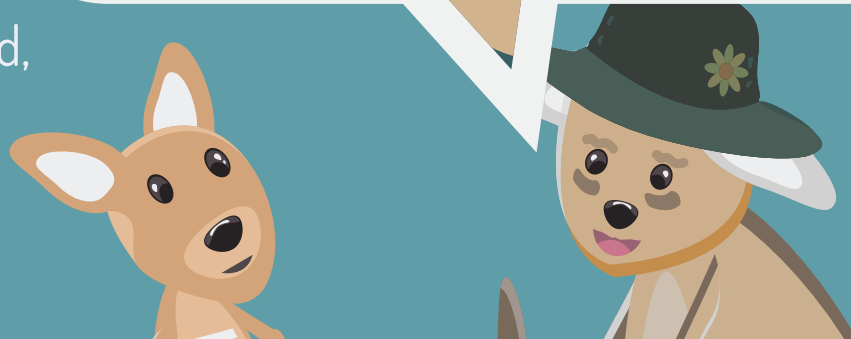


“And every stitch your mother made

to fix your teddy bear,



she sewed with love, thread by thread,  
to show how much she cares.”



Then Grandma said,

“You know,  
Dad’s a bit like Mr. Fuzzy,  
He’s not the same as he used to be,



But he is still the Dad you love,  
and he loves you, your Mom and Sophie.”



Then she whispered in my ear,

as I hugged Mr Fuzzy close to my heart,

“I want you to know, what is happening  
with Daddy, none of it’s your fault.”



“Sometimes when life gets bumpy

all we can do is sew new threads of love.

And support the people close to us  
with patience, kindness, care and love.”



I started to feel better,

as I began to understand,



I can't fix things, and nor can Mom,  
But we can be there to help Dad.



And now I know,

It's good to share our feelings  
especially when life is bumpy.



And Daddy always loves me,  
Even if he's sometimes grumpy.





And so,

things have been a bit different,  
since I told Grandma how I feel.



I am learning to be patient,

and to like playing on my own.



I draw, or read, or play with Sophie  
when Mom is busy, or on the phone.

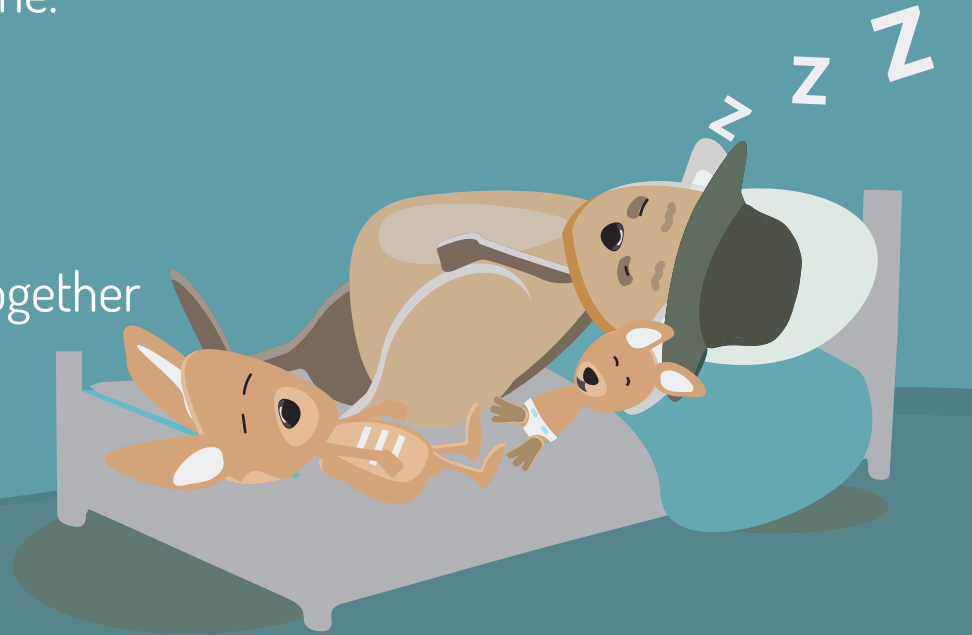


# Grandma, Sophie and I have sleepovers

to give Mom and Dad some time alone.



And Mom and Dad plan fun things together  
for our whole family to do at home.



# And then I think about Dad

and Mom, and Sophie and me,



And all the ways we help each other  
to sew threads of love in our family.



How many adults in Oliver's family?

How many children in Oliver's family?

How many family members in total?

How many people in your family?

Can you think of two people you would share your feelings with?

Do you have any older toys that you love?





What do kangaroos eat?

Do you know what country kangaroos come from?

What other animals live in that country?

Which ones are marsupials, like kangaroos?

Describe the different ways kangaroos keep cool.

Name five animals that live in Canada. What do those animals eat?

## How was this research-based eBook written?

The static eBook was written using research data collected with military families combined with the literature and other lived experience narratives. The overall research project was titled 'Young children's understandings and experiences of parental deployment within an Australian Defence Force (ADF) family' (Rogers, 2017). The information below and in the next few pages, explores research from the eBook and the original research project, with additional input from a focus group of Canadian military parents, some living with service-related injuries. The text for the new Canadian pages was written by Amy Doyle of CIMVHR. These pages were reviewed and informed by military families living with service-related injury, in conjunction with input from our parent focus group, and further reviewed by Canadian psychiatrists with expertise in military families.

## eBook research question

How can the use of an eBook assist children from military families to build their knowledge and understanding of parents' service-related injuries and the changes they experience when that occurs in their family?

## eBook research statement

This static eBook was designed to build on children's knowledge and understanding of:

- physical injuries including some that get better and some that don't
- the shock and emotional responses of other family members to physical injuries
- the mental effects of some physical injuries e.g. memory loss
- the treatment involved with physical injuries
- extra emotional and physical support needed by someone with a physical injury
- the household challenges and changes involved when a parent has physical injuries
- the effects of a physical injury on family relationships and simple ways to support each other
- the stigma associated with injuries
- practical ways to assist a parent with an injury
- types of changes and ways to cope with change and build resilience
- the importance of extended family in times of need



This eBook provides a starting point for parents and family workers to talk to children about some of the experiences of young children within Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) families who have experienced a parent who returns home with service-related physical injuries. To do this, the graphically designed characters show a kangaroo called Oliver, whose father returns home from deployment with an injury, experiencing the shock and emotional responses that he and other family members experience. Children learn about the cognitive effects of some injuries, such as memory loss. The text and illustrations reveal various treatments are often required to help heal, or partially heal physical injuries. Information in the book demonstrates that such treatment involves many phone calls, medical and allied health appointments, and the stress this creates for the family. Additionally, children learn about the extra physical and emotional support parents with physical injuries need, by learning about the extra tasks family members do to support them.

The book explores the changes that occur in the home when a parent is injured and how Oliver feels about those changes. The gradual changes in the background of the illustrations, from very dark to lighter, mirror Oliver's acceptance and understanding as the background lightens. For example, the background is very dark when the parent first arrives home but gradually becomes lighter as Oliver learns more and begins to understand and accept the changes within the household. The book depicts ways the other family members need to support each other as they struggle to assist the injured parent. The stigma associated with injuries is also demonstrated when Oliver becomes upset when people stare at his father when they go out. Extended family as a source of support is demonstrated when Oliver gets help and assistance in understanding what is happening from his grandmother. Oliver learns ways to deal with change and how to support his family in practical and emotional ways. Such narratives assist children to gain understanding of difficult family situations and the way to build resilience by learning from the characters.








## What the literature and research says

This book explores themes identified in the author's thesis entitled 'Young children's understandings and experiences of parental deployment within an Australian Defence Force (ADF) family' (Rogers, 2017) undertaken at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. This Canadian adaptation includes input from Canadian military, Veteran and public safety personnel families, as well as Canadian researcher focused on improving the health and well-being of military, Veteran, public safety personnel and their families.

### Specific challenges when a parent returns home injured

Injuries are a shock for both the person injured and for their family members. In Canada, spouses of injured and medically released Veterans may encounter a number of added challenges which may result in added family stress. (Skomorovsky, 2020). When an ill or injured CAF member is notified that they will be medically released, they begin preparing to transition to a new life in the civilian world. If their illness or injury is of such severity that they are no longer able to work, the transition challenge is even greater. The success of the transition in either case often depends on how well the family can cope with and support the transitioning member. The transition from military to civilian life is not done in isolation – the entire family unit is affected. (Veteran's Ombudsman, 2016). Grief and loss responses will be inevitable for the injured personnel and all members of the family, including very young children. All family members and the injured member grieve for the loss of how things were before the injury. The stages of grief include shock, disbelief, anger, bargaining, depression and eventually, acceptance (Holland, 2018). Protective factors within military families can include extended family, other military friends and military community supports such as those offered through the Military Family Services, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (Manser, 2023).

Connecting to such supports can improve a family's resilience (Manser & Ogilvie, 2022), and these might also include general community supports and programs such as those offered by charitable services and programs can also assist, such as the programs of Wounded Warriors Canada, The Legion, Soldier On and the Veterans Transition Network to name a few. Families who are connected have a much better chance of rebounding after difficult life events and stages (Antcliff et. al., 2014). For families to experience a stabilized family life in the face of military challenges, such as service-related injury, they need to be aware of appropriate services that are available when, where and how they need them (Manser, 2023).





## Reintegration into civilian life

Hypervigilance and residual aggression can be challenging when there is a sudden re-entry into civilian life after deployment (Dekel, Wadsworth, & Sanchez, 2015). Sometimes they report involuntary reactions to loud noises, such as when a car backfires, sending them into combat mode. This can exacerbate traumatic feelings, decrease confidence and cause embarrassment to themselves and their families (Rogers, 2017). Strong links to both the military and civilian community have been demonstrated to promote a sense of belonging and improve wellbeing (Pickering & Lamb, 2020). Additionally, connection with nature-based outdoor activities can be crucial to improve wellbeing. (Bakarat and Yousufzai, 2020, p. 51) state 'there is an emerging body of evidence on the relationship between mental well-being and accessibility to green space and nature settings, particularly for vulnerable populations', such as veterans.

## Supporting injured veterans with mental health conditions

Returned service personnel are susceptible to mental health conditions. This can include PTSD, which is an individual's reaction after indirect or direct exposure to extreme traumatic stress, usually involving intense levels of helplessness, horror, fear, random or stressed behaviour (Rogers, 2017). Spouses, children and grandchildren are vulnerable to the secondary transference of PTSD because of their empathy, knowledge of the trauma and their role as a caregiver for the patient (Rogers, 2017). Buffering the effects of these problems are the strong relationships within military families, which provide protective factors for family members (Rogers-Baber, 2017; Rogers, 2020). Access to mental health services that personnel are willing to use can be challenging for military personnel (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Swick, 2015), often due to stigma and fears the information may be given to their superiors. Community supports might be of assistance in these situations. Other allied health services may also improve mental health, such as occupational therapy (Rostek, 2020), so these might be an early step to seeking professional assistance and a potential link to mental health services.

## Supporting children when a parent has an injury

To support children, narratives can be used because they are very powerful learning tools. Narratives are a way for children to practice their emotional responses to stressful situations in a safe way (Gottschall, 2012; Rogers, 2019), such as when a parent is injured. Additional support from educators might assist the child and provide another source of comfort and someone different to talk to about the changes occurring at home. Educators can be a link to other services within the community (Wilson, 2016). Professional health support services, such as counselling may be needed, so linking with Military Family Services, Military Family Resource Centers, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, Strongest Families Institute, and Wounded Warrior Canada among others, can provide families with various options to provide age-appropriate, early intervention, and prevention programs, resources, supports, activities and camps for children.

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For more research on the impacts of military life on children from military families visit JMVHF at this link *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*: [Vol 5, No S2 Vol 10, No 2](#)



## About the author

Dr Marg Rogers is a lecturer and researcher in early childhood education at the University of New England. Her PhD researched 'Young children's understanding and experiences within an Australian Defence Force (ADF) family'. Marg witnessed the impact of war on her uncle's family when he served in Vietnam on multiple deployments and the effects on his health and mental health. She also experienced the intergenerational effects of her grandfather's WWII service that resulted in injuries. Marg is a researcher with the Manna Institute that aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those in regional, rural and remote Australia. In both her current and previous work roles, her passion for education has always been in supporting families to do the best job they can through authentic community and education partnerships. As a part of this project, Marg has had the privilege to meet with defence families and discuss many of the issues they face. She hopes her eBooks will provide children, parents and educators with a starting point to discuss these issues further.

Other resources by Marg Rogers can be found at [www.ecdefenceprograms.com](http://www.ecdefenceprograms.com), or on Orcid <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8407-7256>



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Military Family Services, Military Family Resource Centres and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services are here to support you. Whether you're facing a recent stressful experience, transition or deployment struggles, relationship, family, or financial issues, we can help you with life's ups and downs.

If you're a serving member, a Veteran, or their family, you can access a variety of programs and services, in your community or virtually from the comfort of your home. Visit [www.cfmws.ca](http://www.cfmws.ca) for services.



True strength is the courage to ask for help.



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