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Mates change Michaela's life

LORETTA LOHBERGER

HOBART'S Michaela Gilewicz has turned her life around, thanks, she says, to the support she has received from Mates4Mates.

The ex-service support organisation, which opened in Tasmania in 2014, is experiencing increased demand for its services.

Injury cut Ms Gilewicz's army career short.

"I was medically discharged 3½ years into what was supposed to be a lifelong career," she said.

That was mid-2012, and Ms Gilewicz said she was also unwell mentally.

After seeing Mates4Mates at a community sporting event, she decided to join and started doing mixed martial arts with the organisation.

"That really helped build my confidence," she said.

Ms Gilewicz also did some equine therapy and a group program for people with post-traumatic stress disorder, which she said gave her the

confidence to apply for entry in Invictus Games, created by Prince Harry for wounded, injured or ill serving and former military personnel to compete in.

"Before I was going [to Mates4Mates] I really struggled to leave the house and to socialise. My life now looks totally different to what it did two years ago," she said.

She competed at Invictus in Toronto last year, and the emotion she showed during the opening ceremony touched hearts around the world, including Prince Harry's.

Mates4Mates is supporting 232 wounded, injured or ill Tasmanian veterans and their families and demand is increasing. More than 80 new "mates" joined the organisation last year.

Ms Gilewicz encouraged other ex-service men and women who were interested in Mates4Mates to drop in and say hello. More information about the organisation is available at mates4mates.org



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THERE TO HELP: Tasmanian regional Mates4Mates manager Stephen Knox, "mate" Michaela Gilewicz and Josh Miller, the group's liaison officer and exercise physiologist.

Picture: LUKE BOWDEN