

The Soldier On Program

The Canadian Forces (CF) is committed to helping ill and injured personnel and their loved ones, through programs ranging from excellent medical care to vocational assistance to social support and counselling. The Soldier On program, and the complementary Soldier On Fund, provides resources and opportunities for ill and injured CF personnel and former personnel to attain and maintain a healthy and active lifestyle through physical fitness, recreation and sport. Since November 2007, when the Fund was established to complement the program, Soldier On has assisted the individuals involved in many ways, including the purchase of adaptive sports and fitness equipment and through training and development camps for ill and injured personnel and former personnel. Soldier On enhances and complements, without replacing, existing public and non-public programs.

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The Soldier On program achieves a number of aims. It encourages ill and injured CF personnel to attain and maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. It supports these personnel in increasing their independence, in developing new skills and in achieving goals. It furnishes an opportunity for them to socialize and explore common interests, and share learning experiences.

Further, the Soldier On program emphasizes the potential residing in all Canadians who have a disability. It investigates partnerships with other disability organizations, in Canada and abroad. It shows health-care professionals, other service providers, CF leadership and the general public how physical fitness, sport and recreation can make all of this possible.

Soldier On partners in many initiatives with the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), a non-profit, charitable, private organization, recognized by the International Paralympic Committee, which aims to empower Canadians with physical disabilities through sport. The partnership makes sense: the Paralympic movement began after WWII as a way of reintegrating injured soldiers into their communities and speeding their recovery¹.

Soldier On is a grassroots idea that grew. It was co-founded in 2006 by WO Andrew McLean, a CF Search and Rescue Technician and ultra-marathon runner, and Greg Lagacé, Paralympic Development Manager with the Canadian Paralympic Committee. The initiative expanded along with the needs of ill and injured military personnel, the interest and support of military leadership, and the promotion of health and physical fitness within the CF. In 2007, responsibility for Soldier On was transferred to the agency now known as Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services (CFPFSS), and in November of that year the Soldier On program was complemented by the creation of the Soldier On Fund.

Mandate:

The primary objectives of Soldier On are to:

- Facilitate, support and integrate resources and opportunities for ill and injured military personnel to fully and actively participate in physical fitness, recreation and sport activities;
- Create awareness of Soldier On among ill and injured military personnel, other CF personnel, the general public and corporations; and
- Investigate, foster and enhance partnerships with allied nations and disability organizations offering relevant programs and services.

The Soldier On Fund

While the Soldier On program is limited to supporting serving CF personnel, the Soldier On Fund has a wider application. The Soldier On Fund may be used to support not only currently serving CF personnel, but also former personnel.

So far, the Soldier On Fund has provided financial grants to accomplish the following:

- purchasing adaptive sports equipment and assistive devices, including a custom mountain bike, a basketball wheelchair, a hockey sledge, a rowing shell and customized home gyms;
- subsidizing the expenses of fitness or sport related activity that directly contributes to enhancing or maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle; and
- subsidizing the expenses of high-performance training for beneficiaries who aspire to compete at a national or international level.

The Soldier On Fund is one of several non-public property (NPP) funds benefiting CF personnel, former personnel and their families. Others are the Military Families Fund and the Hospital Comforts Fund.

For more information, please visit the Soldier On website at www.SoldierOn.ca.