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## ***Australian Story – Monday 21 August, 8pm, ABC and ABC iview***

### **THE STRONG MAN**

Australian Federal Police Commander Grant Edwards is a mountain of a man. He was once Australia's strongest, pulling locomotives, planes and semi-trailers with pure brute strength.

So imagine his surprise to find himself sitting under a tree one day, unable to stop crying.

*"I was a strong guy physically, I thought I was a strong guy mentally. It was probably the greatest wakeup in my life when I realised that I wasn't."* Grant Edwards

Grant has been at the coalface of the AFP's most disturbing work. In the early days of the internet, he headed up a team investigating child exploitation.

*"I can still describe many of those images because they burn into your brain and you just can't get rid of them, they're there forever. I just can't explain the amount of anxiety that builds up and the anger."* Grant Edwards

As one of those charged with protecting society, he'd always been taught to harden up, close those boxes in the mind and move on.

After a highly charged year training police in Afghanistan, things began to unravel.

*"I think his façade fell apart and all of that strength just left him. I think every box he had managed to close opened and he was just hit with everything."* Kate Edwards, Grant's wife

Grant's doctor was the first to suggest he might have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He refused treatment, knowing only too well that admitting to a mental health issue was a career killer.

*"You didn't talk about your vulnerabilities because that was seen as a sign of you weren't doing your job or you weren't strong enough or cut out to be a police officer."* AFP Commissioner Andrew Colvin

It took a breakdown for Grant to understand he was injured in ways not seen by the naked eye. After the suicide of an AFP colleague, he decided to go public with his own struggles, becoming a lightning rod for change inside the AFP. Now Commander of the Americas, Grant is on a mission to remove the stigma of mental health not just in policing, but society wide.

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**For further information and interviews contact:**

**Kim Bassett on 03 9524 2580/0409 600 456 or [bassett.kim@abc.net.au](mailto:bassett.kim@abc.net.au)**