



THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST of AUSTRALIA



Military (ADF) Spouse Employment & Career Development



Amanda L McCue
2017 Churchill Fellow



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Report by Amanda McCue, 2017 Churchill Fellow

To improve military spouse career and employment assistance and outcomes in Australia USA, Canada, UK

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Disclaimer

I wrote this report in its entirety in a personal capacity. It does not represent the views, opinions or official position of any other individual or organisation. All care has been taken to represent the views of those I met with accurately whilst maintaining confidentiality.

Keywords

Military Spouse Employment

ADF Partners

ADF Spouses

Australian Defence Force

Career Development

Defence Policy

ADF Family Support Policy

Military Family Readiness

Military Family Quality of Life

Foreword

I undertook this project as both a career practitioner and as a military (ADF) spouse. The experience embodied many of the issues faced by military families. In planning the trip I was challenged by my husband's work obligations (which required him to be away from home at the same time as me), our parenting responsibilities, the absence of local family support, having sorrowful family commitments that had us on the other side of the world just days before the Fellowship travel started, and the preparations required for my husband's upcoming deployment. I thought that yet again my career ambitions were going to have to take a back seat to my husband's. But with compromises all around and the support of others we made it happen.

As I progressed through the trip I didn't just gain a greater professional understanding of the challenges of military spouse career development and the possible solutions; I also benefited from the social and professional advantages that satisfying work brings. I had interesting and productive conversations with peers and leaders, challenged myself, gained confidence, enhanced my professional knowledge and most importantly felt supported and validated in my professional quest. It was personal proof to me that career development of ADF partners is so important to creating healthy ADF families.

Military families are the 'strength behind the uniform' but that should not mean compromising their quality of life. To do so is to the detriment of the spouse, the military family, and the military itself.

This report is not intended to provide a definitive account of the issue of spouse employment nor how it should be addressed. Rather, it is intended to generate discussion and advance the narrative around spouse employment in Australia, and to contribute to robust discussions about the issue, solutions, and benefits that will hopefully result in more satisfying career outcomes for current and future ADF spouses and improved overall quality of life for ADF families.

Amanda

This report is dedicated to ADF spouses and military spouses around the world.

Acknowledgements

I extend deep gratitude to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for affording me this opportunity, and for their recognition that this topic warranted further investigation. Churchill once said, "*I like things to happen, and if they don't happen I like to make them happen*". Thank you to the Trust for this opportunity to try and make things happen.

I am extremely grateful to all of those individuals (many of whom are military spouses themselves) and organisations in the UK, USA and Canada who so graciously and generously gave me their time and access to their resources to enhance my understanding of their important contributions to military spouse employment. The 5 weeks of my trip were both enormously productive and enjoyable. I left every country feeling inspired and motivated and thankful for the work being done.

Thank you to my colleagues at the Career Development Association of Australia particularly ACT Division President Kate Flaherty, and Lisa Tozer both of whom were instrumental in the preparation of my successful application. CDAA have provided me with a platform to disseminate my findings to the wider career development community for which I am very grateful.

I extend special thanks to Defence Families of Australia (DFA)'s National Convenor Maree Sirois and Communications Officer Michelle Hoare. DFA are the official voice of ADF families and their input into the identification of issues, planning of the trip in the context of the current landscape and dissemination of the report is greatly appreciated.

Thank you to my referee Julie Blackburn for her support of my application and her own efforts in addressing ADF spouse employment when DFA National Convenor.

Heartfelt thanks to my family for their support and understanding. Whilst my children are used to their father being away for extended periods having mum/mom away was a new experience and one they handled beautifully. Kudos to my husband for holding down the fort and for playing the "spouse" role for a change! Thank you to our extended family and fellow Defence families who stepped into help. My husband is incredibly supportive of this project and understands both personally and professionally the value of improved military spouse career development to the ADF community. After listening to my talk about this topic for the past 5 years he knows my talking points as well as I do! Not only does he support my efforts he takes the opportunity to share my findings with those in his extensive ADF network.

Thank you to my husband's RAAF Chain of Command who gave him the opportunity to take advantage of flexible work practices so that he could take on the family responsibilities during my absence. It wasn't simply a matter of time out of the office and I appreciate the effort that went into taking my schedule into account when assigning him his work and training in the lead up to his deployment. Flexible work practices and support for them by leadership is a key facilitator of assisting ADF families to successfully navigate being a dual income family.

Finally, thank you to you the reader for your interest in this topic. I hope this report enhances your understanding and/or inspires action.

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat
-Winston Churchill

Executive Summary

Military spouses embody the type of skills and attributes required by today's workers and sought after by employers, yet evidence suggests that due to the unique aspects of military life, such as relocation and separation, the employment and career development of military spouses is compromised and marked by unemployment, underemployment and career discontent. It is widely acknowledged that the support provided by families is essential to the serving member's wellbeing and their ability to do their job. Work is an important part of life and a good job is good for health and wellbeing. The compromised career development of spouses is negatively impacting individual and family mental, financial, and social health and wellbeing. The implications are widespread and concern defence capability and national security, labour force participation and gender equality. This should be concerning for those who care about ADF family wellbeing, those who are responsible for it, those who rely on it for operational effectiveness and those who benefit from having a fully functioning all-volunteer Defence Force.

Family characteristics, dynamics, and norms are changing and ADF families are no different – there is an increasing expectation for dual-income families, and for both spouses to lead fulfilling career lives. At the same time the world of work is changing—the work we do and the way we work are changing, and employers are in fierce competition for the talent they need. Increasingly, employee skills sought by employers aren't occupation-specific but transferable: interpersonal, communication, problem solving, and cultural awareness skills to name just a few. Today's workers need to be flexible, adaptable and resilient. Those who know military spouses will recognise these skills and attributes in them. Yet the evidence indicates that employers are missing out on, or underutilising, this talent pool. In this new world of work all Australians need to be empowered to manage their careers [1] but especially those who face additional challenges.

Career development support is a powerful tool to empower people to live satisfying careers by helping them manage their careers in the context of personal characteristics and circumstances. There is some career development assistance from the Department of Defence and non-profit groups currently available to ADF spouses. However, as illustrated by programs in place overseas, there is much more that can be done. During this Fellowship I visited a range of organisations and individuals engaged in spouse employment policy, advocacy and service provision at the national and local levels in the US, UK and Canada. This provided me with an enhanced understanding of the military spouse employment situation in countries similar to Australia, and the opportunity to identify 'promising'¹ or best practices in addressing the challenges faced by military spouses which inform the list of recommendations outlined in this report. It was clear from my travels that spouses in all the countries I visited face similar challenges; and that this is a global challenge as well as a national one.

Military spouse career development is a complex issue but there are a number of available solutions. Support comes in different forms including: policy, individual career and job readiness support, employment opportunities, advocacy and education. Governments, non-profits, and for-

¹ Thank you Eddy Mentzer (US DoD) for this very appropriate term for identifying good practices in an emerging area

profits all have different areas of expertise and their own strengths, weaknesses, and risk. A national strategy to provide a coordinated and collective effort is required to deliver high quality, effective services. This would create a landscape in which competition for funding and ‘noise’ is kept to a minimum, population needs are met and impact is maximised.

Supporting the career development of ADF spouses is an opportunity to pursue cultural change and to invest in developing a healthy, thriving, modern day ADF community that is well prepared for the future, reflects the society it serves, and allows it to serve that society to the best of its ability. It may also serve to identify best practices for other sectors of society.

Recommendation One:

Address ADF spouse career development as an essential element of ADF family support and an issue of concern in its own right.

Recommendation Two:

Gather more qualitative and quantitative data on the ADF spouse population and undertake a career development and employment needs assessment.

Recommendation Three:

Convene an ADF Spouse Employment Steering Committee of key stakeholders to agree on a shared vision and design a national ADF spouse employment and career development strategy and framework.

Recommendation Four:

Encourage a collaborative effort from organisations across government, NFP and private sectors to improve military spouse employment and career outcomes, overseen by the Steering Committee.

Recommendation Five:

Champion the business case for hiring military spouses, facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between ADF spouse job seekers and employers, and introduce ADF spouse hiring initiatives within companies.

Recommendation Six:

Enhance and expand current services.

Recommendation Seven:

Review how current Defence policies affect spouse employment and how current and future policies can be enhanced to offset negative effects on families including spouse employment.

Recommendation Eight:

Adopt a whole-of-government approach to ADF spouse employment.

Recommendation Nine:

Approach military spouse employment as a global issue as well as a national one.

Acronyms

ADF- Australian Defence Force

AFCAS- Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (IK)

AFF- Army Families Federation (UK)

BSF- Blue Star Families

CCB- Community Capacity Building

CDAA- Career Development Association of Australia

CAF- Canadian Armed Forces (interchangeable with CF)

CF- Canadian Forces

CFMWS- Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Service

CICA- Career Industry Council of Australia

DFA- Defence Families of Australia

DCO- Defence Community Organisation

DND- Canadian Department of National Defence

DoD- Department of Defense (US)

ESO- Ex-Service Organisation

FAMCAS- Tri Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (UK)

MFRC- Canadian Military Family Resource Centre

MFS- Canadian Military Family Services

MOAA- Military Officers' Association of America

MOD- Ministry of Defence (UK)

MSEP- Military Spouse Employment Partnership

MWDU- Member with Dependents Unaccompanied

NFP- Not for profit

PCS- permanent change of station

PEAP- Partner Employment Assistance Program

QoL- Quality of Life

SECO- Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program

VSO- Veteran Service Organisation

Glossary

Military Spouse- spouse or interdependent partner of military personnel. In Australia the standard term is “partner” however for international consistency and to distinguish from ‘employer partners’ the term spouse is used throughout this report. Discussion around military spouse employment is aimed primarily at the civilian spouses of military personnel.

ADF Partners/Defence Partners- spouses and interdependent partners of Australian Defence Force personnel (the term spouse and partner are used interchangeably)

Career- A lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic: unfolding throughout life. Careers include how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles [2]

Career Development- The complex process of managing life, learning, and work over the lifespan [2]

Career Development Services- A wide range of programs and services provided in many different jurisdictions and delivery settings. Their objective is to assist individuals to gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage their life, learning, and work in self-directed ways [2]

Posting and/or Permanent Change of Station- a military service-related relocation

Service Member or Serving Member- an active duty member of a country’s armed forces

Visit Schedule

United Kingdom April 23-29, 2018:

Organisation	Name	Position
Ministry of Defence	Lisa Ireland	Assistant Head Welfare Support, Chief of Defence People
Recruit for Spouses	Heledd Kendrick	Founder and CEO
ANZAC Day Commemorations at Cenotaph and Westminster Abbey,		
Lifeworks	Iain Downie	Manager
Warwick University, Institute for Employment Research	Dr Clare Lyonette	Principal Research Fellow
Kings Centre for Military Health Research, Kings College London	Dr Rachel Gribble	Post Doctoral Researcher
Australian High Commission	Vivian Sinclair	Family Support Officer

United States April 30-May 17, 2018:

Organisation	Name	Position
Department of Defence Office of Military Family Readiness Policy	C. Eddy Mentzer	Associate Director for Family Readiness and Well-being
Hiring our Heroes, US Chamber of Commerce Foundation	Mona Dexter	Special Projects Manager, Military Spouse Program
Mad Skills	Erica McMannes	Co-Founder
Serving Talent	Marcelle Yeager and Beth Conlin	Founder Business Development Director
The Milspo Project	Ashley Matejka	Chief Experience Curator
	Brooke Goldberg	Military spouse employment consultant
Hiring our Heroes, US Chamber of Commerce Foundation	Military Spouse Employment Listening Session	
Military Spouse of the Year Town Hall		
Army Community Services Fort Myer	Judy Joyner	Employment Readiness Program Manager
Military Spouse JD Network	Homefront Rising Event	
National Military Spouse Network	Sue Hoppin	Founder and Advocate
The White House Conference Call (listening participant)	Jennifer Korn	Deputy Director and Special Assistant to the President
	Leonard Litton	Director, Defense Policy and Strategy, The National Security Council
	Elizabeth O'Brien	Hiring our Heroes

Canada May 22-25, 2018:

Organisation	Name	Position
Canadian Forces Morale Welfare Services Military Family Services	Katie Ochin Todd Stride Commodore Cantelon	Employment and Entrepreneurship Program Manager Senior Staff Advisor Director General Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services
	Vanessa Walsh	Community Development and Stakeholder Relationships Manager
Petawawa Military Family Resource Centre	Claudia Beswick	Executive Director PMFRC
Petawawa Employment Centre	Chantal Rook and staff	

Australian Defence Force Family Covenant

We recognise the significant contribution of ADF families to operational effectiveness.

We pay tribute to the commitment and sacrifice of ADF families in support of Australia.

We acknowledge the unique nature of family and community life in the ADF.

We honour the inherent strength and capacity of ADF families.

We pledge to work in partnership with ADF families to enhance their self reliance.

We commit to listening to ADF families and responding effectively to their emerging needs.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Military spouses embody the type of skills and attributes required by today's workers and sought after by employers: they are organised, flexible, adaptable, and resilient, and have the demonstrated ability to successfully manage and prioritise multiple tasks. They are accustomed to engaging from the outset to make the most of every opportunity, and are experienced in interacting with people and communities around Australia and around the world. Yet they face a number of career challenges. Survey and anecdotal evidence suggests that spouses/partners² of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel experience unemployment, underemployment and career discontent due to the unique characteristics and demands of military life. Spouse employment is a concern for many ADF families, and it is a key advocacy issue for Australia's official representative of families Defence Families of Australia (DFA). The underutilisation of military spouses in the workforce has consequences for individuals, families, the military and the wider community. However, in Australia there is limited awareness and/or discussion of the problem and only limited assistance provided to address it. There is much more that can be done.

The employment challenges experienced by ADF partners are not new and neither are efforts to address them. There have been many recommendations and various service provided over the years going back to the Hamilton Report in 1986 which was a defining document for ADF family support [3]. Despite this spouse employment remains an issue for ADF families.

The situation is similar overseas. In the US, data has led to the conclusion that:

“military spouses may face hurdles in obtaining employment beyond those experienced by similar spouses of civilians” [4].

Supporting and empowering individuals to successfully manage their life, learning and work [1] is essential for all Australians, but particularly for those who face additional challenges. The Australian Blueprint for Career Development states:

“In the face of increasing choices and challenges, some people lose their way or give up. Those that flourish are self-managing individuals who know their strengths and their limitations, have the confidence to follow their dreams and are willing to seek help from and to support the career journeys of others” yet “many people don’t know how to manage their careers, because no one has ever assisted them to” [1].

Contemporary definitions of career refer to individuals' life, learning, leisure and work roles rather than defined occupation pathways. The process of managing these interrelated roles over a

² The terms spouses and partners are interchangeable for the purpose of this report. For international consistency and to avoid confusion with other partnerships the term spouse is used refer to those married or in a recognised interdependent relationship with a member of the military.

lifetime in the context of personal characteristics and circumstances is referred to as career development [1].

There are a number of well-established policies and programs addressing military spouse employment in countries similar to Australia. The aim of my project was to visit some of the organisations involved to gather knowledge and ideas from them in order to inform policy and program design in Australia. I believe that our overseas counterparts are a vital resource, and that approaching this as a global as well as local challenge could be an innovative contribution to finding effective solutions in Australia and overseas.

Military spouses are a skilled and talented workforce. Being a military spouse or partner should be an enabler of employment, not a barrier³.

Project Background and Methodology

In 2013 I accompanied my husband on a 3 year posting to Washington DC. With a keen interest in issues affecting military families I began to explore the career and employment services offered to US military spouses. US military spouses had access to a number of local and national programs including career counselling and links to employers and job opportunities. I used the opportunity of being in Washington DC to attend several military spouse employment events and network with some of the individuals and organisations involved. I became convinced that based on what was happening in the US we could do much more to assist Australian spouses with their careers. In 2014, I enrolled in a Graduate Certificate of Career Development at Swinburne University to enhance my knowledge of career development in order to apply it effectively to the context of military spouse employment. I worked with then DFA Convenor Julie Blackburn on solutions to some of the employment challenges facing ADF spouses and helped facilitate a visit by Julie to the US to meet with some of the organisations providing spouse employment services. Upon my return to Australia in 2016 I continued to advocate for greater support including researching and writing a report on spouse employment, which I sent to the Minister for Defence and other relevant agencies, but it had little impact. Seeking a platform from which to further my advocacy and draw greater attention to the topic I applied for a Churchill Fellowship in April 2017, and was awarded it in October 2017. The timing of the award was favourable. In 2017 the Prime Minister of Australia established the Industry Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment⁴ which included the identification of ADF spouse employment as one of five priority areas [5], the Defence Community Organisation made a significant change to its partner employment funding program [6] and the results from the 2017 ADF families study were released articulating the employment challenges faced by ADF spouses [7]. ADF spouse employment is gaining some much-needed attention but we have a long way to go in addressing it.

The countries of UK, USA and Canada were chosen because of their similarities with Australia, their status as our allies, and the fact that they have military spouse employment programs and

³ Thank you to Recruit for Spouses for this sentiment

⁴ To date the committee has not released any findings or recommendations on the topic.

initiatives in place. The visit revealed our countries share many of the same spouse employment challenges. I contacted several existing contacts prior to commencement of travel to request meetings with them as part of my Fellowship, and to get recommendations for other individuals and organisations to meet with. I also conducted online research into programs and initiatives in place in the three countries, contacted leading agencies to request meetings, and conducted some initial pre-travel online meetings. Once in country I took advantage of several additional opportunities to attend informative events and meet with key agencies. I met with individuals and organisations in the government, not-for-profit, social enterprise, for-profit and research sectors at both national and local levels in order to gain a range of insights and perspectives.

Investigative Domains:

- Military spouse population and employment research and data
- Career and employment issues and challenges
- Advocacy
- Policies
- Programs and services

In designing this project I was not just interested in learning about *what* policies and programs are in place to address spouse employment but *why*. The “*why*” provides the basis for the development of responses (or lack thereof) to an issue and may explain differences between countries.

Fellowship Objectives:

1. To enhance my understanding of and document the military spouse employment situation in countries similar to Australia.
2. To learn about the policies, programs, and initiatives in place across multiple organisations and sectors which address the challenges of military spouse employment.
3. To identify best or promising practices⁵ in addressing military spouse employment challenges in order to inform policy, program and service delivery in Australia to enhance military spouse career development.
4. To advance the narrative of spouse employment in Australia
5. To identify opportunities for international collaboration (an objective that developed in the planning stages of the Fellowship when it became apparent such opportunities exist)

⁵ Credit to C Eddy Mentzer for this term

Who are ADF spouses/partners?

There are over 58,000 permanent ADF members and over half of these are married or in an interdependent relationship [8]. The majority of ADF personnel (85%) are male and in heterosexual relationships and therefore the majority of ADF spouses are female (although I was unable to locate specific data reporting this). 37% of ADF members have dependent children. The majority of Defence couples live together although a small percentage (6%) do not [8]. ADF families live in towns and countries across Australia from major cities to rural and remote towns [9].

Defence spouses frequently manage the logistics of relocation, adapt and thrive in new and diverse communities, and manage the bulk of domestic and family responsibilities. In doing so they develop a highly valuable skill set in addition to their educational qualifications and occupation-specific skills and experience.

Some of the terms used to describe military spouses include organised, resilient, flexible, adaptable, motivated, community-minded, resourceful, committed, entrepreneurial, loyal and team oriented. Their recognised skills include planning, prioritising, problem solving, cultural awareness, networking, communication, leadership, the ability to work under pressure and a strong work ethic [10, 11].

History of ADF spouse employment challenges and support

The Hamilton Report in 1986 identified many of the same issues we face today and suggested many solutions that are still applicable (and which are similar to efforts currently undertaken in other countries). Over the years there have been a range of support programs offered by Defence, some of which are described below.

The Hamilton Report

In 1985 Mrs Sue Hamilton, the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Women, undertook a review of the problems facing spouses of serving personnel, at the request of the then Minister for Defence, The Honourable Kim Beazley. The resulting report titled '*Supporting Service Families*' (but more commonly referred to as Hamilton Report) [3] was a significant publication that identified issues which underpin the Defence Community Organisation's support for today's ADF families [12]. It was also the basis for the creation of what is now Defence Families of Australia [13].

The Hamilton Report identified that employment presents a major problem for the spouses of service personnel and for their other dependants. It identified two main contributing factors:

- 1) That many bases are located in areas where employment opportunities are limited and
- 2) That the frequency and uncertainty of postings makes it difficult for civilian members of service families to secure regular employment or to have any great degree of career development within their chosen employment.

The report addressed many of the same issues raised today: location of bases and lack of employment opportunities in certain regions; employer bias; discontinuous employment history; licence portability; inability to accrue benefits; childcare; reluctant single-income families; deprivation of an important social support avenue.

Amongst Mrs Hamilton's recommendations was the recommendation that postings and promotion policies be reviewed to try and achieve some geographic stability; that employment opportunities for spouses (including opportunities for spouses to take up civilian employment with defence establishments) be improved; and that "spouse employment officers" be established (with at least one in each area where there is a major base or several small bases) whose roles would include:

- Maintaining a register of spouses seeking work in the area, and their skills
- Acting as a first point of contact for spouses who were coming in to the area and seeking work there
- Developing a good knowledge of the local employment market, and contacts with employers and the local Chamber of Commerce
- Taking an active role in marketing the skills of service spouses to local employers
- Promoting the employment of spouses of service personnel in suitable civilian positions on bases
- Counselling spouses coming into the area and those seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce on possible local opportunities, and encourage them to extend their marketable skills by participation in volunteer programs in support of other service families.

Australian Defence Force Families Mobility and Dislocation Study (FMDS)

The FMDS was undertaken between 1992-1993 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies following consideration of the 1991 ADF Families Census [14]. This 1994 report identified higher unemployment among ADF partners than among partners of those in full-time civilian employment. It noted two components:

- 1) a short-term pre- and post-relocation withdrawal from the workforce and
- 2) a longer-term issue attributed to employer bias.

The report noted that the Hamilton Report's recommendation of employment officers had not been implemented but that "the functions of Ms Hamilton's proposed spouse employment officers need to be carried out". Recommendations of the FMDS report included:

- The ADF give greater emphasis to partners' employment by providing assistance at the regional and local level, maintaining registers of those seeking work, maintaining familiarity with the local employment market and actively maintaining contact with employers in the area.
- The ADF examine the need for the central coordination of spouse employment, including the option of establishing a civilian coordinator in HQADF.

- The ADF explore means whereby civilian contractors to the ADF could be encouraged to provide employment for partners of the ADF.

The report identified that a partial solution to spouse unemployment would be spouse preferential employment into civilian positions in the ADF or the Department of Defence. However, HQADF advised that this proposition had been put to the appropriate authorities and rejected on grounds of industrial equity.

The ADF response to the report acknowledged that the majority of the recommendations related to employment. In response, it articulated that the commissioning of a consultant to carry out research had been carried out as an initial step. At the time of writing this report I could not locate any further information on this.

Spouse Employment Assistance Program 1998-2000

There is very little publicly available information on earlier spouse employment assistance however a House of Representatives Questions on Notice record from 2000 provides some insight [15]. The following information is available from the report:

- 42 support networks had been established under the Program.
- 40 employment seminars had been conducted with an estimated 1000 spouses attending.
- No data was collected on how many spouses were provided with assistance through Defence-specific Job Clubs or general community Job Clubs.
- DCO established the spouse employment website
- DCO wrote to large employers in each DCO area to raise awareness of ADF spouses as potential employees and to advertise the existence of the website. Employers were encouraged to advertise vacancies in the employment section of the DCO website and to access the site to obtain details of spouses seeking employment.
- DCO provided access to computers etc. at 42 locations to assist with job seeking and job application activities.
- DCO sponsored and arranged employment information seminars for Defence spouses in most areas. Invitations to seminars were extended to local employment agencies, local Chambers of Commerce and other appropriate stakeholders.
- DCO sponsored limited work readiness training where a need was established.
- The employment assistance booklet *Jobs on the Move* was established.
- Expansion of the website commenced to incorporate a wider information database
- In 2000/01 DCO will continue existing services and will fully implement a referral service to established Job Network Members (Defence to fund those ADF spouses who are not otherwise eligible)
- The Spouse Employment Assistance Program had not been evaluated.

Service Workforce Access For Partners (SWAPP) (circa 2010)

The SWAPP SELECT provided “a selection of employment enabling initiatives to assist ADF partners in Australia to become job ready and gain employment in a new location” [16]. Included in the program was:

- Funding for childcare (up to \$250),
- Remote internet access (max \$30),
- Personal resume preparation (up to \$500),
- Training directly linked to an employment offer (max \$2500),
- Professional employment assistance (max \$2500)/Training (max \$2500),
- Professional re-registration expense payments

Partner Education and Employment Program (PEEP) (until June 2017)

The PEEP program provided funding to eligible spouses for education and employment needs. Included in Tier 1 of the scheme was funding up to the value of \$12,000 (max. \$6000 per posting) for a period of 10 years for education and training (tertiary or vocational), superannuation set-up, resume preparation, child care, and professional re-registration [17]. Eligibility was tied to relocation and was to be taken within 2 years of moving to the new posting location. PEEP ceased in July 2017 and was replaced by the current Partner Employment Assistance Program (PEAP) (see Chapter 3).

Chapter 2

Defining the issue- What it is and why it matters

Recent qualitative and quantitative data and anecdotal evidence collected from Australian Defence Force personnel and their families raises concerns regarding the career development (including employment) of ADF spouses. This section discusses the available data from Australia and overseas.

Military Spouse Employment Facts and Figures

Australia

The most recent data on ADF spouses comes from the 2017 ADF Families Survey with self-reported data from 4,649 ADF families (a 14% response rate⁶), just over 3000 of which are civilian spouses married to an ADF member [7]. Other data includes the 2015 ADF Census, the 2014 DFA Survey, the 2011 ADF Census and the 2009 ADF Families Survey.

The 2017 Defence Families Survey reports that:



- ❖ 81% feel they have made some employment or career sacrifices because of ADF life
- ❖ Only 11% report that their career had been *unaffected* due to ADF service demands or conditions
- ❖ 44% reported impairment of work-related benefits accrual
- ❖ 20% reported being over qualified for current job
- ❖ 30% reported negative impacts on study or education [7]

⁶ The target population was an estimated 32,794 individuals. It should be noted that the report notes that the data is not entirely representative of all ADF families and over-represents unemployed ADF partners.

* The report concluded that this figure is over-representative of unemployed partners given the 2015 Defence reported a 14% unemployment rate.

The 2017 ADF Families Survey report concluded that the survey results were over-representative of unemployment given that the 2015 Defence Census⁷ reported 14%. Regardless, the national unemployment rate is around 6% [7] therefore unemployment is higher in the ADF spouse population (although this does not take into consideration other influencing factors).

The 2017 Defence Families Survey Report states:

"ADF partners experience high levels of unemployment and other career and employment sacrifices" and they have higher unemployment and underemployment rates than the general population.

The 2017 Survey reported that 36% of spouses worked full time, 18% part time and 10% casual (the 2015 ADF Census reported 54% of military respondents had partners working full time, 21% part time and 17% casually). The top 3 occupations of ADF spouses are professionals, community and personal service work, and clerical and administrative work. Most spouses work for non-government and non-Defence related organisations [8]. According to the 2011 Census, 1/3 of ADF spouses have a higher education degree and almost 1/4 have a certificate or diploma [18].

In 2009 the first survey ever conducted on ADF families reported that only 20% of spouses felt their career had NOT been affected by their serving spouse's, and over 50% reported making employment sacrifices because of the serving spouse's career [19]. The 2011 Defence Census⁸ reported that 59% of spouses had changed jobs due a posting relocation and the average length of time out of work due relocation was 5.4 months. Over 50% of those who changed jobs on posting reported earning less in the new location [18]. The smaller (1,832 respondents) 2014 Defence Families of Australia survey reported that fewer than 1/3 had found a job within a month of relocating, 40% found one between 1 and 4 months and 1/3 had not found a job at the time of the survey. Only 1/3 of spouses had found a job within their chosen field at the same level; 37% had gained employment at a lower level or in a different field.

The issue is becoming increasingly important to ADF families and this year in 2018 Defence Families of Australia have identified it as their top advocacy issue.

The situation is similar in UK, Canada and the USA (the latter in which there has been a large amount of data collected over many years).

United Kingdom

Number of full-time Armed Forces personnel: 138,840 [20].

According to the **2017 Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS)** [21]:

⁷ The 2015 ADF Census was sent to all ADF members and its completion is voluntary. 54% of permanent ADF members participated.

⁸ The 2011 Census received a 67% response rate from permanent ADF members. Figures in the report are weighted to be representative of total Defence populations.

- ❖ 74% of spouses are employed.
- ❖ There is no significant difference between the average employment rate of military spouses and that of civilian
- ❖ 56% of spouses reported that Service life had negatively affected their careers
- ❖ 26% of jobseekers experienced difficulties finding suitable employment.
- ❖ Overall job satisfaction was high but those in part-time employment were less satisfied than those in full time employment
- ❖ 4/10 spouses had looked for a new job in the previous year

The recent study conducted by The University of Warwick on behalf of the Army Families Federation reports [22]:

- ❖ 58% were in paid employment
- ❖ 22% were in full time employment
- ❖ 29% were in part time employment
- ❖ Of those not working 84% said they would like to work
- ❖ A further 9% said they would consider work in the future
- ❖ 8% said they were not working or looking for work
- ❖ 68% were satisfied or very satisfied with their job overall
- ❖ 38% were dissatisfied with their opportunities for progression
- ❖ 37% were dissatisfied that their pay matched their experience and/or qualifications

Canada

Canada has a similar sized Defence force to Australia with approximately 68,000 full time serving personnel [23] (although their military population is a smaller percentage than Australia's).

The **2013 Military Family Quality of Life survey** reports that spouse employment is the top challenge faced by CAF spouses [24] and reports:

- ❖ 71% are employed
- ❖ 5.6% are unemployed
- ❖ 23.8% are not in the labour force
- ❖ 2/3 are working in their area of training
- ❖ Of those not in their area of training almost 40% reported they were overqualified for their current job.
- ❖ 2/3 reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their current employment
- ❖ 79% agreed they had made employment sacrifices because of their partner's military career
- ❖ 45% reported they were unemployed or their career had been severely affected by the demands of their military spouse's career
- ❖ 40% of spouses reported that employment was "extremely difficult" to re-establish after relocation.
- ❖ Top 3 reported occupations: clerical/admin; sales/service; nursing/therapy/healthcare

The Spousal/Partner Employment and Income Project (SPEI) commissioned by the Chief of Military Personnel concluded that being a Canadian Forces (CF) spouse impacted female spousal employment status and income [25]. It found that **female spouses of CF personnel were less likely to be employed compared to spouses of civilians and that military spouses earn on average 20% less than spouses of civilians**. Nonetheless, this study concluded that the employment situation of CF spouses wasn't overly problematic; a claim disputed by the Ombudsman (see below).

In 2013 the Canadian Forces Ombudsman undertook a systemic review into the wellbeing of military families in response to an increase in family-related complaints to the Ombudsman. The findings and associated recommendations are articulated in the report '*On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*'[26]. One of the key findings of the report was that "**it is very difficult for non-serving CF spouses to find and sustain reasonable, gainful, continuous employment**" and that the "**overwhelming majority of partners contacted had experienced employment challenges first hand since becoming military spouses, usually in the form of unemployment or underemployment**".

Spouse employment is reported to be a common consideration for CAF members to separate from the military [27, 28].

United States of America

There has been more research conducted on military spouse employment in the USA than in the other countries visited. The Department of Defense, Blue Star Families, Hiring our Heroes and various other organisations have surveyed and collected data on military spouse employment. There are approximately 690,000 spouses of active duty service members in the USA [29]; a significantly larger population than the UK, Australia and Canada. Like similar countries the overwhelming majority are female [30].

The 2015 Survey of Active Duty Spouses in the US (with 45,000 respondents (24%)) reports:

- ❖ 66% of spouses were in the labour force
- ❖ 41% were employed, (13% in the Armed Forces themselves)
- ❖ 12% were unemployed
- ❖ 34% were not in the labour force (i.e. not employed and not actively looking for work)

Those who were unemployed had been looking for work on average for about 5 months [30].

The DoD's Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) website reports that "*while military spouses are well educated and highly qualified for a range of careers, they face a 26% unemployment rate and a 25% wage gap compared to their civilian counterparts. 77% of these spouses want or need to work*" [31]

The Blue Star Families 2015 Family Lifestyle Survey reported that 75% of respondents felt being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career, and that 58% of spouses not working would like to be employed outside the home [32] .

In 2005, RAND researchers found that, whilst the majority of spouses were employed, they were less likely to be employed, more likely to be seeking work and earn less than comparable civilian spouses [33]. The research found the majority of spouses believe that military life negatively affects their employment and education, and that **many spouses opt out of the workforce because of conditions unique to the military lifestyle**. In a 2008 study of more than a thousand spouses it was found that a majority (2/3) of spouses believe that the military has a negative effect on their employment [34]. This perception differed across ranks with spouses of junior enlisted personnel least likely to perceive a negative impact and the spouses of senior officers the most. A 2012 RAND report examined employment patterns of military spouses and found that unemployment was higher than in the civilian population and labour force participation was lower (even after adjusting for demographic differences between military and civilian spouses) [4]. The study concluded that the data supports “**the notion that military spouses may face hurdles in obtaining employment beyond those experienced by similar spouses of civilians.**” This is confirmed in a recent report by the US President’s Council of Economic Advisers who report (based on the American Community Survey results [35]) that **military spouses are less likely to be labour force participants, when employed earn less than would otherwise be expected, and are disproportionately affected by occupational licencing requirements** [29]. In 2013 the Military Officers Association of America in conjunction with the Institute of Veteran and Military Families administered the Military Spouse Employment Survey that reported military spouses had a 3 times higher an unemployment rate and earned 38% less than their civilian counterparts, and that in terms of education and experienced 90% of respondents were underemployed [36]. The 2017 survey by Hiring our Heroes reported that the military spouse unemployment rate is four times the current rate for all adult women in the US. The survey reported significant levels of unemployment and underemployment [37].

Thus, although there are differences between countries, there are concerning levels of unemployment and underemployment in Australia, the UK, USA and Canada, and negative career development experiences reported by the spouse populations in these countries. This was confirmed by discussions with spouses and service providers in all countries I visited during my Fellowship.

Why military families are different

The uniqueness of military life is widely acknowledged. Australia’s Defence Family Support Policy states:

“Service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) places unique demands on Defence members and their families. The nature of Service life and the commitment required of Defence members may impose restrictions, pressures and difficulties on their families not generally encountered in the civilian community” [38].

The previous Canadian Defence Ombudsman stated it well in the ‘*On the Homefront*’ report when he identified 3 aspects that shape the life of military families – **mobility, separation and risk** [26].

As the Ombudsman points out none of these alone may be unique to military families, but combined the differences are more obvious.

“Few occupations or professions expose the overwhelming majority of its people to recurring geographic relocation, relentless separation and elevated levels of risk as a matter of course throughout much of their careers”

The US DoD concurs. A 2011 report to Congress states “*Military family life is characterized by unique demands, including a) risk of injury and death of the Service member, b) frequent relocation, c) unique organizational culture and norms, and d) family separations due to military deployments, unaccompanied assignments, and training. No single civilian employer places all these demands on its employees and families throughout their career”* [39].

Most (but not all) military families relocate repeatedly throughout their military life. The 2011 ADF Census reported that over 80% of service members had had at least one service-removal; 50% had between 1 and 4, and 23% had had between 5 and 9. Of those who had had at least one removal the average was 4.5 [18]. A distinguishing feature of military families is they have little to no choice in where they move or when and often move more frequently than civilian families [26]. For a military spouse this makes forward career planning and management very difficult if not impossible.

“No single civilian employer places all these demands on its employees and families throughout their career”
-US DoD

Military members spend a lot of time away from home and these family separations can range from days to over a year, particularly in this era of high operational tempo. Again, compared to civilians, the periods of separation in military families are likely to be longer and more frequent. The 2015 ADF Census reports that all members had spent some nights away from home on duty; more than half of ADF members had spent between 31-200 nights away in the previous year. In the UK more than half of personnel were away from home for 1-6 months in the year and 19% for 7-12 months [40]. In the US, more than half of spouses had had a spouse away for more than 30 days in the previous 12 months [30]. 78% of US spouses had experienced a deployment in their serving husband/wife’s career with the majority having a deployment to a combat zone, and most having experienced a deployment in the last 36 months. Around 2/3 of Canadian Forces spouses reported that their serving member spouse had been away for 1-4 months as a result of military service; less than 10% had not been away, and close to 20% had been away for at least five months [30]. As with relocations, separations are sometimes unpredictable thus also making career management for military spouses difficult. Added to this is the emotional toll that family separation and the risky nature of military jobs can impart on spouses. In addition, because of the relocation aspect of military life, military families are less likely than their civilian counterparts to live near traditional forms of support such as extended families.

The uniqueness of military life for ADF members was acknowledged in Chapter 8 of the Human Rights Commission's Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force [41]. This report acknowledges that "*the pressures of postings and deployments makes the lives and careers of ADF members significantly different from that of their civilian counterparts*" and that ADF service can impact ADF families in areas including spouse employment.

Employment Challenges (and it's not just about relocation)

Relocation and domestic responsibilities give rise to specific employment challenges reported by military spouses. Many of the same challenges are reported in Australia, the UK, USA and Canada; a point echoed throughout my Churchill Fellowship.

Some of the challenges of military spouse employment include⁹:

- ❖ Interrupted and discontinuous employment/workforce participation
- ❖ Difficulty finding work in new location after a service-related relocation and/or finding work in one's preferred occupation or field of employment.
- ❖ Inability or difficulty transferring professional registrations and licences between states and countries which can legally and financially delay or prohibit employment.
- ❖ Availability of work in different locations (remote and overseas postings can be particularly problematic).
- ❖ Length of time taken to find a job in new location after a service-related relocation
- ❖ Negative perceptions among employers of ADF partners' ability to commit long term to a job
- ❖ Missing professional development and career progression/promotion opportunities and loss of seniority when changing jobs.
- ❖ Working less hours or at a level beneath skill and qualification level i.e. underemployment
- ❖ Availability to work constrained by domestic and family responsibilities including those related to the demands of ADF life such as the absence of the serving member and relocation logistics.
- ❖ Difficulties negotiating flexible or preferred hours to meet family responsibilities.
- ❖ Finding suitable childcare (availability and affordability).
- ❖ Difficulty returning to work after long absences from the workforce (e.g. due to having children; overseas postings)
- ❖ Difficulties transferring current job to another location
- ❖ Long commute times between home and place of work (keeping in mind Defence housing solutions are usually located close to Bases and there is an expectation that ADF families will live close to the Member's posted Base location).
- ❖ Inadequate pay for available jobs
- ❖ Acquiring cumulative workplace benefits such as long service leave and superannuation.
- ❖ Language difficulties

⁹ This list is compiled from various reports on the topic and discussions with many individuals and organisations familiar with this topic.

Discussion of selected challenges

Relocation

Relocation is a challenge itself and also a contributing factor to other challenges. As discussed, relocation is a common feature of military life. A US qualitative study reported that frequent moves were the primary reason for the perceived negative impact of military life on spouse work opportunities [34].

Relocation often means resigning from one job and looking for another, which can prove challenging for many spouses particularly when relocating to areas with high unemployment, or to states or countries where licencing or work permits delay or prohibit employment. The average length of time out of the workforce due to a service-related relocation for spouses in Australia is 5.4 months, and over half of spouses earn less in their new job [18]. In the US, the majority of spouses in one study were out of work for between 1 and 7 months with 27% out of work for more than 10 months [30]. A 2016 RAND report found that Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves negatively impact spouse wages with the average wage loss in the year of the move being 14% (higher for those with children), and that lower earnings persist for 2 years after the move [42].

Moving between jobs every 2-5 years also has longer-term effects such as cumulative wage losses, and the lack of opportunity to accrue longer-term benefits such as long service leave and superannuation. Moving frequently between jobs also hinders or prevents professional development and promotion opportunities; a common complaint is that a spouse has to 'start over' at the bottom every time they relocate. Both the 2011 Census and the 2014 DFA survey indicated that finding similar employment in the new location at the same level and or/pay scale is difficult for many spouses [18, 43].

Frequent relocations are also a barrier to securing employment due to reported reluctance of employers to hire someone with multiple short-term jobs, periods in and out of paid employment, and/or periods of employment outside the field of employment they are applying to (see discussion on employer bias below). Military spouse resumes are often far from the ideal that employers and recruiters are seeking via traditional recruiting methods and standards. In addition, being new to an area may mean that the job-seeking spouse doesn't have local connections to facilitate employment, thus placing them at a disadvantage especially if jobs are not formally advertised. The 2015 US Survey of Active Duty Spouses reported that significant barriers to spouse employment included experiencing a service-related relocation within the past year and the frequency of lifetime relocations [30].

Geographic location

Unlike most civilians who relocate for work, military spouses have little choice about when or where they move. Thus they are not 'chasing jobs' but rather having to find work in the geographic

location their service spouse is assigned to. This can prove especially difficult in areas with high unemployment rates and/or low workforce turnover, where licences and registrations are not recognised, where the local job market doesn't align with qualifications and experience, or in the case of some overseas postings, where working is prohibited by local labour laws.

In the 2017 Defence Families Survey over 22% of spouse respondents reported finding it difficult to find work in their current location. Difficulties finding work were most common in regional and remote areas (for example, 50% of spouses posted to the Albury Wodonga region experienced some form of difficulty) although difficulties were not uncommon in major cities (e.g. 26% of respondents posted to Melbourne experienced difficulty). The main reason for experiencing difficulty was high local unemployment rates [7]. As previously discussed, even when spouses do find employment in their chosen field it may not be at the same level of seniority as the previous location or at the same pay level [18, 43].

Australia, Canada and the US have similar geographic sizes that influence spouse employment experiences. Relocation may mean moving large distances away from traditional forms of support networks such as family and friends [44] and to very remote areas which may affect career options. Some families live apart in order to minimise the disruption of relocation, but this experience is likely to be influenced by the geographic distance between the service member and their families. For example, in the UK (with a much smaller geographic size) many Navy families remain in location whilst the service member works Monday to Friday at their posting location and returns home on weekends. Returning home on weekends would not be practical for families separated by large distances such as west coast vs. east coast of USA, Australia or Canada. Thus geographic location is also an influencing factor of methods to offset some of the challenges associated with relocation.

Not all consequences of moving to a new area are negative. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some areas the career opportunities for some spouses are enhanced due to a smaller talent pool for employers to select from and in areas with high transient populations the 3-5 years of military postings may be considered long-term.

Licence portability

Licence portability is a major concern particularly in Canada and the USA, but also to a lesser extent in Australia. Many occupations require licencing or registration, and often the regulatory bodies are state-based; thus licences may not be easily transferable across state and provincial borders. Obviously this is a barrier for employees such as military spouses who relocate across state lines every few years and sometimes more frequently. In Canada for example the regulation of the nursing profession is the mandate of provincial-based regulatory bodies. Katie Ochin from MFS reports that it can be very difficult for nurses to relocate from some provinces to others depending on the requirements of the new province of residence. Licencing is a significant challenge to spouse employment in the USA with its 50 states and large number of regulated occupations. Conversations with key stakeholders in the US indicated that licencing is a significant barrier to employment and it was a key topic presented by Brooke Goldberg at the Hiring Our

Heroes Military Spouse Employment listening session. The 2015 Active Duty Spouse Survey indicated that of the 79% of spouses who experienced a PCS move approximately 14% acquired a new licence, with over half having to wait more than 4 months (and some up to 10+ months) to acquire the new licence [30].

Recently an ADF spouse in Australia gathered over 12,000 signatures in support of national accreditation for Australian teachers and explained that teachers don't just transfer their registration between states – they maintain registrations in different states in case they are posted back there [45].

Licence portability can be problematic in a number of ways: in the ability for a licence in the new state to be granted at all; the cost involved (both transferring and maintaining multiple licences); and the length of time taken to obtain a new licence (especially if further training or exams are undertaken) which means additional time out of the workforce.

Employer attitudes and bias

Employer bias relates to employer assumptions about how long a spouse will remain in the job or what level of commitment they will have to the job given their short tenure and/or other responsibilities such as family. There are also concerns about spouses being looked over for positions because their resumes aren't competitive with other applicants because of patchwork resumes with work histories that contain many different employers or periods out of the workforce. The reluctance of some employers to employ military family members has been recognised in the US, UK and in Canada [26, 46, 47]. Employer bias has been reported in Australia in surveys such as the 2017 Defence Families Survey in which "negative perceptions of Defence partners" was cited by 35% of respondents as a reason for difficulty finding work [7], and anecdotally in online and offline conversations.

Whilst there are documented cases of employer bias against military spouses the suggestion was made more than once during my Fellowship that employer bias may be as much about perceived disadvantage as it is actual. Either way it is cause for concern (see further discussion below on perceived vs. lived challenges).

The costs with sourcing, hiring and replacing staff are valid concerns for businesses. However, in this day and age it is not common for employees to remain with one employer for extended periods of time, and thus bias against military spouses is unwarranted and should be addressed to help both spouses and employers. The Employers Network for Equality states that "*pre-conceptions about military spouses can result in the exclusion of a talented group of people and employers cannot afford to limit the talent pool in any way*"[46]. Many of those I met with during this Fellowship impressed on me that there was still much work to be done in changing the minds of employers, breaking down stereotypes and biases (especially with respect to being transient and less committed than other employees) and promoting the business case of hiring from the military spouse talent pool.

Domestic responsibilities and unpaid work

“Research on military families and gender suggests that in order to function, militaries rely on spouses, most often wives, to undertake the majority of domestic labour, suspend their own careers, and relocate willingly for new postings” Leigh Spanner, University of Alberta [48].

One area I think is overlooked in employment policies and programs is the extent of family and domestic responsibilities carried by military spouses, and the impact of these on work choices. As discussed in the section on ‘Why Military Families are Different’ (p 23-24), frequent and/or lengthy service member absence from home is a common element of military life that can increase the family responsibilities of spouses beyond that of comparable civilians. These absences from home create a ‘solo parenting’ situation for military spouses with children. The 2015 ADF Census reports that the key reason for partners not working was “to stay at home and meet the needs of the family”. It is not clear from this statement if this is a preferred choice or because of a lack of other viable options. Other responses included “my service related absences from home make it difficult for my partner to work”, “to be home when the children are out of school” and “childcare difficulties” [8]. The top two reasons cited by spouses in the UK reporting employment difficulties were 1) have a spouse who is often away and 2) that their partner is unable to assist with care responsibilities [21]. In a US study more than half of US spouses who reported a negative impact of military life on their careers attributed it to the absences of home of the service member [34]. As Spanner reports in her article on the Canadian experience **there is an “expectation that the spouse of the member will take over ‘caregiving’ when the member is away on duty”** [48].

One US study found that deployment reduces spouse labour force participation, and the extent to which it does is influenced by the age of dependent children (with those with children under 6 experienced a great decrease in labour force participation)[49]. The author argues that deployments turn military families into single parent households, and identifies that the decrease in labour force participation begins months prior to the deployment start date and persists for several months after the deployment ends. This decreased labour force participation may be explained by the inability of military spouses to find (or remain in) jobs that have the hours that allow them to meet their family and domestic responsibilities [49] . Childcare is one solution to this problem and presents its own challenges (see further discussion below).

**Deployment
reduces
spouse labour
force
participation**

The Canadian Ombudsman reported that many CF families tried to achieve predictability and stability by the spouse setting aside their professional aspirations and assuming “*a disproportionate parenting role, offsetting the serving spouse’s service-induced limitations*”. He reported that most CF spouses expressed frustration at “*having to make most, if not all, of the professional compromised required to raise a family once children were introduced into the equation*” [26]. The issue is not just that spouses bear a disproportionate amount of domestic responsibilities; it is also that militaries rely on this arrangement to achieve their organisational goals. Spanner reports that the Canadian Forces’ “*reliance on unpaid family members to support personnel...means that a large burden is undertaken by military families*” and that “*non serving*

spouses assume all the household, domestic, and parenting responsibilities” [48]. This is often occurring at a lengthy distance from secondary forms of support such as grandparents and other extended family.

Relocations themselves can increase the domestic responsibilities of military spouses. A RAND report from 2002 reported that “*wives are likely to bear the brunt of the tasks associated with moving to a new location*” resulting in lower labour force participation as a result of the move than their civilian counterparts [50]. Spanner argues that the fact that Canadian Forces don’t adequately support the range of domestic issues which arise from a service-related relocation presumes that the service member has a civilian spouse to take on this labour while the member “*resumes their work duties after a move post-haste*” [48]. In addition, a consistent frustration expressed in one US study was that even when the service member is home the spouse still carries the brunt of the parenting responsibilities because of the ‘greedy’ [44] nature of the military.

There is a gender element to this concern because the majority of military spouses are women. The US 2017 Blue Star Families report found that “*desire and ability to work were impacted by gender-based caretaking expectations*” citing that almost half of male military spouses reported working full time compared to 27% of female respondents, and 50% of female respondents citing impact of family obligations on their career compared to 30% of males [51]. On average in Australia mothers spend more than twice as many hours per week looking after children compared to fathers [52] with the average woman spending 64% of their working week performing unpaid care work which contributes to gender inequality in the workforce (see further discussion in the next section) [53]. Given the extent to which ADF spouses solo parent we can presume that the burden of unpaid work is higher in the ADF spouse population. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has reported that the extent to which mothers can engage in the workforce varies and that “*single mothers face particular difficulties since they don’t have a co-resident parent to share parenting responsibilities*” and that the employment rates of single mothers was lower than that of couples [54]. Given the periods of solo parenting (in the absence of support) the experience of ADF spouses may mimic that of single parents to some extent.

Childcare

Finding suitable childcare is key to managing career ambitions and balancing work and family commitments, and is a concern for military families and others alike. In the 2015 ADF Census 11% of members reported childcare as the reason their civilian partner was unemployed [18]. The 2017 Defence Families Survey reports that whilst childcare accessibility is not a key issue overall, it is in some locations, and is a potential retention issue [7]. Key reasons for difficulties accessing childcare included affordability, availability of places and the hours offered by childcare services. Being new in an area due to a service-related relocation can mean being placed on long waiting lists for a place, or for a place that aligns with preferred days and hours, or at a conveniently located centre. The absence from home of the serving member means that spouses whose preferred job means working outside standard childcare hours (e.g. nurses) are limited as they are often solo parents without a partner to drop off or collect children on time. Spanner reports that “*military families have difficulty accessing adequate childcare due to the unique schedules*

associated with the military lifestyle, namely shifting schedules and inability to plan" and that whilst balancing income and childcare is a concern that many families have to deal with, military spouses may have "particular and additional challenges" due to military separation and mobility. The affordability of childcare is an issue particularly for underemployed spouses who aren't meeting their earning potential. The importance of accessible, affordable, quality childcare was raised several times in conversation throughout my Churchill Fellowship.

Language

Language was a unique challenge raised in Canada. Canada has two national languages (English and French) and the ability to speak both languages fluently can influence employability. For example, it is mandatory in most government jobs that employees speak both languages. Some spouses may only speak one language which makes them employable in one province but not in another (the example given during my conversations with MFS was a spouse native to Quebec Province who only speaks French may not have a problem finding work in Quebec but would in other provinces when his/her service spouse is relocated).

WHY IT MATTERS

"Spouse unemployment and underemployment is a quality of life, ADF workforce capability, national security, gender equality and labour force participation issue"

The unemployment, underemployment and career discontent amongst military spouses has implications for individuals, families, the military, employers and the economy. It is a quality of life, ADF workforce capability, national security, gender equality and national labour force participation issue.

Financial Stability and Security

Improved financial circumstances are an obvious benefit of employment to individuals and their families. Multiple periods of unemployment, wage losses associated with relocation and being underemployed have a negative impact on a spouse's income. Not surprisingly, one small Australian study (by Trewick and Muller) has shown that employed ADF spouses experienced less financial strain than unemployed spouses [55]. The recent 2017 Defence Families Survey reported that satisfaction with financial security was lowest amongst partners of ADF members and much lower than that reported by dual ADF couples indicating that civilian partners of ADF members are more vulnerable to financial strain [7]. The 2015 Blue Star Families survey in the US reported that 51% of those surveyed cited spouse unemployment or underemployment as a primary obstacle to financial security [32].

In addition to the immediate financial disadvantages of unemployment and underemployment there are some long term financial consequences for those who engage in less paid work [56], such as the lack of accumulation of leave and superannuation benefits. In 2015-2016 the average Australian woman was reaching retirement with an average of \$113,660 less superannuation than the average male which places them at greater risk of poverty in their retirement age [53]. If the

predominately female military spouse population are facing additional employment challenges resulting in higher rates of unemployment, underemployment or disengagement from the labour force then they will be at an even greater financial disadvantage and risk.

Financial independence is also a protective factor for risky behaviours and situations. One situation that should be considered is family violence. One in five Australian women have experienced violence by a partner [53]. Whilst 2/3 of female domestic violence victims are in paid employment the Australian Human Rights Commission states “*it is known that employment plays a critical role in assisting victims and survivors of domestic and family violence to leave their violent relationships*” [57]. It also provides social interaction and formal and informal support mechanisms for victims.

Changing Family Norms and Expectations

Dual-income families are becoming increasingly more common in Australia and similar countries. One of the significant changes that has occurred within Australian families over recent decades has been the increase in maternal employment [54]. The 2013 AIFIS study reveals that in 2011 the majority of Australian families with children under 18 had two working parents (in various combinations of full time and part time employment). At the recent Hiring our Heroes Military Spouse Employment Summit Dr Jill Biden (former Second Lady) stated that in “*today's world, military and civilian alike most families need two incomes to get by*”. Elizabeth O'Brien from Hiring our Heroes recently highlighted on social media that the majority of families in the US are dual-income but military families are not afforded that same opportunity. Dual incomes may help families better afford living expenses, increase expendable income and better enable saving and investing for the future (also see discussion on Transition). The Canadian ‘On the Homefront’ report states: “*The employment quandary of CF families is in stark contrast with the prevailing trend in Canadian society, whereby both partners in a family construct are generally positioned to pursue careers or continuous, coherent employment*” [26].

Quality of life

(i) Contribution of work to wellbeing

Work impacts health and wellbeing. Waddell and Burton report that, in addition to providing the resources essential to wellbeing, “*work meets important psychosocial needs in societies where employment is the norm; work is central to individual identity, social roles and social status*” [58].

Two of the key assumptions of the Psychology of Working Framework are that “work is an essential component of mental health” and that “working has the potential to fulfil three

“Work is an essential component of mental health”

fundamental human needs – the need for survival and power; the need for social connection; and the need for self-determination” [59]. An analysis of Australian household data revealed that unemployed respondents had poorer mental health than those who were employed [60]. In addition, this and other studies have shown that underemployment (in terms of hours worked) or poor quality work can be a bigger health risk than unemployment [61],

62]. The Australian government acknowledges the economic, social and health benefits of work in its report on increasing women's workforce participation [63].

The Trewick and Muller study concluded that those **spouses who were employed experienced better health, better quality relationships and higher levels of psychological wellbeing than those who were unemployed**, and that unemployed spouses were deprived of the non-financial benefits of working such as time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and activity [55].

Thus, the unemployment and underemployment reported in military spouse populations around the world are cause for concern in terms of mental health. A US study concluded that career and professional development is one of two best opportunities for improving spouse quality of life [34]. Findings from the Australian Timor Leste Family study suggest that ADF spouse satisfaction with their own employment should be examined as an indicator of wellbeing [64].

Career and professional development is one of two best opportunities for improving spouse quality of life
- Castaneda and Harrell 2008

The Canadian Ombudsman highlighted a contradiction between the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence's emphasis on the importance of 'strong, independent families' and an employment situation (apparently accepted by the institution) that "*has left many non-serving spouses feeling dependent, peripheral and unfulfilled*" [26].

Opportunities to meet and talk with military spouses throughout my Churchill Fellowship reinforced the link between meaningful employment and quality of life. There are many stories throughout military spouse communities in Australia, UK, USA and Canada of poor mental health outcomes from unemployment and underemployment and conversely of the positive outcomes associated with meaningful employment.

(ii) Separation of families

Some military families try to minimise disruption caused by relocation by living apart. In the 2015 ADF Families Study spouse employment was the number one reason for families choosing to live apart with over 55% citing it as the reason for choosing to be Member with Dependents (Unaccompanied) (MWDU) [65]. The most reported positive of MWDU was retaining spouse employment. In the UK 1/4 of military families surveyed in the FAMCAS don't live together [21]. Discussions in the UK during my visit revealed it is common for Royal Navy families to live apart during the week with the service member returning home on weekends. In Canada the arrangement is called 'Imposed Restriction' and in the US 'homesteading'. Whilst living apart minimises disruption due to relocation for those with children (the majority of families) it places additional domestic responsibilities on the spouse and essentially creates a single parent family. On top of the additional domestic responsibilities the absence from home of the service member absence has, there is an emotional impact that needs to be factored in. For example, 75% of Australian MWDU families reported missing their partner and feeling like leading separate lives [65]. The 2014 DFA Survey reported that 73% of respondents said that being MWDU had a

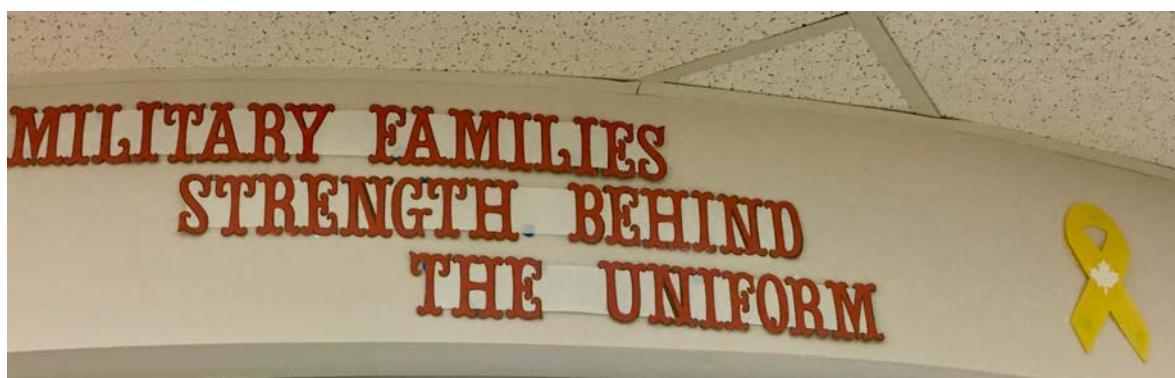
negative impact on their family [43]. The overwhelming majority of US spouses reported some form of loneliness and having to deal with issues/decisions alone and dealing with emotional problems in the family during service member absences from home [30].

Moral Obligation

As discussed throughout this report it is widely acknowledged that service life is unique, and that it presents families with challenges. It is acknowledged by political leaders that these are not trivial and that partner employment has increased in importance and difficulty over recent years [66]. The evidence we have indicates that unemployment and underemployment are higher as a result of military life and that unemployment, underemployment and lower workforce participation have serious financial and health and wellbeing consequences for individuals and their families. Work is an important part of life and a recognised social determinant of health, and has the potential to fulfil essential needs such as survival and power, social connection and self-determination [59]. Australian psychologist and career development researcher Dr. Peter McIlveen opines that work is a human right because "*it creates the identities of who we are in our communities*" [67]. Without providing an in-depth philosophical argument, when these benefits and rights are challenged as a result of military life to the detriment of individuals and families there is a case to be made for the moral obligation of defence forces and governments to address the situation to the best of their ability as part of their duty of care to an all-volunteer force of service members and families and in acknowledgment of the important role families play.

Military recruitment, retention, capability and national security

"In the all-volunteer military force, successful recruiting and retention of active duty personnel rely on the ability of the military to afford both service members and their spouses job satisfaction and contentment with all facets of life"- Castaneda and Harrell (2008) [34].



Sign in the reception area of Petawawa Military Family Resource Centre Southside Community Centre.

In a rapidly evolving and competitive job market, armed forces in Australia, UK, USA and Canada need to be an attractive employer in order to recruit, develop and retain the skilled personnel they require to be operationally effective and deliver defence capability and national security [68-70]. In 2014-15 Australia spent \$8.8b (30% of its budget) on ADF personnel; it is a significant national investment [71]. The Australian Department of Defence has articulated that the quality of its people is the foundation of capability, effectiveness and reputation; the 2016 White Paper states,

"attracting and retaining the future Defence workforce will be a major challenge. Being an employer of choice for Australians in a more competitive labour market will require fundamental changes" [68].

Not only will the workforce grow in coming years [68] but there will be greater emphasis on gaining and developing the right skill sets as work becomes more technologically advanced. The First Principles Review articulates the necessity for a strategic workforce plan to develop a highly professional workforce with the necessary skills for today and the future [71]. Defence will be recruiting already-skilled and experienced people and recruiting people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds [68] (some from collective rather than individualistic cultures) and thus family commitments including spouse employment are likely to be an important factor in the attractiveness of the ADF 'offer'.

The financial, health and wellbeing effects discussed above significantly impact the quality of life of military families and are therefore important factors in the attractiveness of the military as a career – especially given the large percentage of military personnel in all countries who are married and/or have family responsibilities. The ADF wants to attract the 'best and brightest' but these individuals often attract, and are attracted to, other 'best and brightest'. Thus in order to be 'an employer of choice' and recruit and retain the people it needs (particularly as it seeks greater diversity) Defence needs to be attractive to couples not just individuals. If military life doesn't offer both individuals the opportunity to pursue satisfying, meaningful career and personal lives and financial stability then the military is unlikely to look like an attractive option in a competitive labour market. Investing in better support for spouse employment is an opportunity to make a fundamental change to make Defence a more appealing employment choice in a highly competitive labour market.

The 2017 Defence Families Survey reports that of the five factors influencing a spouse's preference for the member to leave the ADF, three reflected perceptions of conflict between the needs of the ADF and the needs of families. In the last five years two family-related factors have featured consistently among the top 10 reasons for leaving among transitioning ADF members. The 2017 ADF Families Survey reported that it was clear from the findings that '*partners expect acknowledgement that, in their families, their career is as important as that of the ADF members'* and that family perceptions about not being considered in postings emerged as a retention factor [7].

The situation is similar in the UK where the impact of service life on family and personal life is the top factor influencing intentions to leave [40]. In Canada 'spousal employment' is the top reported challenge for CAF families (as selected by CAF spouses) [24]. General Everheart II (head of USAF's Air Mobility Command) is facing an ongoing shortage of pilots and competes with the commercial

Investing in better support for spouse employment is an opportunity to make a fundamental change to make Defence more appealing in a highly competitive labour market.

Partners expect acknowledgement that their career is as important as that of the ADF members

sector for retaining personnel (a challenge also faced by the ADF). He states that “*One thing is increasingly clear: if Airmen stay or elect to depart the service, it is usually a family decision*”. He has identified the education of military children and the employment of military spouses as two influencing quality of life factors in his article “*‘Family First’ Approach Key to Addressing Pilot Shortage*”[72].

Family readiness also impacts military readiness and performance [69] so financial and family health and wellbeing are not only important factors for recruitment and retention but also for readiness and operational effectiveness. Both the military and military families have been described as ‘greedy’ institutions that are both very demanding of the service member and both of whom are in competition for the member’s commitment [44]. As described above this may result in the service member separating from the military, but even if it doesn’t this pressure on the service member is likely to affect both their quality of life and job performance. It is not unreasonable to assume that serving members with a high quality of family health, wellbeing and quality of life are more likely to be more prepared, focused and ready and be able to positively contribute to the morale, operational readiness and capability of the military

The UK, US, and Canadian governments explicitly recognise that family quality of life concerns, including spouse employment, affect this workforce capability and hence national security. All have implemented policies and programs to improve recruitment and retention by addressing conditions of service (see Chapter 3).

Transition and Retirement

Spouse employment has the potential to facilitate the successful transition of Service members to the civilian workforce whether planned or unplanned. Due to the spouse employment challenges discussed, many ADF families are heavily reliant on the steady, predictable income of the serving member and benefits such as subsidized housing thus transition from the ADF presents a significant financial consideration. As discussed above, dual incomes over time enhance opportunities to save and invest for the future and can make a significant contribution to financial readiness for separation or retirement. Families with an employed spouse and a savings nest egg will have financial piece of mind when separation or retirement from military service occurs and will have the means to endure potential periods of unemployment or loss of earnings for the transitioning member.

*“spousal
employment
can be a
crucial part of
a successful
transition to
civilian life”*

As Ms Deanie Dempsey (wife of former US Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff in the US General Martin Dempsey) said of the US military:

“Steadily employed spouses will help the country transition its young heroes to the civilian workforce...Fewer would suffer financial crises if their spouses were gainfully employed, and particularly so if they were able to save and invest that second income over the course of their service” [73]

The UK Centre for Social Justice report stated:

“spousal employment can be a crucial part of a successful transition to civilian life for some military families. The stability provided by a second income, combined with the support of social networks that come as part of working, give families more resilience at a time of change.” [74]

and the UK Forces in Mind Trust:

“Service leavers whose spouses were already in employment tended to fare better”
[75]

Spouse employment is forming part of transition discussions in the UK.

In addition, given the mental health benefits of employment, spouse employment also contributes to family health and wellbeing, and healthy families are more likely to provide ADF members and families with supportive circumstances in which to transition, thus increasing chances of success.

Further discussion about the contribution of spouse employment to transition can be found in my submission to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Transition from the Australian Defence Force* [76].

Workforce Underutilisation and Gender Equality

There are widespread benefits of career development being recognised by OECD countries – including increased labour participation, improved productive capacity, increased tax revenue, improved health and associated reduction in health care burdens and improved social equity [1, 77]. In 2013 the then Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations articulated its long-term vision of a National Career Development Strategy as:

“All Australians have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to manage their careers throughout life to support their individual wellbeing and participation in the workforce and contribute to Australia’s productivity” [78].

Given the importance of career development for Australians in general it is particularly important for those facing additional challenges.

Unemployed, underemployed and spouses not participating in the labour market represent an underutilised section of working age citizens. This is particularly disheartening given the educational qualifications, skills and attributes that can be found within military spouse populations. It is of little benefit to a country to have a skilled workforce wanting to work, or work more, reporting unemployment or underemployment or not being able to engage in the labour market to the extent that they wish.

Military spouses in Australia, UK, USA and Canada are overwhelming female and women in Australia and other parts of the world face inequality and discrimination. Whilst women make up

47% of the Australian workforce they take home less money and Australia has a national gender pay gap of 15.3%. Female-dominated industries such as aged care, childcare and health and community services have been historically undervalued. Superannuation is another area of inequality with the average Australian women retiring with over \$100,000 less than the average male; in 2015-16 the average superannuation balances for women aged 60-64 were just over half that of men [53]. Advancing gender equality including reducing the gender pay gap is a priority for Australia. The current Australian government has identified supporting women in the workforce in general as “an economic and social priority” because it is “good for women, families, businesses and our economy” [63]. Employment offers women and families financial security and savings for retirement. It has identified that boosting women’s workforce participation is essential to securing Australia’s future prosperity. As such it has outlined efforts the government is taking to increase the opportunities for women to work *if that is their choice* (emphasis added) [63].

Military spouse employment should be considered a priority as a gender equality issue

One hundred and ninety three United Nations Member States including Australia have agreed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [79]. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include #5 gender equality:

- 5.4 recognising and valuing unpaid and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate and
- 5.5 ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunity for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.

Australia is committed to achieving these goals both within and outside of Australia. The voluntary review of Australia’s progress against the SDGs acknowledges that deeply-ingrained attitudes and stereotypes surrounding women and their role in the workplace and society present barriers to full participation and wellbeing and articulates that **boosting women’s workforce participation is an economic and social priority [80]**. Australia has committed to G20 efforts to reduce the gender participation gap by 25% by 2025. It is acknowledged that economic participation and leadership pathways may be more difficult for particular cohorts of women who experience additional or different barriers and I propose that military spouses can be considered one of these cohorts.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) states that to achieve gender equality in the workforce requires the removal of barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce. Given that the majority of military spouses are female and shoulder the majority of unpaid domestic work in military families, and that the military is acknowledged as a “greedy” institution [44] and is unique in what it demands of its members and their families that **military spouse employment should be considered a priority as a gender equality issue**.

Conclusion

The military lifestyle is unique due to the combination of hallmark factors such as relocation, separation and risk. Evidence suggests because of this unique lifestyle the employment and career development of military spouses is compromised and marked by unacceptable levels of unemployment, underemployment and career discontent. The impacts are concerning and wide-reaching affecting not just individual spouses but their families, the Australian Defence Force and Australian society.

Chapter 3

Addressing the Issue Australia, UK, USA and Canada

CURRENT SUPPORT IN AUSTRALIA

Defence Policy and Research

The Defence Family Support Policy states that families make a positive contribution to the morale, performance and retention of service members and that accordingly the ADF “accepts an obligation to assist” in providing support [38]. Defence aims to support families in five key areas:

- Critical incident and casualty support
- Mobility support
- Absence from home support
- Community capacity building
- Working with Command to meet its responsibilities and obligations to members and families

Defence provides some career support to ADF spouses (which has changed several times over the years (see Chapter 1)) as part of Mobility Support. As well as providing individuals with assistance its aim is to strengthen the capability of the ADF and aid the retention of members.

Research has addressed spouse employment as early as the Hamilton Report (see Introduction and Background) [3]. The ADF Census and Defence Families Studies have provided some quantitative and qualitative data on the employment status and experiences of ADF spouses. There have also a small number of external studies that have included information on employment. Overall, the available data on employment status and experience of ADF spouses is limited and there have been no large-scale formal research projects undertaken specifically on the topic.

The ADF Family Covenant acknowledges the contribution of Defence families to Defence and makes a commitment to listening to ADF families and their emerging needs [81] and thus provides a basis from which to appeal for greater assistance.

Defence Community Organisation Programs

Current support is provided in the form of the Partner Employment Assistance Program (PEAP) administered by the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) and local workshops.

The PEAP program is aimed “*at assisting partners to improve the probability of securing employment when posted to a new location as a consequence of their Defence partner’s military service*”. As part of Defence mobility support it is specifically tied to relocation. Under the program ADF partners can apply for funding for up to \$1500 in funding to access professional employment services such as coaching, resume writing and interview preparation [6]. Spouses can apply for funding as soon as a posting order is issued and then any time within 12 months of the effective posting date (previous programs allowed 2 years). PEAP is not a statutory benefit and is available only to eligible spouses in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the policy document. Funding is subject to availability.

Some local DCO offices conduct spouse/partner employment workshops with guest speakers covering topics that may include info on PEAP, how career service providers can assist, how volunteering can help gain employment, local labour market information, services provided by non-profit organisations and other topics relevant to the local area.

Awareness of career and employment support amongst the Defence community is problematic (a theme common across the countries I visited). The 2017 Families Survey reported that awareness of support such as employment agencies, the DCO program, coaching and resume development was low, with the majority unaware of the support available. Only a very small minority (5% or less) had used these services and found them useful (see p20 of the survey report). More than half of survey respondents weren’t aware of DCO’s (previous) program to assist with employment, 34% were aware of it but hadn’t used it and only a staggeringly small 4% overall had used it and found it helpful [7]. Clearly there is more that can be done in both providing good quality services and linking spouses with them.

Defence Community Groups

Defence maintains a number of community centres and neighbourhood houses around Australia. These are incorporated not-for-profit groups who are run by an elected committee who can access funding from the Defence Family Support Funding Program (FSFP). A number of groups and centres offer ad hoc employment and career service programs such as resume writing workshops, job search strategies, interview techniques and other job readiness resources.

Defence Families of Australia <http://www.dfa.org.au>

Defence Families of Australia are the officially appointed representative of ADF families. Spouse/partner employment has been a key advocacy concern of DFA’s for a number of years.

In their 2016/17 Agenda DFA reported that they had interviewed a variety of organisations and businesses over a 6 month period to discover more about what is being done or could be done for partners and aimed to release a report to Defence that year [66]. Given initiatives such as the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Program were established in this time, DFA decided not to release a report, but rather keep talking to stakeholders operating in this evolving space. DFA used

their learning to formulate partner employment questions in the 2017 ADF Families Survey, thus expanding the knowledge base around this issue.

In 2018, Defence Families of Australia continue to advocate on behalf of ADF families on this issue and are in regular discussions with Defence on the topic. This year DFA created a checklist¹⁰ to act as a gold standard for employers to be identified as “Defence Partner Friendly” as part of a campaign to educate employers of both the skill set of the military spouse community and the employment challenges they face. DFA recently published this checklist on their website [82]. Five companies who sit on the Prime Minister’s Veteran Employment Industry Advisory Council (see below) have agreed to the checklist, and DFA have included links to these companies on their website. DFA do not consider this a permanent solution but rather an interim measure to fill what they identify as a gap in services i.e. a connection between spouses and employers.

Ex-Service and Veteran Organisations and other services

ADF spouses also have access to some services provided by veteran organisations such as Soldier On and RSL Queensland. Soldier On employment and education programs are primarily aimed at veterans and emergency services personnel (and are extended to spouses). The Soldier On program includes a job board, support for job readiness, training programs, networking events with employers and a pledge signed by just over 50 companies to support the veteran community via employment opportunities. RSL Queensland has launched a new program in 2018 for ADF spouses located in Queensland. This program provides career counselling, training and development, skills translation, job application assistance and connection to employers [83]. In addition some private companies and career practitioners (such as myself) provide career services specifically for veterans and military spouses (which may be funded by PEAP, paid for by clients or provided for free) and there are some recruitment firms such as Enabled Employment (who originally partnered with Soldier On) who assist ex-ADF members and their families as part of their clientele.

Defence Housing Australia

Defence Housing Australia (DHA), who manages housing for ADF families, supports tenants in operating a business from home. Applications to do so must be lodged with DHA. However, recent cases have highlighted that approval rests with the owners of the properties (DHA lease many properties from owners) which has recently prevented some spouses from continuing their businesses in their new posting location. A 3-year initiative beginning this year is being trialled at the Puckapunyal Military Area. Puckapunyal is one of the few military bases that has a significant number of Service Residences located on base. Employment options in the immediate area of Puckapunyal are limited as are public transport options to surrounding areas with more employment. Members can now reject a suitable offer of a Service Residence in the area based on confirmed spouse employment or study [84].

Flexible work policies within Defence and the Total Workforce Model

¹⁰ A project I was heavily involved in as a consultant

The ADF currently has some flexible work arrangements (FWA) in place such as working from home or working non-standard core hours (although the nature of many ADF jobs makes these often difficult to take advantage of). A Defence-wide approach to addressing flexible work forms part of the APS Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2019 Defence Action Plan [85].

Recently, the ADF have developed a new model of employment called the Total Workforce Model (TWM) [86]. According to the website the ADF want to support the need for flexibility without reducing military capability. It is designed to better enable mobility across full-time and part-time service categories as personal circumstances change and to offer improved access to flexible career options. As discussed in this report flexible work practices are essential for allowing dual-income families to balance work and family responsibilities.

Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program

In 2016 the Prime Minister launched the [Prime Minister's Veteran Employment Program](#) that focuses on raising awareness amongst employers (public and private sector) of the value and unique experience of veterans. As part of the program an Industry Advisory Committee was established to "develop practical measures to embed veterans' employment strategies into recruitment practices of Australian businesses". Included in the eight terms of reference is one that addresses spouse employment: #7 'Examine whether there is scope to encourage businesses to employ the spouses of serving Australian Defence Force members', and spouse employment has been identified as one of five key areas of focus [5]. The council met most recently in June 2018 but there have been no public announcements regarding outcomes. Whilst the inclusion of spouse employment is very much welcomed the program (based on the program title, terms of reference and website URL, marketing and media communications) appears overwhelmingly focused on veteran employment.

Part of the program includes the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards that "recognise the achievements of companies, organisations and individuals in creating employment opportunities for veterans and supporting their transition into the civilian workforce". The inaugural awards were held in March this year and included a category called the "Veteran Employment Program Excellence in Supporting Spouse Employment".

WHAT IS HAPPENING OVERSEAS

The aim of this Churchill Fellowship was to learn about the career experiences of military spouses overseas and to view first hand what policies and programs are in place to address the career challenges experienced by military spouses in countries similar to Australia. I met with a range of government, not-for-profit, for-profit and social enterprises in the UK, Canada and the USA to learn more about policies and programs in place to assist spouses. The following is a reflection of what I learned from my Fellowship. It is by no means a comprehensive review of all policies and programs in place overseas.

UNITED KINGDOM



Legislation, Policy and Research

Lisa Ireland generously met with me at the MOD for a morning of discussions about the policies and services provided by the MOD to address spouse employment challenges.

In the UK the basis of current policies to address spouse employment are

- 1) The negative effect on retention of UK Armed Forces personnel and
- 2) The responsibility to ensure that UK Armed Forces personnel and families are treated fairly and not disadvantaged compared to other citizens as a result of their military service.



Lisa Ireland and Amanda McCue at MOD London

There has been recognition of spouse employment issues by the MOD for many years (as far back as the troubles in Northern Ireland). In 2008 the government-of-the-day produced the first ever cross-Government strategy for supporting Armed Forces personnel, their families and veterans '*The Nation's Commitment – Cross Government Support for our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*' (also referred to as the '*Service Personnel Command Paper*' [87]). This report stated that the Armed Forces are crucial to national security and acknowledged the unique nature of military service and the impact Service life has on families, and in turn the impact that the challenges faced by Service families has on the Armed Forces' ability to recruit and retain its people. The report stated "*many serving personnel and their families are finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile life in the Armed Forces with their expectations of a normal life. The impact of this is considerable, particularly on families. We underestimate it at our peril*". The starting point to the MOD response is that "Government has a moral obligation, on behalf of the nation, to honour its responsibility toward its Armed Forces. *The essential starting point is that those who serve must not be*

disadvantaged by virtue of what they do". One of the measures introduced in this report was 'service family access to employment programs' in response to the acknowledgement that Service life reduces the ability of family members to obtain paid employment.

The Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce met between 2009-10 to "examine ways in which additional help to enhance employment and training opportunities for Service families could be provided, and to trigger interventions and initiatives that will have a tangible impact in providing better support" [88]. The intent was to find ways in which Service families could be given the same opportunities as civilians in accessing employment, education and training i.e. to minimize disadvantage.

When the Labour Government lost power in 2010 the Coalition replaced the cross-government strategy with the Armed Forces Covenant but maintained the principle of minimising disadvantage. The Armed Forces Covenant is "***a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly***". It is an agreement between the Armed Forces community, the nation and the government and expresses the moral obligation the country has to the Armed Forces community [89] and specifies that those who serve or have served and their families "*should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services*". The Covenant's underlying principles were embedded in law in 2011 and there is mandatory reporting required as part of the Armed Forces Act 2011[90]. Each year the Secretary of State must report to Parliament the effects that military service has on Service members, their families and veterans and address matters of disadvantage. Businesses and community groups wishing to express their commitment to supporting the Armed Forces Community can sign the Covenant.

The 2010 Strategic Defence Review and the introduction of the New Employment Model Programme (NEM) prompted current spousal employment activities. The NEM was a comprehensive analysis of military terms and conditions of service resulting in a revised model [91]. Spouse employment was identified as a risk to retention (based on the results from the AFCAS and the identification of spouse employment in the top 5 reasons for considering leaving the Armed Forces) and thus cause for concern. In order to provide families with greater stability the MOD introduced the Partner Employment Programme in 2015 as part of the NEM and partnered with a number of external organisations to deliver initiatives to support and enable military spouse employment (see discussion of programs below) [92, 93].



The recently released, first ever, UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy 2016-2020 sets out the current approach to Service families and provides guidance for MOD policy officials [70]. The Strategic Defence and Security Review placed the recruitment and retention of personnel as a Defence priority. The Chief of Defence People states in the Families' Strategy that the UK Armed Forces must make the most of the talents of those who work for them and that in order for personnel to fully deliver their tasks they need the support of their families and need to be confident that their families are supported. Partner Employment makes up the first of seven priority areas of the current "offer" to Service Families based on the evidence that suggests "*that one of the key 'push' factors for Service personnel deciding to leave the Services is the difficulty experienced by their partner in finding employment.*" As such, the strategy articulates that in line with the commitment to recruit and retain capable and motivated Service personnel, "*we will work to ensure partners are able to draw on the appropriate and necessary support* (which might include training) *to find employment, up skill or become self-employed.*" Lisa Ireland from the MOD explained that as part of the Families Strategy the MOD established the Partner Employment Steering group (which the MOD chairs) that convenes representatives from the Services, Families Federations, and external stakeholders to collaboratively address spousal employment, expand the knowledge base and increase understanding of the issue [94].

There are also policies outside of Defence that relate to spouse employment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provide employment assistance via Jobcentre Plus services. As part of the Armed Forces Covenant the DWP has initiatives that help Armed Forces members, families and veterans. All military spouses have access to the full range of Jobcentre Plus services. In addition, it is Job Centre Plus policy that military spouses who leave employment as a result of a service-related relocation "will have 'just cause' for leaving that employment provided they did not leave earlier than was reasonably necessary in order to arrange the move" i.e. they are not considered to be "voluntarily unemployed"[95].

New legislation in the UK also indirectly supports spouse employment in its efforts to recruit and retain personnel. The Flexible Working Act which allows some military personnel to service part time and restrict the amount of time away from home has been introduced to "*make it significantly easier for our dedicated Armed Forces to raise their children, care for elderly relatives, or look after an ill family member*" [96]. It was introduced in response to MOD surveys that consistently report that the impact of service on family and personal life as the most important factor influencing decisions to leave the Armed Forces. The MOD acknowledge that 96% of UK employers already offer flexible working arrangements and that research has found that offering flexible work encourages people to remain with employers.

Official data on UK Armed Forces personnel and their families is collected via the annual Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) and the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS). Data from these studies is used to inform policy development and measure impact of decisions on personnel and families.

Kings College also undertakes research on UK Armed Forces families at the King's Centre for Military Health Research. I met with researcher Dr Rachel Gribble who has undertaken several studies on military family health and wellbeing that have included aspects on spouse employment.

Recently the University of Warwick's Institute for Employment research conducted research on spouse employment on behalf of the Army Families Federation "to analyse the factors shaping the employment of military spouses/partners and to formulate recommendations for effective support services"[22]. I met with research lead Dr Clare Lyonette as part of my Fellowship. The research project involved a literature review, 14 key stakeholder interviews, an online survey of 1491 spouses, 32 telephone interviews with military spouses and a short online survey of 38 employers. The report was published in June 2018 and can be found at:



<https://aff.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Employment-Research-report-ONLINE-COPY.pdf>.

The key findings of the project were [22]:

- ❖ That similar proportions of civilian and military spouses are in employment
- ❖ Military spouses often choose portable jobs
- ❖ Self-employment amongst military spouses is gaining in popularity
- ❖ The main barriers to military spousal employment centre around childcare; postings and deployment; ability to keep up with training and professional development; lack of (re)training opportunities; having to change career path; and MOD reluctance to support military spouses/partners and the general military culture
- ❖ Spouses with young children face more challenges in gaining and maintaining employment.
- ❖ Spouses with higher qualifications face more barriers in maintaining a career

The recommendations in the report include:

- Introduce a new online jobs platform for spouses
- Provide information and dissemination of the benefits of new ways of working to employers
- Require more evidence of adherence to the Armed Forces Covenant by employers
- Provide priority recruitment of military spouses for military-related jobs
- Introduce local training partnerships and more tailored training programmes
- Challenge employer stereotypes

The list of recommendations is broad and includes some very positive suggestions although some of these recommendations appear to be initiatives already undertaken by other programs.

UK Programs and Services

Partner Employment Steering Group

The Partner Employment Steering Group was created as part of the Armed Forces Family Strategy and aims for a collaborative approach to addressing spouse employment concerns. It is chaired by the MOD Head Office and meets regularly to discuss the military spouse landscape. Membership consists of:

- 3 Service Representatives
- A Joint Forces Command Representative
- The 3 families federations (Army, Navy, Air Force)
- Defence Relationship Management
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Career Transition Partnership (CTP)
- Anglia Ruskin University
- Kings College
- Recruit for Spouses
- RBLI Lifeworks
- Wolverhampton University

The Armed Forces Covenant and Defence Relationship Management

The Armed Forces Covenant is “*a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly*”. The Covenant can be signed by businesses, charitable organisations, local authorities, and public sector organisations.

Organisations can make a range of pledges/promises to support members of the armed forces community. Supporting the employment of veterans and service spouses/partners is a featured the website and includes the following suggestions [97]:

- Focus recruiting efforts on the Armed Forces community, such as advertising through ‘service-friendly’ recruitment agencies and service charities
- Offer guaranteed interviews to spouses/partners if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert
- Committing to attempt to find alternative employment within the business in another location if they need to accompany their partner
- Look sympathetically on requests for holidays before, during or after a partner’s overseas deployment, when the service person has leave to spend time with their family
- Consider whether special paid leave is appropriate for employees who are bereaved or whose loved ones are injured

Defence Relationship Management (DRM) offers advice and support to Industry on employing members of the armed forces community, and enables organisations to develop a mutually

beneficial working relationship with the MOD. DRM continues Defence's work with reservists, their employers, and those organisations who want to partner with defence.

DRM works with national employers to:

- Promote the employment of spouses/civil partners of Service personnel
- Encourage the in-business transfer of posts during times of relocation due to Service needs
- Look sympathetically on requests for leave before, during or after a partner's overseas deployment in order for the service person to spend time with their family.

A number of companies have made standard and bespoke pledges in support of spousal employment e.g National Express who have extended their guaranteed interview scheme to Service spouses and partners (subject to meeting minimum criteria).

Partner Employment Program

As part of the New Employment Model (NEM) the MOD teamed up with a number of organisations to address spouse employment barriers. The programme consisted of the Spouse Employment Support Trial, Lifeworks Families and the Business Start-Up Programme [93] :

MOD Spouse Employment Support Trial

The Spouse Employment Support Trial ran between October 2015 and October 2017 and was delivered by Career Transition Partnership (CTP) on behalf of the MOD. The trial ran in Cyprus and selected UK locations. Each branch of service in the UK is directly responsible for its personnel and families and only the RAF and Joint Forces Command elected to participate in the trial. Its purpose was to "*help support eligible spouses in finding employment that matches their skills, knowledge and experience, and that meets their aspirations and ability*". It involved limited numbers (120 personnel in Cyprus and 200 in the UK) and entry into the program was via application [93, 98, 99].

The program involved a number of elements focused on individual job readiness:

- A meeting or telephone call with a career consultant to develop a Spouse Development Plan
- Job search skills including CV preparation, job search skills, job applications, interview techniques
- Access to the myPlan personalized website with career assessment activities, CV builder, job vacancies etc.
- Webinars and other online resources
- Notification of employment events
- Access to RightJob (a bespoke jobs and job matching database developed for CTP) and access to opportunities with Brook Street (a part of Manpower).
- A taxable training grant for up to 879 pounds

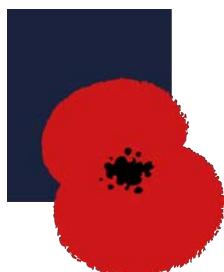
The program was evaluated by Anglia Ruskin University and the final report delivered to the MOD in July 2018. It found that the support built spouse confidence in job-seeking, developed spouses' skills and qualifications and enhanced their potential employability. The training component was highly valued by spouses and considered a crucial aspect of the support package. The evaluation did not prove any impact on retention but spouses did report feeling valued and invested in by the military as a result of the trial. The majority of spouses heard about the trial through HIVE or education centres, word of mouth, online and poster. Almost 90% of trial participants engaged with the provider CTP after registration (although most did not physically attend a workshop) and just over half accessed the training grant. The most popular types of courses accessed were education and childcare; beauty therapy and hair; health and social care; and hobbies, arts and crafts. Over 80% of participants would recommend it to other spouses [75].

spouses reported feeling valued and invested in by the military as a result of the trial

The report includes 8 recommendations:

- The MOD continue to provide support and assistance to help military spouses into the employment market by making the trial program 'practice as usual'
- Establish a stronger relationship between spouses and the military institution by implementing the program or considering other mechanisms that recognise the contributions and sacrifices made by military spouses.
- Provide or facilitate easily accessible childcare and transport options to facilitate employment
- Continue to provide training grants to spouses
- Consider other mechanisms to enable spouses to choose and manage employment-related training opportunities
- Encourage the MOD and other organisations offering employment support and advice to spouses to work together to ensure spouses are aware of the provision and the support available.
- Employers should consider more flexible employment arrangements to mitigate the impacts of mobility and the military lifestyle to capitalise on the important spouse resource.
- Carry out further longitudinal studies to understand the legacy of this trial on participants and to see whether the provision of spouse employment support has any impact on retention of successful transition.

RBLI Lifeworks Families



I met with Lifeworks Families manager Iain Downie during my visit to London. Lifeworks Families is the family version of the Lifeworks Program for veterans. It began in 2013 with the idea planted by a spouse who was accompanying her service member on the veteran course, and it recently formed part of the MOD Partner Employment Program. Since 2013 the course has been delivered to over 1400 attendees. The course is available to all spouses and partners of any serving (or recently discharged) member of the British Armed Forces (permanent and Reserves) and is delivered free of charge. The course delivery

model is a 3-day in person course offered at various locations around the UK and overseas. Alternatively an online course is available. Advice and support is also provided over the phone. It includes a career assessment and feedback session and has a strong focus on identifying and building employability skills. Lifeworks Employability Coaches help spouses identify training opportunities, understand and manage the impact of a change in location or situation, increase confidence and motivation and develop job search skills. Like the veteran program there is a follow up evaluation component to the course that aims to track outcomes and validate the skills development program.

Supporting the Unsung Hero Dependents' Business Start-Up Programme (University of Wolverhampton)

The Supporting the Unsung Hero Dependents' Business Start-Up Programme began in 2013 is delivered by the University of Wolverhampton and funded by HBSC. It is a free 10-month business training and mentoring support program available to dependants of Armed Forces personnel, veterans and reservists. It consists of a 4-day business start up course and monthly individual mentoring sessions. The four-day course (2 days over 2 months) covers business planning, market research, marketing, finance, sales and networking skills. The mentoring sessions with a business advisor are one hour per month via telephone, Skype or face to face [100].

Recruit for Spouses



Recruit for Spouses (RFS) is a social enterprise¹¹ military spouse-run recruitment firm and job readiness provider. I met with founder and CEO Heledd Kendrick prior to my Fellowship and in York during my Churchill Fellowship to discuss her company as well as the history of spouse employment initiatives in the UK. Heledd has been instrumental in raising the issues of military spouse employment in the UK and providing solutions.

Recruit for Spouses was established in 2011 in response to Heledd's recognition that so many spouses (wives in particular) of UK Armed Forces personnel had given up work or their career goals because of military life [101]. Recruit for Spouses works with both spouses (to get them job ready) and with a range of employers (to match spouses with job vacancies and provide employers with a talent solution).

RFS provides spouses with free individual job readiness assistance with CV writing, career coaching, mentoring, webinars and workshops (which it funds via the charitable component of the business, and with the income from the recruitment business). Recruit For Spouses also run a closed social media group social that provides a platform for spouses to network and share information and provide feedback. Recruit For Spouses also works with employers to build mutually beneficial relationships between employers seeking talent solutions and the military

¹¹ A social enterprise business model sells a product or services to an external market in order to help fund other social programs.

spouse talent pool by identifying job vacancies for military spouses and sourcing suitable candidates from their military spouse talent pool. This arm of the business is a traditional business-to-business (B2B) recruitment model where employers pay for the recruitment services provided by Recruit For Spouses. CEO Heledd Kendrick reports that this B2B model is a key strength of the business because employers are comfortable with, and respect doing business with, other businesses, and can see the value in what they are investing in via the transaction.

The social enterprise model of Recruit For Spouses allows the company to fund the job readiness services for spouses from the income generated by the recruitment arm of the business. Recruit For Spouses has helped over 1000 spouses find work.

This year Recruit For Spouses partnered with Google Digital Garage to help spouses build their digital skills. The program offers free workshops, face-to-face coaching and covers topics such as CV writing, social media strategy and empowerment sessions [102].

Recruit for Spouses are a member of the MOD's Partner Employment Steering Group and Heledd is very active in promoting the case for enhanced spousal employment support to the MOD, government ministers and employers. In 2014 Recruit for Spouses worked with the Employer Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI), the UK's leading employer network veering equality and inclusion in the workplace, to publish the Employer Guideline for Military Spouse Employment. The guide was revised in 2018 and is used by large companies to inform their Diversity and Inclusion advice including addressing unconscious bias against military spouses and how employers can best support a military spouse into work [46].

Recruit for Spouses won the Prime Minister's Big Society Award in 2013, the Duke of York Entrepreneur Award in 2014, a Women in Defence Award in 2016 and were accepted in Deloitte's Super Pioneers Programme in 2015 and Society Partners Programme in 2016. In presenting the PM's award then Prime Minister David Cameron said

"Service families often have little choice about where they live or when they have to move. This is why we must make a clear effort to help service spouses achieve employment wherever they find themselves living...It's inspirational to see Heledd do so much to help thousands of military spouses start or maintain fulfilling careers. This work shines a light on the huge range of talent and skills that can sometimes be over-looked"

Armed Forces Champions in JobCentre Plus centres

I did not visit JobCentre Plus as part of my Fellowship but am including it in this report because it represents a multi-government agency approach to supporting veteran and spouse employment.



The Shambles, York

Armed Forces Champions in the Department of Work and Pensions' JobCentre Plus program assist veterans and military spouses by:

- Developing and maintaining arrangements between JobCentre Plus and the armed forces community in their local area
- Providing information to JobCentrePlus staff about specific armed forces initiatives
- Providing an understanding of the issues the forces community face that can be a barrier to employment
- Being the first point of contact for JobCentre Plus staff and services staff to advise on queries regarding individual armed forces cases

CANADA



Policy and Research

In my meeting with the Director General of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, Commodore Cantelon identified retention of military personnel and quality of life for military families as the reasons behind Canadian Defence policies addressing spouse employment challenges. Todd Stride (Senior Staff Advisor at MFS) explained that spouse employment programs are driven by Defence Strategy, the results from Quality of Life (QoL) surveys and the Ombudsman's report (see below). In addition, The Canadian Armed Forces Family Covenant (introduced in 2008) reflects a commitment to families and serves as the foundation from which military family services are enhanced. Like the UK, a fundamental principle of the Covenant is fairness and the sentiment that military families should not be disadvantaged by the nature of military service [103].

The Military Family Services (MFS) Program is the CAF's support program for families. MFS (a division of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services) is tasked with



Parliament Hill, Ottawa

ensuring that the Canadian military family community is well supported “*in order for military families to lead positive and nurturing family lives comparable to other Canadian families*” [104]. The 2017 ‘Parameters 4 Practice’ document provides guidance for the delivery of programs, services and resources to military families states:

“healthy, resilient military families are at the core of a modern professional military force, influencing recruitment, retention, morale, performance, reputation, operational readiness and operational sustainability. The Canadian Armed Forces’ ability to defend Canadians and Canadian interests depends on effective support to modern military families” [105].

The MFS Spousal Employment Operating Plan states:

“DND/CAF is committed to supporting and enhancing the well-being of the military family community, thereby preserving its pivotal contribution to the CAF operational readiness and effectiveness”.

MFS provides national employment support to CAF spouses and funds and assists with local support via Military Family Resource Centres (MFRFCs). MFRFCs are community hubs located on Canadian Armed Forces bases around the country and are non-profit organisations (managed by a volunteer board of directors) that provide frontline support for families via the mandated delivery of the Military Family Services program in line with local needs (See Policies and Programs).

The 2013 Defence Ombudsman’s report ‘*On the Homefront- Assessing the Well-being of Canada’s Military Families in the New Millennium*’ highlighted the employment difficulties experienced by CAF spouses and detailed 18 recommendations which included fully implementing the CF Family Covenant throughout the Canadian Armed Forces, and developing a national employment strategy to assist spouses and partners [26]. As a result of the Ombudsman’s recommendations the MFS produced a 3-year operating plan to address the Ombudsman’s findings. As of March 2018 all 18 recommendations had been accepted, 6 implemented (including the full implementation of the CF Family Covenant), 10 partially implemented (including the development of a national employment strategy) and 2 not implemented [106].

The first chapter of Canada’s most recent Defence policy ‘*Strong, Secure, Engaged*’ is dedicated to the support for personnel and their families indicating that this is a key priority, however it does not specifically address spouse employment [107].

Key research that has contributed to an understanding of military spouse employment includes the Spousal/Partner Employment and Income (SPEI) Project in 2011, the Quality of Life Surveys of CAF spouses and the Ombudsman’s ‘*On the Homefront*’ report [24-26]. The QoL survey conducted by the department of the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) examines the challenges faced by CAF families in order to inform programs and services. QoL surveys have been distributed every four years since 2005 and include specific questions on spouse employment. The surveys are sent to the home addresses of a selected representative

stratified sample of Canadian military families. The Canadian Census asks for military status identification and makes this information available to MFS.

Canadian Programs and Services

Military Family Services National Programs

I met with Katie Ochin and Vanessa Walsh for three days of learning about MFS and MFRC programs. MFS fosters collaboration between the MFS and MFRCs and between MFRCs. They also provide some employment programs at the national level. These are specifically designed to complement the MFRC services and aim to not compete with or duplicate them. The majority of MFS services are delivered online (in keeping with their aim to provide national services and leave local service delivery to MFRCs).

Employment is one of the few programs delivered direct to families at the national level and initially arose from the priority placed on developing national employer network (following the *On the Homefront Report*). Up until recently MFS had only one full time employee responsible for managing all employment and entrepreneurship activities on a limited budget.



With MFS staff Katie Ochin (L) and Vanessa Walsh (R)

The CAFconnection.ca portal has an employment tab to direct users to employment information and services. Impressively, the language used on the site acknowledges the impact relocation can have on a family with the following:

“When you are posted, and you have to leave a job you love and the paycheque your family depends on, it can be tough”

(<https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Employment.aspx>)

The website links users to information on the different types of employment services offered by MFRCs around the country as well as information for job seekers and entrepreneurs. Online information includes links to community resources, information about transferring licences between provinces, job search tools and links to military spouse-specific training and programs. These military spouse-specific programs include a pilot career counselling program, the Forces@WORK program for those posted to Alberta, an entrepreneurship program, and the ‘Work it Out with MFS’ online training series (see below). MFS also run a Facebook page dedicated to spouse employment that provides information about MFS support, career information, and links to job vacancies. There is also an MFS YouTube channel.

Work It Out with MFS Online Training Series

The Work It Out training series is a low-cost virtual program to assist military spouses with a range of employment information via webinars (in French and English) using the WebEx platform. There is one session/topic per month run multiple times. Some of the topics covered this previous year include LinkedIn, resume writing, freelancing, public service applications, licensing and career planning. Some sessions are recorded for later viewing.

'Your Career Path' Virtual Career Counseling

MFS are currently running a pilot virtual career-counselling program delivered by Career Cycles (via tender). 'Your Career Path' is a narrative counselling-based program. Clients get 1:1 virtual career counselling by a certified professional for 6 sessions, with some initial group sessions held by Mark Franklin (the practice leader). Spouses work with a counsellor to map out a career plan that fits with their lifestyle. The time commitment is about 2-3 hours per week. With limited places available entry to the program was via application on a needs basis and a screening process to ensure those selected could commit to the process. Spouses were alerted to the program via MFRCs and social media. The counselling staff received an orientation session prior to the program starting with Katie Ochin from MFS providing insight into the spouse population experiences and needs. At the time of my meeting with Mark Franklin (via video conference) and Katie Ochin the program was $\frac{3}{4}$ completed with 53 participants. Mark informed me that underemployment, loss of support networks and the need for portability were key themes that have emerged from the sessions. The program is a high-cost program but potentially also high value. The program will be evaluated and reported on by MFS and Career Cycles.

Collaboration with the career development profession

MFS partnered with CERIC (a charitable organization dedicated to advancing education and research in career development) to produce '*Military to Civilian Employment: A Career Practitioner's Guide*'. The book contains a section titled '*Strength Behind the Uniform*'. Katie Ochin from MFS wrote a chapter on spouse employment to raise awareness of the unique experiences and needs of Canadian military spouses. The guide is intended for career coaches, counsellors, HR professionals, hiring managers and others working with the military community. MFS staff also attend the CERIC Cannexus Career Development Conference.

Entrepreneurship: The Helping Entrepreneurs Reach Complete Success (HERCS) program

The HERCS program began at Trenton MFRC and has now gone national with the introduction of an MFS-funded web-based program. It is now delivered both in person and online in both English and French. The program was created specifically for the military community. The purpose of the program is to empower participants to create a business, particularly portable businesses that can easily be relocated on posting. It involves 3 x 2-hour interactive sessions covering topics such as small business ownership, marketing, social media, financing and creating a business canvas. A hard copy manual is sent to participants prior to the course starting. The course is free to the military community but participants pay for business portfolio materials. To date over 200 people

have participated in the program. Participants come from across Canada and around the world (those posted on ‘OUTCAN’ overseas postings). The program receives very positive feedback and 100% of attendees have reported they would recommend it to others. This online training initiative is relatively low cost per attendee to deliver.

Military Family Resource Centres

Frontline local support for military families in Canada is provided by Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs). There are 32 of these military community hubs located across Canada. MFRCs are non-profit organisations governed by a volunteer board of directors that are tasked with delivering the national support program under the Military Family Services Program (MFSP) framework. Every MFRC is unique and the programs and services they offer reflect the needs of the families and other services available in the location. However, as part of this framework they are mandated with providing some form of employment services to the military families in their communities. How they provide this service is at the discretion of each MFRC. This may include providing services from the MFRC or referring to community partners. Thus the type of service varies by location. Approximately half of the MFRCs have a full time staff member designated for employment services. MFRCs provide a range of family services some of which support employment. For example, MFRCs provide deployment and absence from home support, relocation assistance, mental health services, and childcare (casual and permanent). MFRCs receive the posting messages to alert them to all incoming members, which provides them with a means of reaching out to spouses.

Petawawa MFRC and Petawawa Employment Centre – a joint MFRC and Community Service

I was fortunate to spend a day at the Petawawa MFRC in Petawawa, Ottawa hosted by Executive Director of PMRFC Ms Claudia Beswick. PMFRC provide a comprehensive range of services to local military personnel and families including deployment, relocation, mental health, language training, employment, childcare, and child and youth support across several locations on base.



Petawawa Employment Centre provides employment services to both military spouses and to local civilian community members as a service provider for Employment Ontario (partly funded by Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario). I met with Employment Service Coordinator Chantal Rook and her team of dedicated counsellors who provide one-on-one employment assistance to clients (both job seekers and local employers). Job seekers can access a range of resources including counselling sessions (including identifying transferable skills, discussing barriers and enablers, managing client expectations and goal setting) resume writing assistance, important local labour market information, job search assistance, links to training and education information and local opportunities, and a computer lab. Assistance is provided over the phone, face to face or online depending on the clients' preference and requirements. The assistance is very personalised and may be provided for up to 6 months depending on the needs of

the client. The team at the Employment Centre work very closely with local employers to identify and advertise vacancies, provide staffing solutions (the team noted that local businesses can have a hard time finding quality staff), facilitate links to government incentives, and provide training opportunities. Around 70-80% of the clientele are military-related primarily due to the needs of this transient population.

Over the course of a morning the Employment Centre team and I discussed some of the issues facing military spouses posted to Petawawa. Local employment can be difficult for some highly qualified spouses due to the local employment market. In general terms the wages and levels of seniority are lower in Petawawa compared to large, metropolitan centres. It is dominated by the sales and service industry and the requirement for out of hours work can prove challenging for military spouses (especially with a high demand for local childcare services). The team at the Petawawa Employment Centre help spouses tailor their resume and job search process to the local market.

Petawawa MFRC also have a YouTube channel and have uploaded videos on employment services such as the Petawawa Employment Centre.¹²

Trenton MFRC

I met with Liz Nicholas, Employment and Education Coordinator from Trenton MFRC via videoconference at the MFS national office in Ottawa. Trenton MFRC provides support to approximately 3600 families. Employment support includes one-on-one career counselling, referral to community services, support for entrepreneurs, and employment workshops. Trenton MFRC run ‘employment cafes’ that provide information about various topics (such as LinkedIn) in a group networking format for approximately 10-12 attendees (a recent workshop on LinkedIn attracted over 40 enquiries). They also provide dedicated space for spouses to undertake exams and offer an exam proctoring service. Also available is advice on the local job market and job search strategies and a range of employment and education resources. In addition Trenton run a ‘Job Shop’ which is a free online service for military spouses looking for work and for local employers who are looking to hire. Staff spend several hours per week on job databases and share content of findings with clients. They currently have just over 500 spouses on their client list. Subsidised childcare is offered for events to make them more accessible.

Trenton run two specialised employment programs— the HERCS program (discussed above) and a portfolio development program in conjunction with a local college. The centre works to design programs that address population needs and works with local partners to deliver services such as practical LinkedIn workshops (delivered at a local college computer lab).

A collaborative effort between MFS and MFRCs

MFS and MFRCs work together to coordinate efforts to deliver quality employment services to families, avoid duplication of programs and aim for consistency in services provided to families.

¹² The PMFRC Petawawa Channel can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0MI210OHlgjilsKeVhd5MQ>

The MFRCs and MFS recently produced the MFS Spousal Employment Operating Plan 2017-19 to complement and improve the local employment services offered to military families. The aim of this plan is “*to create increased opportunities for non-serving military spouses to achieve and sustain meaningful career options that will contribute to financial stability for their family and or their overall wellbeing as an individual*” [28]. The objective of the plan is to:

- Raise awareness and knowledge among community partners and employers around the realities of military spouse career development and activate their collective ability to support this mobile workforce
- Build community capacity among military spouses and families that will enable spouses to overcome employment barriers, find their own solutions and achieve improved career outcomes
- Ensure collaboration among employment community partners exists to maximize resources and capabilities that will propel the entire military spouse community forward.



L-R: Katie Ochin (MFS), Vanessa Walsh (MFS), Claudia Beswick (PMFRC), Amanda McCue and Louise Anderson (PMFRC)

It is a 2-year community capacity building based program and has 4 priorities:

- Enhance collaboration and coordination among MFS-MFRCs
- Establish a strong network of community partnerships
- Increase awareness, education and training of military spouses
- Infuse measurement and evaluation into all employment programming

MFS also created a seven-chapter employment resource toolkit for MFRCs.

Engagement with Employers (including the now defunct METSpouse Program)

Up until March this year military spouses had access to employment opportunities through the national METSpouse Program, in addition to the employer relationships built by local MFRCs.

METSpouse was an employer network operated by the Canada Company in partnership with MFS and MFRCs across Canada.

METSpouse connected CAF jobseekers with a network of ‘military spouse friendly’ employers across the country. CAF spouses had access to an online portal where they could find ‘hot jobs’ and access information on the 140+ military-friendly employers. Spouses also received weekly emails highlighting the immediate hiring needs of METSpouse Employer partners, invitations to job fairs and information on job search practices. The program focused on employment mobility, portability and telecommutability to meet the employment needs of the CAF spouse community [108]. METSpouse required employers to:

- Provide military spouses with equal pay to equivalent civilian counterparts
- Explore and support labour mobility opportunities when possible if and when a spouse relocates
- Charge no fees or costs for military spouse employment opportunities
- Identify an individual within the organisation to act as the primary point of contact for the METSpouse program and who will participate in new employer training.
- Provide METSpouse with quarterly hiring data (including total hires and hires retained corporately when relocating)
- Ensure partnership information is communicated internally to all hiring managers and leadership
- Sign a terms of reference document to demonstrate an organizational commitment to the METSpouse employer criteria.

Its establishment in 2016 was a direct response to the Ombudsman’s recommendation that a national employer network be established to assist military spouses find work. It was operated by Canada’s leading veteran charity who was already running a similar program for CAF members and veterans [109]. It started as a 12-month pilot program before being launched nationally in April 2017. Canada Company raised awareness of veterans and military spouses amongst employers, recruited employers to the program and educated companies on how they can support and benefit from veteran and spouse hiring programs.

Many of the employer partners were national employers and one criticism I heard levelled at the program is that it was too Ottawa-centric and many of the companies did not have a presence in some of the regional or remote areas of Canada where military bases are located.

Unfortunately just less than a year after launching nationally Canada Company shut down the program (along with the veteran MET program) after the Veterans’ Affairs Department and the Government of Canada selected a professional HR firm to deliver career transition services.

MFS is currently investigating options for an alternative platform for connecting employers with military spouse job seekers and recently appointed a Community Development and Stakeholder Relations Manager to their spouse employment team in Ottawa.

UNITED STATES



Legislation, Policy and Research

In the US spouse employment is grounded in policies that recognise the contribution of family wellbeing to retention and military readiness, and therefore national security.

Recognising that the majority of Members have family responsibilities the US DoD acknowledges that family readiness impacts personnel readiness, performance, retention and recruitment [39, 69, 110]. In an annual report to Congress the DoD states that "*Service member resilience, readiness, retention and transition success are closely tied to family financial health, quality of military life satisfaction, and overall well-being*" [69]. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy is responsible for establishing and supporting community quality of life programs for service members and their families; and provides policy, advocacy and program oversight for support programs including those that promote family wellbeing, readiness and quality of life and including spouse education and employment programs (refer to Program section below) [111]. In 2010, the DoD established the spouse-centric Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program to strengthen and expand the positive effects that spouse education and employment have on military family resilience and overall readiness and retention of the Armed Forces [69].

Military spouse employment has been the focus of a number of government initiatives in the past ten years. In 2008 President Bush issued an Executive Order that allowed government agencies to make non-competitive appointments of certain military spouses including those who were relocating as a result of PCS orders [112]. In 2010 President Obama made the care and support of families a national security policy priority. He directed the National Security Staff to develop a coordinated government-wide approach to supporting military families; the result of which was the 2011 Presidential Study Directive 9 report '*Strengthening our Military Families – Meeting America's Commitment*' [113]. This effort combined the work of a number of government departments and agencies in efforts to improve services to families. Included in this report were several recommendations pertaining to career and educational opportunities for military spouses.

In 2011 the First and Second Ladies Michelle Obama and Dr Jill Biden launched *Joining Forces*, a nationwide initiative to support US military families [114]. The primary objectives of *Joining Forces* were to:

- bring attention to the unique experiences and strengths of America's military community
- inspire, educate and spark action from all sectors of society
- showcase the skills, experience and dedication of America's service members, veterans and their families
- create greater connections between the American public and the military.

The program had three priority areas for national initiatives: employment, education and wellness. Employment included expanding the employment and career development opportunities for veterans and military spouses, highlighting their workforce potential, educating employers about the need to create military family-friendly workplaces and working to reduce or eliminating licensing and credentialing barriers. The *Joining Forces* initiative was discontinued by President Trump when he took office in 2017 although the Trump Administration has continued to support military spouse employment.

In May 2018 (during my time in Washington DC) President Trump signed an executive order (EO) aimed at increasing federal job opportunities for military spouses. I had the privilege of listening in on a teleconference hosted by Jennifer Korn (Deputy Director and Special Assistant to the President), Leonard Litton (Director, Defense Policy and Strategy, The National Security Council, The White House) and Elizabeth O'Brien (Hiring our Heroes) discussing the EO. The EO enhances an existing hiring preference program for military spouses (see discussion on programs below) by requiring Federal agencies to promote the use of the current non-competitive hiring authority, directing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to: raise awareness of the program and educate agencies on the use of the hiring authority; requiring all agencies to report annually on their progress on the use of the authority; and directing agencies to recommend new ways to improve licence portability. In introducing and implementing this EO The White House hopes to raise awareness of the issue of military spouse employment and encourage greater effort amongst private enterprise [115]. In June this year Kellyanne Conway, special advisor to President Trump expressed the administration's support for spouse employment at the Hiring our Heroes military employment summit [116] and the current Second Lady Mrs Pence is undertaking listening sessions around the country.

Earlier in 2018 Senator Tim Kaine introduced two pieces of legislation aimed at addressing military spouse employment: the *Military Spouse Employment Act of 2018* and the *Jobs and Childcare for Military Families Act of 2018* to address military spouse employment and childcare. The *Military Spouse Employment Act* addresses four main areas of concern: employment opportunities, continuing education and training, childcare, and counselling and transition assistance. The legislation was endorsed by Blue Star Families, Military Officers Association of America, National Military Families Association, the Military Family Advisory Network and The American Legion [117]. The second piece of legislation provides for the expansion of Work Opportunity Tax Credit

to incentivise businesses to hire military spouses, and dependent care savings accounts to allow for pre-tax payment of childcare expenses [118].

Like the UK, the US has policies in other government departments that apply to spouse employment. The US Department of Labor (DoL) recognizes spouses who have resigned from their job due to a permanent change of station (PCS) as a *dislocated worker* i.e. a jobseeker who has lost their job through no fault of their own; and also recognises stay-at-home parents choosing to return to the workforce due to their serving spouse's deployment or transition from service as *displaced homemakers* hence providing them with eligibility for specific DoL services (see programs below) [119]. In addition, many states offer unemployment insurance to military spouses when they PCS because they recognise resignations as a result of PCS orders as "involuntary" [120].

With licence portability being one of the main challenges of military spouse employment in the US, state policies about licences are very important. Some states have adopted interstate occupational licensure compacts that allow licensed military spouse members to work in states other than the one where their licence was granted or to more easily transfer their licence to the new state. The Defense-State Liaison Office is facilitating this initiative which was prioritised by the Joining Forces initiative. Currently all 50 states have military-specific licencing rules but there is inconsistency between states and with which occupations are covered by the laws [121]. Earlier this year all three military service secretaries signed a letter to the National Governor's Association outlining ways state leadership can better support service members, including reviewing professional license reciprocity. The letter stated that the secretaries would be encouraging leadership to consider whether reciprocity of professional licences is available for military families when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives [122]. This is a powerful statement considering the economic advantages for counties and states of having a military base in the area, and was reinforced recently by USAF Secretary Wilson [123].

As discussed in Chapter 2 there has been an extensive amount of research on military spouse employment undertaken in the US. Some of the organisations conducting research and publishing on the topic (together and separately) are the Department of Defense, RAND Corporation, Blue Star Families, Hiring our Heroes, Military Officers Association of America, the Syracuse University Institute of Veterans and Military Families and the Military Family Advisory Network. The official data collection of military spouse employment occurs via the DoD's Survey of Active Duty Spouses which collects information on employment, relationships, family wellbeing, finances, relocation and deployments every two years [124].

US Programs and Services

There are many organisations providing employment support to veteran and military spouse in the US. During my visit to the US I met with representatives from a few key organisations and sectors and attended a number of events. The discussion below reflects my Churchill Fellowship meetings

and is not a reflection of the depth and breadth of organisations providing career support to military spouses.

Military Spouse Federal Hiring

The Priority Placement Program for spouses (PPP-S) is a program that gives preference to military spouses for competitive Department of Defense jobs if they are among the best-qualified candidates [125]. Spouses register for the program on arrival at their new location and are contacted when a suitable position comes up. The program can be used once per PCS move. According to [military.com](#) the program has been a source of frustration for spouses and will soon be overhauled [126].

The non-competitive appointment program under Executive Order 13473 enables hiring managers from federal agencies to appoint qualified military spouses to competitive service positions without using traditional competitive examining procedures. Spouses must be relocating to a new duty station to be eligible (or be the spouse of a 100% disabled service member injured on active duty, or an un-remarried widow or widower of a service member killed on active duty) [127]. Agencies are not required to use it but a recent Executive Order by President Trump is requiring agencies to promote its use (see discussion in Legislation, Policy and Research).

The Department of Defence:

- Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) Program
- My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA)
- Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)
- LinkedIn Premium access

SECO

The US DoD offers a comprehensive national-level program to all US military spouses via the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program (SECO) that was created specifically for military spouses. Spouses can access support with:

- Career exploration
- Education, Training and Licensure
- Employment Readiness
- Career Connections

Spouses can access career coaching with certified coaches over the phone 12 hours per day, 6 days a week at any stage throughout their military journey. Coaches can help with skills identification, career exploration and goal setting, education pathways, job search assistance, networking and entrepreneurship information. Specialised online career coaching packages are also available including packages for STEM careers, health careers, teaching careers, Federal employment, new spouses, and entrepreneurship.

Program Director Eddy Mentzer reports that the coaching aspect of SECO (which is provided by Zeiders who recently successfully re-competed for the tender) is relatively inexpensive. The SECO program also allows spouses to create their MySECO profile and build an individual career plan, take career assessments, access information on resumes, create a resume using the resume builder, explore labour market information and search for scholarships. The SECO program also hosts monthly online discussions with career coaches and employment partners (see MSEP below) via webinars, Facebook and LinkedIn

Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)

The Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) launched in June 2011 as part of the SECO program and is a portal that connects military spouse job seekers with over **360 military-friendly employment partners** who have committed to recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining military spouses. Employment partners are required to sign a Statement of Support and commit to increasing employment opportunities for military spouses (including posting vacancies on the job portal) and when possible, maintain employment when a spouse relocates. Jobseekers can create an account and generate up to 5 resumes and search for jobs (via title, keyword or location) listed in the portal and receive direct access to employers who are actively recruiting via the portal and online groups such as LinkedIn. Employment partners are provided with an account manager/liaison officer who connects with partners regularly to assist with technical difficulties, disseminate information and provide feedback on efforts. Employment partners report spouse hiring data to the DoD on a regular basis including the number of spouses hired part-time, full-time and virtually, the number of spouses retained upon relocation, and when they have referred spouses to similar employment in other organisations when relocating. The MSEP website reports that over 120,000 spouses have been hired by MSEP partners. Recently the DoD created MSEP “ed” (a scaled down, targeted version of MSEP) to foster relationships between K-12 educators and local schools and school districts.

My Career Advancement Program (MyCAA)

The MyCAA program is a scholarship program within the SECO program providing financial assistance up to \$4000 (\$2000 annual cap) for spouses to pursue a licence, certification or Associate’s degree in high-demand, high-growth portable career fields or occupations. It is available to spouses in pay grades E1-5 (private-sergeant), W1-2 (Warrant Officer 1 and 2) and O1-2 (Second and First Lieutenant). The MyCAA program has been positively associated spouse earnings and with service member retention [69].

Virtual Spouse Symposium

The SECO team hosted the SECO Virtual Military Spouse Symposium in May this year. I was fortunate to join from my hotel room in Ottawa. The symposium was a 4-day online event of more than 15 different sessions on topics such as career development, entrepreneurship, remote work, personal branding, education, LinkedIn, job search skills, and individual and family wellbeing. The presentations were done via webinar (conducted during the day), and allowed for interaction by attendees via the chat window (which was well-utilised in the sessions I attended). The webinars

were recorded and posted on the SECO website for those who were unable to attend live or want to revisit the content.

LinkedIn Premium

Recently SECO secured an arrangement for the provision of 12 months free LinkedIn Premium access for military spouses each time they move as part of a service-relocation. The program which began in July 2018 is part of LinkedIn's Military and Veteran program also provides spouses with free access to LinkedIn Learning courses including a specific program for military spouses.

Service Installation Programs – Army Community Services (ACS) Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall

The individual Services also provide employment services in addition to the national DoD program (which does not oversee or administer the Service programs) as part of their family readiness programs. Each installation can tailor the Service programs to meet their local needs. Programs are accredited every 3 years. I met informally with Judy Joyner at Army Community Services (ACS) and briefly with Stephanie Hechtkopf and Dionne Vassell from Marine Corp Community Services (MCCS) at Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall in the Washington DC area to learn more about what services local families can access.

ACS JBMHH covers a large area in DC, Maryland and Virginia (the 'DMV'). Judy has been working at ACS since 2004 and provided insight into the challenges faced by spouses in the area and the services provided. Judy is the only staff member assigned to employment services in the ACS.



The DC area is quite different to many other military installation areas in that there are a lot of positions for higher qualified candidates. The number of jobs in the area is not so much the issue as finding suitable positions to match skills and experience and personal requirements. Judy spends a lot of time with clients establishing their job search parameters (preferences, availability, willingness to commute and transport options (the DC area is large and traffic is an issue), type of work etc. in order to narrow down the job search and to determine what assistance they need. Childcare is an issue for many job seekers. Being a public service town it can be challenging for non-US citizen spouses to find work due to the large number of federal jobs (which require US citizenship). Another challenge for spouses that Judy raised (which I hadn't previously considered) is the financial cost of relocating to a major capital city like DC and the costs associated with having to purchase clothes that are deemed suitable for work. For spouses relocating from a warmer, regional climate this can be quite significant and something that many of them don't factor in. In general D.C is an expensive city to live in and Judy says there is a financial incentive/need for families posted to the area to be dual-income.

The centre runs monthly classes on employment topics such as newcomer orientation to learn about the local area (Judy reports many spouses don't know where to begin looking for employment in DC), resume writing, and federal job application information i.e. job readiness skills classes. There are also specialised programs such as federal resume writing courses provided by external service providers and information on the federal jobs Priority Placement Program for military spouses. ACS also advertises positions from local employers (who can approach ACS with vacancies). Judy has a very client-needs based approach to her service provision. Clients include those new to the area, those re-entering the workforce and those who have received posting orders to elsewhere (Judy can help them get job ready and refer them to the centre at their new installation). ACS plans their calendar a year out and advertises monthly events in advance via social media and newsletters.

The MCCS Family Member Employment Assistance program (FMEAP) also offers a broad range of services including career counselling, job search techniques, resume writing assistance, job readiness workshops, links to current job opportunities, a resource library and information on portable careers.

The ACS and MCCS liaise with local providers such as the Virginia Employment Commission and promote hiring fairs in the local area such as those being conducted by Hiring our Heroes. ACS also hosts its own career fairs on the installation at no cost to the vendors or spouses (career fairs hosted by local installation clubs may be able to charge vendors because they have a different funding arrangement using non-appropriated funds). ACS and MCCS at Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall share information about upcoming events in order to reach as many spouses as possible. There is also collaboration between DoD programs and installation services such as resource sharing and career fairs.

The uptake by spouses is relatively low although the centres receive a lot of telephone enquiries that can be resolved over the phone. Dionne Vassell from MCCS reports they get a lot of clients from referrals from other family programs and via their outreach activities.

Hiring our Heroes

Hiring our Heroes is a program of the U.S Chamber of Commerce Foundation (the non-profit arm of the U.S Chamber of Commerce). The program launched in 2011 to help veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses find employment.

Hiring our Heroes run a dedicated military spouse program which includes career fairs and hiring receptions, employment forums and MOAA Spouse Symposiums, the Military Spouse Professional Network, the AMPLIFY career workshop, the Corporate Fellowship Program and the recently launched Economic Empowerment Zones.



As part of my Fellowship I was fortunate to meet with the Manager of the Military Spouse Program Mona Dexter, attend a networking event by the DC Chapter of the Military Spouse Professional Network, and attend the Military Spouse Employment Listening Session at the US Chamber building. Unfortunately the Military Spouse Employment Summit was rescheduled from May to June so I was unable to attend.

Hiring Fairs

Hiring Fairs are held throughout the year across America (and sometimes overseas near US military installations). The fairs are open to all military, veteran and Gold Star spouses and connect job seekers with HR staff and hiring managers from national and local companies. The employers are vetted to ensure that they have positions available and that they are suitable for military spouses.

Employment forums and MOAA Spouse Symposiums

Employment forums and MOAA Spouse Symposiums (which used to be held solely by MOAA but are now held in conjunction with HoH) are professional development workshops held over the course of a day. Topics covered include resume development, social media for job seeking use, salary negotiations, personal branding, and panel discussions with employers and spouses.

AMPLIFY

AMPLIFY is a 2-day intensive career development event held at various locations around the country. Attendance is via application. Attendees have the opportunity to work with an industry mentor, participate in sessions on networking, entrepreneurship, relocating, interviews and career management. Attendees leave with an improved resume, professional photo and LinkedIn profile.

The Military Spouse Professional Network (MSPN)

The Military Spouse Professional Network (MSPN) (originally In Gear Career) is a grassroots networking and employer engagement platform with over 40 local chapters across the country and overseas as well as a virtual chapter on Facebook. The MSPN chapters provide those new to a location with an established professional network and established links to local employers, peers and mentors. The event I attended in DC was attended by HoH staff, spouses from a range of industries as well as employers, and provided an opportunity to converse and exchange business cards in a relaxed, social yet professional setting.

Corporate Fellowship Program

The Corporate Fellowship is an application-based 12-week program that provides spouses with hands on experience in the workforce with an employer who is matched to their skills and preferences, along with professional development opportunities. It is offered in a select number of cities in the US. A Bachelor or Associate degree and a minimum number of years of work experience are required to apply.

Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones

Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones are a new effort with the first zone launched in February this year. The program now includes the cities of San Antonio, Tampa and Colorado Springs as well as the state of Washington. The aim of the program is to create a local employment network for spouses by facilitating collaboration between private and public sectors including national employers, local businesses, education institutions, community resources, civic communities and military communities, that allow for local characteristics and needs. Interested employers are vetted by HoH before being admitted into the program. At this stage it is not clear how success will be measured. Richard Perez of San Antonio says that currently they're relying on businesses to self-report [128].

Military Spouse Employment Listening Session and Summit

A Military Spouse Listening Session was held on May 3, 2018. The contents of the session were not for distribution so a detailed description is not provided in this report. Presentation and discussions took place on three themes- licencing and credentialing, ongoing challenges to military spouse employment and communication. There were also presentations by employers who discussed what companies can do to be more welcoming of, and benefit from, military spouse employees in terms of recruitment, engagement, on boarding and support. The more comprehensive annual Military Spouse Employment Summit that was to be held on this date was postponed to June so unfortunately I was unable to attend. The annual summit provides a platform for partners, administrators and stakeholders to engage and to release current findings and initiatives.

National Military Spouse Network (NMSN)

The NMSN is a networking, mentoring and professional development organisation for military spouses founded in 2010 that aims to empower, educate, support and advance military spouses. They offer both public and paid membership options. Founder and president Sue Hoppin has been actively advocating and consulting on behalf of military spouses for many years and is a recognised subject matter expert on military spouse issues including employment. Her expertise on spouse topics was referred to several times throughout the Military Spouse Town Hall discussions and Sue generously shared her experience and insight during my visit to Washington DC.

NMSN provide networking and mentoring opportunities, resources, and opportunities to share expertise and solutions. They also host the annual Military Spouse Career Summit in the Washington DC area and more recently in Colorado. The summit is a 2-day event that provides networking opportunities, opportunities to hear from panel experts and to learn and develop career skills such as branding, negotiating, finances, resume writing and creating portable job opportunities.

Mad Skills and Serving Talent

Mad Skills and Serving Talent are two spouse-run for-profit businesses providing employment solutions for military spouses.

Mad Skills provides companies with virtual workforces (anywhere from one professional to an entire team) consisting of military spouses. For military spouses this is a source of flexible, remote work they can do from anywhere. It is a free platform for military spouses who can post an online profile, contact employers and apply for jobs directly via a job board. Companies can either approach MadSkills for full-service support i.e. sourcing and vetting candidates and delivering the workforce or they can advertise open virtual positions on their site. In the first scenario spouses work directly with the MadSkills team but for the client; in the second scenario they are interviewed and hired by the employer. MadSkills originally started as a job board for virtual positions and evolved into the current staffing agency model. The niche market approach can be a benefit because they are able to respond to the specific needs of their clients. Recently Mad Skills (as a hirer of military spouses) became a member of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership.



L-R: Myself, Marcelle Yeager (Serving Talent), Beth Conlin (ST) and Erica McMannes (MadSkills)

Serving Talent is a traditional recruitment agency model that provides employers with staff solutions from their pool of US Foreign Service and military spouses around the world. It was founded by a military spouse Maggie Verona and Foreign Service spouse Marcelle Yeager when both were stationed in Chile in 2015 and continued upon their return to the United States. Serving Talent source and vet candidates and present employers with the top qualified candidates for their needs. Serving Talent offers employers two options- a basic search and an advanced search depending on the level of service and support they need. Their current employer market is small to mid-size companies. Serving Talent is proactive in reaching out to employers and is actively trying to promote the advantages of hiring military spouses and promoting a positive image of this talent pool to counteract any negative stereotypes or bias. Some of the ideas discussed during one of my discussions with Marcelle were mainstream media articles and videos highlighting spouses managing their careers to their satisfaction to highlight that it is possible.

Both companies are advocates for the military spouse community and work to showcase the skills contained within the military spouse talent pool and educate employers about the unique employment situations and challenges experienced by military spouses. Thus they both champion military spouses and provide quality employment solutions for employers. Both companies are very active in proactively reaching out to both the military spouse and employer communities.

Both MadSkills and Serving Talent have faced challenges being for-profit businesses in a predominately not for profit environment but have created successful businesses. Both believe there is room for for-profit models in the military spouse employment landscape.

Entrepreneurship and The Milspo Project

Entrepreneurship is a viable employment solution for some spouses and one that may not be supported by some of the more traditional employment services models.

The Milspo Project founded by Elizabeth Boardman is a non-profit military spouse entrepreneurship community that launched in 2016. It is a membership-based organisation that has so far helped 450+ military spouse business owners start and/or grow their business. The spouse-led Milspo Project team realise that entrepreneurship is one solution to the high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the military spouse community. Their mission is to help 10,000+ spouses launch, expand and reach profitability in their businesses by 2024. The organization offers two levels of membership- incubator and accelerator. The Incubator program is for spouses thinking about starting a business and who are looking for resources and accountability to help them get started; it is open to all military spouses. The Accelerator program is for spouses with an established business who want to 'level up'; admittance is by application only.



With Ashley Matejka from
Milspo Project

The organisation offers a number of virtual activities such as monthly workbooks, online workshops, Mastermind sessions, and a business book club. In addition there are important face-to-face events such as meetups, the annual Milspo Project Live traveling 1-day conference, and an annual retreat. Milspo Project reach the military spouse community via various means including social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and by word of mouth.

The Milspo Project is focused on empowering spouses, encouraging them to understand their value and invest in themselves and their business and supporting them in launching and growing successful businesses, gaining career satisfaction and reaching their professional potential.

During our meeting Milspo Project Chief Experience Curator Ashley Matejka and I discussed the importance of changing the narrative around military spouse employment (especially steering away from any notions of being victims) and focusing on encouraging military spouses to value their skills, ability and worth and to invest accordingly (see Chapter 4). There is deliberate intent by the Milspo Project to not only offer services and support to the military spouse community but to advance the narrative and culture around spouse employment. The Milspo Project and other similar organisations is an example of military spouses supporting and encouraging each other to succeed.

Advocacy and Political Engagement- the Military Spouse JD Network (MSJDN) and the Homefront Rising Event

The Military Spouse JD Network is a paid membership-based group that advocates for licencing accommodations for military spouse lawyers. It was started in 2011 by two spouses frustrated with trying to maintain a legal career due to the different licencing and bar membership requirements across states. MSJDN advocates for licencing accommodations for military spouse attorneys, educates the public about spouse employment challenges, and provides a network and professional development opportunities for military spouse attorneys. They also partner with firms or companies committed to supporting military spouse legal professionals [129].



Each year MSJDN hosts the Homefront Rising event – an initiative that “*encourages and trains military spouses to speak up and get involved in the political process through advocacy and public service*”. This year’s event which I was fortunate to attend included guest speakers such as U.S Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers discussing women in Congress, Seth Lynn (Executive Director of Veterans Campaign) discussing how military spouses are equipped to serve, and Jennifer Korn (Deputy Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison) discussing her path to the White House and the work she is doing there to improve spouse employment. The event also included a panel discussion on the various ways spouses can use their skills effectively in advocacy and politics, small group discussions and an interactive leadership workshop.

Some of the key themes throughout the day included:

- Show up and take a seat at the table to be involved in topics and decisions that affect you and your community
- Personal stories are powerful and we need thought leaders to spread stories and awareness
- Military spouses are their own best advocates
- Military spouses are important ambassadors in the community and have the ability to bridge the military-civilian divide
- Be active in the community in which you currently live
- Build networks and cultivate leadership
- Know your worth

Other advocacy organisations (whom I did not meet with) include the National Military Family Association, Military Spouse Advocacy Network, Military Family Advisory Network, and Blue Star Families).

Recognising military spouses- the Military Spouse Town Hall Event

The Military Spouse Town Hall event is an annual networking event held by Military Spouse Magazine held in conjunction with their Military Spouse of the Year (MSOY) award. The MSOY award recognises the contributions of military spouses from all branches of service. The award event (held separately from the Town Hall) is attended by Department of Defense leadership,

members of Congress, senior military leaders and military spouses. The theme of this year's Town Hall was "*Go For It! How to make the leap to do great things*". The event had an impressive line up of keynote speakers and panellists and the themes throughout the day centred around empowerment and action, and showcased the achievements of a wide variety of military spouses. For me personally the day provided motivation and encouragement to pursue my advocacy efforts in spouse employment and a fantastic opportunity to network with a variety of US military spouses (including one who is also an Australian Army veteran!).



With Beth Conlin (Serving Talent and
Erica McMannes (MadSkills)



With
Australian
Army
veteran
and US
military
spouse
Anna
Blanch
Rabe

Conclusion

As illustrated in this chapter there is a wide array of support policies and programs in place by various service providers across government, non-profit and for-profit sectors. These can roughly be divided into four categories:

- 1) services that support individual job readiness,
- 2) services that facilitate employment via connections with employers,
- 3) advocacy and awareness raising platforms, and
- 4) policies and legislation.

Many organisations provide services across multiple categories. The tables below are a snapshot of the programs I visited and/or discussed during my Fellowship as well as some higher profile organisations I did not get the opportunity to meet with. It is by no means an exhaustive list (particularly for the US).

The tables illustrate that Canada, the UK, and the US all offer support across the four categories at various levels. The main forms of support come from the government and non-profit sectors with some emerging for-profit providers.

Table One: Policies and Programs by Category

	Legislation and Policy	Job Readiness	Employer Connections	Advocacy, Awareness and Research
UK	Armed Forces Covenant	Recruit for Spouses	Armed Forces Covenant and Defence Relationship Management	Families Federations
	Partner Employment Steering Group	Spouse Employment Trial	Recruit for Spouses	Defence Relationship Management and Armed Forces Covenant
	New Employment Model Programme	RBLI Lifeworks	Spouse Employment Support Trial	FAMCAS and AFCAS Surveys
	UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy	Business Start Up program		Kings College and other educational institutions
	Flexible Work Act	Job Centre Plus		Veterans institutions e.g. Forces In Mind Trust
	UK Department of Work and Pensions involuntary unemployment policy			
Canada	Canadian Military Family Readiness policies	Virtual Career Counselling	Employment Centres and MFRC Job Boards	Defence Ombudsman
	MFS Spousal Employment Operating Plan	Military Family Resource Centre programs	METSpouse (no longer operating)	Spouse Quality of Life Surveys
		MFS Work it Out online program		Spousal/Partner Employment and Income Project
		HERCS Entrepreneurship Program		MFS Collaboration with CERIC
		MFS online presence (website, Facebook, YouTube)		MFRC and community collaboration

US	Military Family Readiness policies	SECO	Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)	DoD/RAND
	Obama Presidential Study Directive 9 (US)	Service Installation programs	Service Installation programs	National Military Family Association
	Joining Forces (US)	MyCAA	HoH Hiring Fairs	Defence State Liaison office
	Presidential Executive Orders on non-competitive hiring (US)	DoD Virtual Spouse Symposium	HoH Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones	Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families
	State Licensing Compacts	LinkedIn Premium	HoH Corporate Fellowships	National Military Spouse Network
	US Department of Labor policy on dislocated workers	HoH resume builder	HoH Military Spouse Professional Network	Blue Star Families
	Proposed Military Spouse Employment Act and Jobs and Childcare for Military Families Act (US)	HoH AMPLIFY	Serving Talent	MSJDN
		HoH Military Spouse Professional Network	Mad Skills	HoH Military Spouse Employment Summit
		Milspo Project	Priority Placement Programs and Non-competitive hiring authority	
		National Military Spouse Network	Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN)	
		Military Spouse Corporate Career Network	LinkedIn Premium	
		Department of Labor website		

Table Two: Programs by Sector

	Government	Non-Profit	For Profit	
UK	Armed Forces Covenant and Defence Relationship Management	Recruit for Spouses	Recruit for Spouses (free for spouses)	
	Spouse Employment Trial (UK)	RBLI Lifeworks		
	Partner Employment Steering Group	Families Federations		
	Job Centre Plus			
Canada	Virtual Career Counselling	Military Family Resource Centre workshops and job boards		
	MFS Work it Out online program and other online resources	HERCS Entrepreneurship Program		
	Military Family Resource Centre support and oversight			
	HERCS Entrepreneurship online Program			
US	SECO	Hiring our Heroes programs	LinkedIn Premium (free for spouses)	
	MSEP	MSJDN (membership)	Mad Skills (free for spouses)	
	MyCAA	NMSN (membership)	Serving Talent (free for spouses)	
	Priority Placement and non-competitive hiring	Blue Star Families		
	Service Installation Services	MSCCN		
	Virtual Spouse Symposium	Milspo Project (membership)		
	Dept. Labor website	NMFA		

Chapter 4

Discussion of Key Themes

An important part of my Churchill Fellowship was listening to the stories and opinions of key stakeholders (spouses, policy makers and service providers) in the three countries to get a better understanding of spouse employment experiences, challenges, solutions and future directions. The following themes stood out to me from my discussions and I believe should form part of the narrative in Australia when discussing ways forward in addressing the challenges of spouse employment.

Families have changed

As discussed in Chapter 2, societal family dynamics are changing, including in military families. Today's military families are more diverse than traditional families of husband, wife and children. There are same-sex couples, single parents with various parenting arrangements and multi-generational households (especially with an ageing population). The roles of parents have changed with an increasing number of women in the workforce, an expectation (or need) for dual-income families and a desire by fathers to have more active parenting roles. This can create tension between the needs and expectations of members and their families and the needs of the military. Many military families need to or want to be dual-income families, they value the career of the spouse as much as the member, they want to share family responsibilities more evenly, but feel that the military life challenges this and places them at a disadvantage in comparison to civilian families. Addressing spouse employment is part of addressing the changing needs and desires of families and seeking arrangements that better balance the needs of families and organisations so that both are better off.

Military spouse employment is a different beast to veteran employment

*"Veteran employment programs and military spouse employment programs aren't synonymous"
"We have to move spouse employment out of the fine print"*

-C. Eddy Mentzer, US DoD

Many of the military spouse employment initiatives in the US have stemmed from veteran initiatives fueled by high levels of veteran employment around 7 years ago. It is important to recognise that these two populations, whilst both connected to the military, face very different employment challenges and need different assistance. Hallmark challenges of veteran employment include limited or no civilian job seeking knowledge or experience, difficulty understanding how military experience translates to civilian job skills, finding the right civilian job 'fit', and adjusting to civilian workplaces. These are very different challenges to those of military spouses (discussed in Chapter 2) which include patchy job histories, difficulty finding work upon

relocation (which on average occurs every 3-5 years), juggling career demands and ambitions with a heavy workload of family and domestic responsibilities, and negative perceptions of their suitability as employees. Thus needs of the military spouse community are very different to those of the veteran community and military spouse employment programs need to be tailored to the needs of the spouse community. We have a lot to learn from the US who have made great strides in tackling military spouse employment as an issue in its own right but still have a way to go.

Eddy Mentzer, Associate Director for DOD Family Readiness and Well-Being put it succinctly on LinkedIn when he said:

"The challenges Veterans faced are different than the challenges that military spouses face. Veterans don't move every couple of years; veterans are not 92% female; Veterans don't have employment gaps every couple of years; nor have they worked in 8 different industries in 12 years. Embrace that difference"

Complexity

An overwhelming theme arising from my Churchill Fellowship was the complexity of this problem due to the range of influencing factors, the diversity within the military spouse population, the changing needs across the military spouse lifespan, the complexity of organisational and societal structures, and the difficulties in balancing the needs of a 'greedy' organisation with those of families.

The military spouse community is very diverse in terms of skills and experience. Military spouses work in a wide range of occupations and fields of employment. There is also a wide range of skill levels. I had several conversations about the difficulties this presents in terms of addressing employment challenges. For example, low or unskilled workers can benefit from training and up-skilling opportunities whereas the higher-skilled, higher-qualified cohort need employment opportunities that align with their skills and experience often in geographical areas where they don't exist.

There is also diversity with respect to career needs and desires within the population. Iain Downie from Lifeworks shared that often the veteran Lifeworks courses are filled with active jobseekers whereas there is more diversity within the spouse courses, with some attendees still exploring career options. The needs of spouses change over time and there is a wide range of age groups within military spouse communities; what a spouse is seeking career-wise in his/her 20s may be very different and/or influenced by different factors in his/her 40s and. Family arrangements also affect career needs.

There are also differences between populations within the military spouse population. Each service is quite different and thus the lifestyle influences may be different. The same is true for different occupations within the military – some are more 'routine' than others and there are differences in work hours and time spent away from home and there may be differences between ranks. For example in the UK Navy families move less often but spend more time apart from their

serving member; Army and RAF officers move more frequently than Navy personnel or those of other ranks/enlisted [21].

There are many and varied challenges that lead to unemployment, underemployment and career dissatisfaction. It is not just one challenge but multiple (and often interrelated) challenges that present employment issues for military spouses. It would not be uncommon to find the following example: a military spouse with children resigns from her job due a service-related relocation; she then manages the logistics of the removal including finding housing, new schools, doctors, ensuring children meet all the new school and childcare requirements etc. which may take a month or two before beginning her job search once the family is settled; she then begins the search for employment in a town where her resume with its multiple short term job easily identifies her as a military spouse in a town with a high unemployment rate; she is searching for a job that suits her skills and qualifications but which also offers her the flexibility to manage her family responsibilities (particularly when her serving spouse is absent from home) and hopes that she can find childcare in the same timeframe.

Data:

- (i) Quality
- (ii) A more nuanced approach than unemployment rates

Difficulties obtaining quality data and identifying what data is needed was discussed many times during my Fellowship. It is outside my area of expertise to analyse current data quality or make recommendations but I offer up the following points for further discussion:

- Data on military spouse employment is self-reported which raises concerns about how accurately it reflects actual situations. This was raised in the 2017 ADF Families Study. Voluntary participation in surveys/self-reported data may risk skewing the data toward those with a greater interest in the topic or those who are more involved in military life. For example, the 2017 ADF Family Survey reported it had a disproportionate number of unemployed spouses. The data was also skewed in other ways i.e. the very low percentage of respondents who were officer spouses, which could have influenced results. In Canada, the quality of life survey sample uses stratified sampling in order to try and obtain data from representative numbers in each stratum (e.g. rank and service). I refer readers to an article that discusses the difference between the DoD's Active Duty Spouse Survey and the Blue Star Families Survey for further insight into how survey design can affect results [130].
- Even though different surveys may report different figures, the issues raised appear to be consistent amongst surveys [130].
- Response rates to many surveys on spouse employment are low e.g. the 2017 ADF Families Survey had a 14% response rate, the 2013 Canadian Quality of Life Survey had a 23% response rate and the recent US active duty spouse survey had a response rate of 23%.

- Comparisons are made between unemployment/underemployment rates of military spouses and civilian spouses but it should be noted that as described above military spouse unemployment data is self-reported; national unemployment rates is derived data based on monthly sample surveys [131].
- National unemployment and underemployment rates provide limited information. If, as discussed, geographic location influences employment and spouses have little say in where they are relocating it may be more appropriate to consider regional data when considering impact on families and designing solutions.
- There are many forms of data that can inform the situation. Whilst quantitative data (e.g. unemployment rates) is often desired by government decision makers, qualitative research data and anecdotal evidence give important insights into the nuances of the situation and impacts on individuals and families. It was mentioned many times during my Fellowship that there is valuable information contained within the stories of spouses.
- Definitions need to be clear and consistent especially when making comparisons. In Australia ‘unemployed’ refers to those who are not working but actively looking for work. Thus, those who would like to work but are not actively seeking work are not unemployed but instead are recorded as ‘not in the labour force’. ‘Jobless’ can refer to the combined unemployed and not in the labour force numbers.
- It would be beneficial to break down the ‘not in the labour force’ cohort into those who want to work and those who don’t, and note the reasons why (see point on qualitative data). It would also be beneficial to record ‘discouraged workers¹³ i.e. those who want to work but whose main reason for not actively looking for work is because they don’t believe they would find a job (or one that suits their circumstances).
- Several of those I met with said that military families are getting tired of surveys. Data is important (especially to convince governments to act) but too many surveys, or surveys that don’t ask the right questions can detract rather than help. Collective efforts can minimise the number of surveys that are distributed to families and assist with effective survey design.
- The demographics of the spouse population are needed to provide employers with an indication of the characteristics of this talent pool.
- Information on what spouses themselves feel they need to empower their careers is needed.
- An important component of data collection is the reporting of programs in place to assist spouse employment. Programs need to be evaluated and progress against goals measured and reported in order to determine if they are working and to adjust if they are not.

¹³ See Australian Bureau of Statistics 6102.0.55.001 Feb 2018

Otherwise there is a risk of creating ‘noise’ in the space by giving the impression that the problem is being addressed when in fact it is not.

Underemployment

Unemployment rates of military spouses have received a lot of attention. However, an emerging concern is that underemployment could be the main employment problem within the military spouse community and we don’t yet have enough information on it. Drawing on the discussion about data, we need a more nuanced evaluation of military spouse employment than national employment and unemployment rates in order to understand the impact on military spouses and families. For example, in Canada the MFS reports that at first glance of military spouse employment rates there doesn’t seem to be a significant issue; over 70% of spouses are employed and only 5.6% are unemployed (with a further 23.8% out of the labor force). But as the MFS reports the 70.6% of employed spouses includes those who are employed part-time, seasonally or are self-employed. MFS identifies that they don’t have access to an estimated percentage of underemployment and that the “absence of this crucial statistic could affect the overall perception of need with decision makers”. Canada have included more questions in their next quality of life survey to address this and efforts were made by the Australian government to better address this issue in the 2017 Families Survey.

As discussed in the section on data we need to ensure consistency in the terms that we use. Underemployment is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to refer to working fewer hours than desired. However, many military spouses report being overqualified for their positions which could also describe being underemployed. Underemployment is cause for concern whether it relates to the number of hours worked or the quality of the work. Studies in Australia and overseas have shown that those who work in poor quality jobs have poorer health status than those who are unemployed i.e. a bad job is worse for your health than no job. And another Australia study found that declines in mental health were associated with greater hours of unemployment and concluded that “underemployment to be a target of future workplace prevention strategies”. Furthermore, they identified that certain workers were more susceptible to the ill effects of unemployment including women, younger workers, those in low-skilled jobs and those casually employed [61]. We need to capture and report (separately) underemployment in terms of hours and in terms of experience and qualifications.

There is a sound business case for hiring military spouses

This is a key underlying principle of spouse employment programs. The military spouse population contains many skilled and educated working-age individuals with skills and attributes that are highly sought after by employers. The military talent pool has depth and breadth of talent across a number of occupations and industries. Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) lists the following attributes of military spouses when outlining the business case for hiring them: resilient, adaptable, educated, resourceful, team-oriented, entrepreneurial, multi-taskers, diverse, civically engaged and socially aware.

Facilitating military spouse employment is not about a hand out- it is about maximising the employability of spouses to the benefit of them *and* employers.

Valuing and investing in military spouses

This was a topic raised quite often throughout my Fellowship in a variety of contexts and is at the heart of any efforts to address the issue. If the career development of spouses is not valued there is little incentive to invest in it. And if there is no investment it will remain an issue. As discussed in the previous chapter there are many reasons to be concerned about the poor state of career development and employment amongst military spouses. The contributions that military spouses make to their families, the ADF and their communities should not be underestimated or taken for granted. If the health and wellbeing of individuals and families is valued, if the contribution of spouses is valued, and if we are to value (rather than take for granted¹⁴⁾) the amount of unpaid labour and the caring work performed by spouses in order for the service member to commit fully to their job, then as a society we should be investing in policies and programs that can improve all aspects of military spouse career lives (which does not just include paid work).

**As a society
we should be
investing in
military
spouse career
development**

There is also the sound business case for hiring spouses (as discussed above). In one discussion I had during my Fellowship it was suggested that a program that didn't charge employers to participate to access the spouse talent pool was preferable to one that does. But companies invest substantial money in trying to find the right talent for their business in a competitive labour market. If employers want to benefit from the skills, experience and attributes that exist within the military spouse talent pool is it unreasonable to expect that they invest in this as they do elsewhere? And if they are getting something for free will they value it? What image is created or message is sent if the military spouse talent pool is a free resource? I believe there is a real risk of sending a message that military spouse talent isn't of high enough quality to pay for. Investment need not only be financial but we shouldn't be discouraging placing a monetary value on military spouse talent. Governments cannot charge employers to participate in programs but they can, like MSEP do, require them to sign and honour written commitments and invest time and effort in meeting these commitments and tracking and reporting on progress. The flip side to this (raised more than once in Fellowship discussions) is that without proper vetting and evaluation a "pay to play" situation may arise where companies benefit from appearing to support the military community. Thus, it is important that companies are recognised and/or accredited for *doing* something to support spouse employment, not just committing to something or investing funds.

**Military spouses
should be
encouraged,
supported and
empowered to value
and invest in their
own career needs**

It is also important for military spouses to value and invest in themselves. Too often military spouses put their needs behind those of their serving spouse, their children and sometimes anyone else who needs their help. Military spouses should be encouraged, supported

¹⁴ See Spanner, 2018

and empowered to recognise, value, prioritise and invest in their careers.

Perceived vs. lived challenges

As discussed above there are many challenges associated with spouse employment that need to be understood in order to understand the causes of the higher unemployment and underemployment rates and how to address them. However, more than once during my Fellowship discussions it was suggested that some of the employment challenges faced by military spouses are perceived rather than actual. For example, whilst there are certainly reports of military spouses being explicitly told by potential employers that they aren't good candidates or weren't hired for a position because of their military spouse status, it was suggested that many spouses believe employer bias exists regardless of whether there is proof in particular circumstances. In at least one conversation the suggestion that challenges were perceived was accompanied by the sentiment that they weren't "real" and therefore needn't be considered, or if they are considered, the responsibility for addressing them rests with the spouse.

Perceived challenges are just as problematic as those with a lived-experience basis for a two reasons:

1. If negative perceptions about the influence of military life on spouse employment exist at significant levels within military families then it is still a military retention and capability issue.
2. Perceived and lived challenges can influence work volition which in turn influences work choices.

Work volition is defined as "*a perception* which is hypothesized to develop – in part – from *real* structural, environmental and personal barriers and constraints" [59]. It is shaped by, but distinct from, real constraints. Work volition has been linked with a range of positive outcomes such as increased career maturity and sense of control, increased work meaning, person-environment fit, job satisfaction and life satisfaction. The Psychology of Working Theory proposes that "individuals with greater work volition are more likely to engage in meaningful and fulfilling employment" [59].

Perceived challenges should be taken seriously because their existence is an employment challenge in its own right. The UK Families Strategy acknowledges the importance of perceived challenge or disadvantage in terms of overall perceptions of military life and states:

"the intent is to move those families who may feel that they are poorly treated...toward an end state where they feel informed and engaged...in the first instance, this will be achieved by removing disadvantage (perceived or actual), but subsequently by creating and supporting choice in the system" [70]

Employment programs can reduce or eliminate perceived challenges as well as those with a basis in lived experience, and can facilitate empowerment and work volition of spouses.

Context and choice (and why we should be talking about career development not just employment)

One of the other themes that arose prior to, throughout and in the weeks following my Fellowship was the concept of “choice” and the following arguments that have been raised

- a) Not all spouses want to work, and efforts to support military spouse employment assume that all spouses want to work
- b) Many military spouses choose not to work because they want to be stay at home parents
- c) If spouses want to work they can (related to perceived rather than actual challenges)

This point highlights the importance of discussing spouse ***career development***, not just employment. Career development can be defined as “*the complex process of managing life, learning and work over lifespan*” and thus includes many aspects including but not limited to paid work [2]. Employment is a key focus of military spouse career development because the data indicates that many military spouses around the world want to engage in more paid work or more satisfying paid work, but it does *not* mean that all spouses want to (or should want to) engage in more paid work. A focus on career development of military spouses provides support for spouses to manage all elements of their careers including paid and unpaid work, leisure and learning.

We need to discuss spouse career development not just employment

On the flip side the assertion is often made (and was at least once during my Churchill travels) that many unemployed military spouses are not in paid work because they *choose* not to be. The subset of spouses in question here are those spouses who are unemployed but not looking for work (and therefore don’t meet the criteria for unemployment¹⁵). In the 2015 ADF Census the key reason for ADF spouses not working was to stay at home and meet the needs of their family. However the same survey reported that 18% said that the serving member’s absence from home made it difficult to work and 12% reported childcare difficulties. Only 6% reported that they chose not to work [8]. Thus it is unclear whether the choice to stay home with children was one of preference or necessity.

The Canadian Ombudsman articulates the impact of military life on spouse employment choices with the following statement:

“For many, the only way to achieve the stability and predictability needed to raise a family amidst the fluidity of relocation, deployment and separation is for the non-serving partner to set aside their professional aspirations and assume a disproportionate parenting role, offsetting the serving spouse’s service-induced limitations. Many CF spouses are neither working nor seeking employment because they are resigned to the necessity of providing stability and continuity on the homefront...Of the many non-serving CF partners who are not in the labour force, a strong majority

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics

appear to be doing so to maintain family stability or because of an absence of viable options rather than by choice” [26]

The RAND ‘Working around the military’ paper reports:

“The vast majority (approx. ¾) of spouses out of the labor force mentioned full time parenting responsibilities as their reason for not working. While some of these spouses prefer to remain out of the labor force, not all stay-at-home spouses lack a “taste” for work. A sizeable number of spouses neither working nor seeking work mentioned barriers, including day care problems, local labor market conditions, or demands of the military lifestyle, that hinder their employment. Although day care and local labor market conditions are issues that large numbers of civilian spouse also face, many military spouses viewed these conditions as the result of their military lifestyle, either because they were removed from extended family that could help with the parenting responsibilities, because they would not have self-selected the location to which the military sent them, or because the military demands such as deployments and long hours precluded their service member from assisting them” [33]

Thus the “choice” to not engage in paid work may be one made out of necessity rather than a career development preference. We need to be mindful about assumptions about how much choice is involved in decisions in the context of military life. The Psychology of Working Framework challenges the traditional assumptions about personal freedom of work choice and on the contrary assumes that most people face considerable constraints in choosing their occupations [132]

the “choice” to not engage in paid work may be one made out of necessity rather than a career development preference

Again, this raises the importance of discussing career development including career self-management of military spouses. Current approaches to career development are about assisting people *“gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors to manage their life and work”* [1]. All individuals make career decisions in the context of their personal circumstances and assisting them to do this is an important element of support. However, we should be concerned from a social justice point of view about social and economic structures that affect work choices of certain sectors of the population. It is important to better understand the career choices of military spouses and the reasons behind them rather than make assumptions, and to support spouses make choices that suit their circumstances whilst at the same time addressing barriers.

Concerns about identifying as a spouse

Concerns about identifying as a spouse were raised on two fronts. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 2 there are documented cases of employer bias against spouses, despite the fact that it is illegal for employers to ask about marital status much less discriminate on the basis of it. But this raises another concern. Military spouses are categorised as such *because they are*

Information about military spouse status must be self-reported.

married; and because they are married it is illegal to ask them about their status as a military spouse whether it is to discriminate against them or assist them. Thus information about military spouse status must be *self-reported*.

The other concern is that many spouses are very independent and many may be reluctant to identify as spouses and/or to access family support services, or they may not recognise their unique situation.

Collective Impact¹⁶

It is unlikely that due to the diversity of the population and the complexity of the issue that there will be one single solution. Instead, it will take a coordinated and collaborative effort between different organisations to provide specialised, targeted assistance. This is articulated in the Canadian MFS Spousal Employment Operating Plan:

“No single organization, community, centre or provider has the knowledge and capacity to deliver complete employment support to military spouses and families. The ability to support military spouses and their families in career development is highly dependent upon shared responsibilities, awareness and collective competences of community partners” [28].

I saw throughout my Fellowship the wide variety of efforts in place to address spouse employment by various sectors including government, non-profit, for-profit and social enterprise.

US DoD spouse employment program director Eddy Mentzer has spoken often about “collective impact” as the key to successfully addressing spouse employment challenges and agrees that no one person or organisation can do everything. On the 5-year anniversary of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership Todd Weiler, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs stated:

“We must work with employers, military and veteran organizations, communities, government agencies, and academia to tap into their ideas, talents, and resources, to mind-share to get them to get the best results for our military families” [133].

‘collective impact’ is the key to successfully addressing spouse employment challenges
-Eddy Mentzer

Efforts to address this problem need to be collective, collaborative, coordinated and not competitive. Each sector brings unique insights to the problem and a complex problem such as this needs novel and innovative ideas that are shared. We need to ensure that services are not duplicated unnecessarily, particularly in the non-profit sector where groups are competing for the same public money. Whilst having a number of service providers can draw more attention to the issue¹⁷ it can also mean a lot of ‘noise’ in the as well as competition for the same dollar. As both Sue Hoppin and Brooke Goldberg pointed out in my discussions with them, money for veteran

¹⁶ Thank you to DoD spouse program director C. Eddy Mentzer for his use of the term in this context

¹⁷ A point made by National Military Spouse Network’s Sue Hoppin in conversation

charities in the US is drying up and the number of charities is decreasing. In their assessment of the 100,000 Jobs Mission RAND reported that the ‘noise’ created by having a large number of providers can be confusing for both employers trying to connect with veterans and for veterans trying to distinguish between service providers and find one with genuine opportunities [134]. This sentiment was echoed in one discussion I had with a service provider who said it can be difficult for organisations to distinguish themselves and reach spouses effectively in order to deliver their services. Similar concerns have been raised with respect to veteran charities in Australia. The ESO Mapping Project found that the “*support services available to veterans and/or their families from the 3474 charities are not clear*” and that the growth of ex-service and veteran organisations risks duplication of services, confusing key messaging to both the public and the veteran community, reduced effectiveness of advocacy and less efficient use of limited resources [135].

We also need to ensure that the best individual or organisation for the job is delivering services. Different sectors (government, non-profit, for-profit and social enterprise) all have pros and cons, and the ability and resources to service different needs. As US DoD’s Eddy Mentzer said on LinkedIn:

“We also have to be aware of what we can and cannot do. There are areas where we can impact based on our role and where we cannot. When we cannot impact something, we have to be willing to interact with those that can.”

Part of the consideration of suitability of service providers needs to be not just what services they have the ability to provide but also whether spouses will access that provider.

Whilst the duplication of services is not an efficient use of resources there must be some redundancy or guarantee built into the system. It was mentioned to me during my Fellowship that services have been lost (particularly from the NFP sector) when funding ceases or is redirected, which has repercussions in terms of service delivery but also in terms of the messaging to employers partners and military spouses. The METSpouse program in Canada came to an abrupt halt when an existing arrangement between the Canada Company and Veterans Affairs came to an end and Canada Company withdrew funding for both veteran and spouse programs leaving a large hole in MFS service provision. Australia can learn from this experience to ensure that services can be delivered reliably long-term.

Reaching spouses and uptake of services

One of the key challenges mentioned by many of the organisations I met with was awareness of and/or participation in employment support programs by the military spouse community.

There are efforts made to address this. For example, the US DoD SECO staff send direct mailers to spouses such as the 330,000 sent out about the MyCAA program. The program saw an increase in registrations for the 6-8 weeks following the mail out. However Eddy Mentzer reports that reaching spouses continues to be a challenge. SECO are also tailoring packages to reach spouses such as a ‘new spouse’ welcome pack specific for each branch of service.

In Canada many employment services are provided by the local MFRC. Service members posted to a new location are expected to report to the MFRC as part of their inward clearances (and at Petawawa around 80% of them do so). This provides a means for the MFRC to reach families (although it is via the member) to alert them to services. In addition families can reach out the MFRC directly and each MFRC has a website link from the main MFS website.

Social media provides a means for organisations to reach spouses and vice versa. SECO, MSEP, Hiring our Heroes, Canadian MFS, MFRCs and many other organisations I met with have an active presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram or Twitter (or a combination of one or more) that provide both information and links to career opportunities.

In terms of designing service delivery in Australia the following aspects should be considered in relation to awareness and uptake:

- We have an opt-in system for Defence family communication therefore regular promotion of programs across multiple platforms (not necessarily just Defence-related) accessed by ADF spouses is essential for raising awareness.
- Services need to meet the needs of the population to facilitate uptake; given the diversity of the population and the complex nature of the issue a range of services are needed.
- A coordinated approach to service delivery will reduce ‘noise’ and focus attention on the services on offer.
- A coordinated approach will facilitate cross-promotion and referrals of services

Following on from this last point – the Department of Defence currently funds professional employment services for eligible spouses with PEAP but there is no information on how or where to access services or even what services can be accessed. For example, identification of transferable skills, employment options and job placement advice are funded but spouses may not know who to approach to obtain a quote for these services. Coordination and referral between funding providers such as DCO and service providers (such as professional career development organisations) may facilitate better uptake of the program and also provide important information for those spouses who aren’t eligible for funding but still want to access career support (See Chapter 5).

Disadvantaged but not victims (why language matters and why this is not about charity)

“above all, be the heroine of your life not the victim” – Nora Ephron

It can be easy to assume or perceive that when an individual or population experiences disadvantage that they are victims. I don’t believe this to be the case with the military spouse population and this was reinforced throughout my Fellowship. Military spouses don’t just survive military life they thrive in it. The challenges associated with frequent

**Military
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military life
they thrive in
it.**

relocations (and starting over in a new location), frequent and/or lengthy deployments and absences from home of their spouse, domestic and family responsibilities and living with the inherent risk (and sadly sometimes the worst case outcomes) of military service have, at the same time as creating career disadvantages, instilled in many spouses qualities that make them valuable citizens and employees. As MOAA point out in their guide to spouse employment the common characteristics of military spouses include adaptability, resiliency, independence, flexibility, problem solving, hard-working, loyalty and motivation [10].

Military spouses are innovating and implementing solutions to a range of issues including spouse employment.

Almost all of those I met from organisations addressing spouse employment (across countries and sectors) were military spouses themselves. They are leading the way in efforts to address employment and lifestyle challenges and present employers with a relatively untapped talent pool. Whether in their own homes or in the community, military spouses are innovating and implementing solutions to a range of issues including spouse employment. They are working at the grass roots level through to high-level discussions with senior government and military leaders and in some cases running for office themselves.

A common response from so many spouses when discussing the challenges of military life was to focus on the positive aspects. There are widespread reports of the excitement and benefits of living in different communities and cultures, developing friendships that span time and distance, and the pride felt about being part of the military community.

Two events I attended in during my Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to hear from and talk with a number of US military spouses. These were the Military Spouse of the Year Town Hall and the Homefront Rising; they were both motivating and inspiring events that showcased not just the skills in the military spouse community but the tenacity and grit. A common theme throughout both events was the ability and potential within the spouse community to make positive changes for military families, and the events showcased several spouses doing just that whilst encouraging and empowering other spouses to do similar.

Narrative and language are important influencers of public perceptions of military spouses. When discussing the career challenges faced by the military spouse community we need to be mindful of the language used. I think we have much to learn from the narrative around veterans. Drawing much needed attention to the challenges faced by many veterans in terms of health and wellbeing may have inadvertently given the impression that the overwhelming majority of military veterans are 'damaged goods'. This in turn may have led some employers to be dis-incentivised to employ veterans, in turn exacerbating problems for those experiencing a difficult transition. In response there has been explicit recognition that the majority of veterans don't leave the ADF with health issues; a point emphasised in a recent speech by Minister for Veterans Affairs and Defence Personnel Darren Chester [136]. Addressing spouse employment in conjunction with veteran

Narrative and language are important influencers of public perceptions

employment may not be beneficial given the differences in needs between these populations or it may in fact be detrimental in terms of narrative and perception. It was mentioned to me that the negative image of military personnel and veterans in the media (in particular with respect to PTSD) presents a barrier to onboarding community support for spouse employment.

Eric Eversole of Hiring our Heroes suggested at the 2017 Hiring Our Heroes Military Spouse Employment Summit that the narrative (languages and images) of military spouses as “guardians of the homefront” was negatively affecting spouse employment and that the narrative needed to shift in order to better portray spouses as an “economic force that is crucial to this country”. As the DoD’s Eddy Mentzer expressed to me, we often hear about the negative but there are tens of thousands of out there ‘killing’ it every day in the workplace.

It is important when we are drawing attention to the challenges of military spouse employment that we are not portraying the spouse community as victims and the call for action as a hand out or a charitable action. Instead, we should be focusing on the strengths within this community, the strong business case of hiring military spouses and to the wide-reaching benefits of addressing this issue. This is important not just for employer/public perception but also for the perception that the military spouse community has of itself.

It's about more than recruitment: meaningful work, retention, entrepreneurship and flexible work options

A point reinforced through many discussions on spouse employment is that it is not just about getting any job – the quality of the job is important. As discussed previously a bad job can be worse for your health than no job. There will not be widespread benefits to individuals, families and the military if we are not seeking *meaningful*¹⁸ employment for spouses.

Another theme throughout this Fellowship was that there is no magic bullet. Recruitment programs alone will not be enough to assist the spouse community because (as discussed in Chapter 2) employment concerns include underemployment, family and household demands and lack of career progression. Employment solutions need to include retention, flexible work practices, professional development opportunities and new, innovative approaches. Employment programs supporting military spouse employment and career development should include employer education and awareness efforts to ensure that companies (particularly HR staff) understand the military spouse community, how to support them and the benefits of doing so, and input from employers about possible employment solutions. A key message from the DoD’s MSEP program is that whilst recruitment is important it doesn’t solve the challenge of relocation and that assisting spouses to retain employment when they relocate is crucial. As such part of the reporting metrics for the MSEP program include tracking how many spouses are transferred when relocated or assisted to find work with a similar employer [31].

¹⁸ As determined by individual spouses. The term ‘meaningful’ is used by several individuals and groups when discussing veteran and spouse employment but with respect to this Fellowship I credit the Hiring our Heroes team for the use of the word.

Entrepreneurship has been touted as one solution to military spouse unemployment and underemployment. Whilst not everyone is suited to owning and running their own business there are many spouses who do so successfully and many of the attributes of military spouses make them suitable candidates. Thus entrepreneurship facilitators such as Canada's HERCS program and professional groups such as The Milspo Project are important contributors to the landscape. However, entrepreneurship is not always portable and many spouses find themselves having to start over in new locations to reestablish a client base. Some come up against hurdles such as not being able to conduct their business from home, as was the case recently in Australia for a spouse who could not obtain the permission of the Service Residence property owner to do so.

Flexible work practice and remote work are becoming more common and will hopefully provide a viable opportunity for enhanced military spouse career development. However, flex and remote work is not yet widespread enough to "solve" spouse employment.

We need to be looking at a range of employment options and assisting spouses to make decisions that meet their career ambitions in the context of their circumstances whilst also trying to mitigate negative circumstances.

Are military families at capacity? Self-reliance and volunteerism

Contemporary approaches to assisting military families are centered around community capacity building (CCB) to empower military families and communities to help themselves. A common basis of military family support is self-reliance; it is a key component of both the ADF Family Support Policy and the ADF Family Covenant [38, 81].

In her article on CF spouses Spanner argues that the notion of 'by families for families' provides an important avenue for military spouses to "exercise agency and ownership" yet points out it also "*risks placing additional responsibilities on military families who might already be overstretched*"[48]. It was brought to my attention during my visit to the US that 'self-reliance', or even reliance of the military on families to perform essential functions, may be negatively influencing spouse employment and career development. The US, UK, Canadian and Australian armed forces have experienced continuous war and a high operational tempo since the 9/11 attacks of 2001. Many personnel have not experienced a peacetime defence force. This operational tempo is taking its toll on military families. The 2017 Blue Star Families' survey reports that the operational tempo is exerting 'an unacceptable level of stress' on US military families and time away from family, military family stability and the impact of military service on children are the top reported concerns of families [51] . As discussed in Chapter 2, military spouses bear enormous family and household responsibility and workload much of which is a result of military life and the unavailability of the serving member to assist. Anecdotally many spouses I speak to feel that they are working at or beyond capacity. As one respondent in the 2014 Blue Star Families (BSF) survey said "*self-sufficiency is a nice goal, but families who experience deployment*

repeatedly develop a more critical need for programs that actually provide services...and most civilian communities don't have resources in place to help military families”[137].

Military families are also renowned for their volunteerism and in the 2014 BSF survey it was reported 68% of respondents formally or informally volunteered. However, several spouses I spoke to raised concerns that whilst volunteer work can build skills and experience it is detracting from paid work, isn't valued by employers the same way [138] and is too often viewed as a viable substitute for paid work for military spouses. The military support environment in the US itself relies on volunteers; each service has some form of Family Readiness Group that relies on volunteers to facilitate communication and support and enable families “to become more knowledgeable and self-reliant”. Many spouses I spoke to felt that the reliance on families to provide support through volunteer efforts was a throwback to an era when families didn't want or need to be dual income, and that contemporary military families don't have the same capacity to assist.

Spouse employment is an international issue

One of the most powerful themes to arise during my Churchill Fellowship was that military spouse employment is a challenge for military families in Australia, the UK, the USA and Canada. Whilst there are local influences that result in differences between countries overwhelmingly the challenges described are experienced by military spouses across the world. This provides opportunities to address this problem globally as well as locally by sharing knowledge and experience as well as implementing solutions across countries as well as within. This is especially true for solutions provided by companies with an international or global presence. The issue of gender also makes military spouse employment a consideration for the achievement of United Nations Sustainability Goal #5.

Still more to be done- advancing narrative and actions

Throughout my Fellowship I received overwhelming feedback that whilst good efforts are in place there is still much to be done. Even in the USA where there are a multitude of organisations addressing the issue it was impressed upon me that there were still many challenges in place (reflected in the still-high unemployment and underemployment rates). There were concerns that commitments to assist spouses into employment hadn't yet translated into high numbers of hires and that more evidence of success was needed. The sentiment that more action rather than more information was expressed. No one I met was resting on their laurels and all were actively seeking ways to improve employment and career outcomes. A common phrase when discussing military spouse employment is that we need to ‘advance the narrative’; in fact this is precisely one of the foundations of this Churchill Fellowship.

**“Who is going to CHANGE, not CONTINUE the
conversation”**
– Eddy Mentzer, US DoD

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

"It is wonderful what great strides can be made when there is a resolute purpose behind them"

~Winston Churchill

We have evidence indicating that the unemployment, underemployment, and career discontent amongst Australian Defence Force spouses/partners (resulting from the unique aspects of military life) is having a negative impact on their workforce participation, their mental, financial and social health and wellbeing, and therefore on the quality of life ADF families. This should be ringing alarm bells for those who care about ADF family wellbeing, those who are responsible for it, those who rely on it for operational effectiveness and those who benefit from having a fully functioning all-volunteer Defence Force.

Family characteristics, dynamics and norms in Australia are changing and ADF families are no different. There is an increasing expectation (and/or necessity) amongst families to be dual income. The world of work is also changing resulting in fierce competition by employers for the right talent (and a rapidly changing definition of 'talent') [139] leading to the necessity to be 'an employer of choice' in order to achieve organisational goals. These changes are already occurring and rapidly accelerating and like other organisations the ADF will need to position itself to respond effectively to these changes.

We often hear that military culture is stuck in the 1950s where every married service member had a wife who didn't work outside the home who could take care of all the domestic and family responsibilities. As the data shows most of today's spouses do work, or want to work, outside the home and spouse careers are valued by ADF families as much as the member's [7]. However, frequent relocations and absences of the service member from home impact the ability of ADF spouses to fulfill their career ambitions and it can be argued that military family policies are still based on a 1950s family [140]. Unfortunately the topic of ADF spouse career development is largely confined to the spouse population itself and there is little awareness, nor understanding, of it (or its impact) outside this sphere. Defence leaders understand it (and live it) on a personal level but this hasn't lead to sufficiently addressing this issue from a policy or workforce management point of view¹⁹. Yet, as discussed in this report, addressing the issue will benefit individuals, families, the ADF, Australian businesses and Australian society in general.

¹⁹ Thank you to Commodore Cantelon from CFMWS for this sentiment

Shining a spotlight on military spouse employment and making efforts to address the challenges is about far more than lowering unemployment rates or aiming for parity with spouses of civilians. It presents an opportunity to pursue cultural change and invest in developing a healthy, thriving modern day ADF community that is well prepared for the future, reflects the society it serves²⁰ and allows it to serve that society as well as possible.

Shining a light on military spouse employment presents us with an opportunity to pursue cultural change and invest in creating a healthy, thriving, modern day ADF

This Churchill Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to observe and understand how other countries similar to Australia view spouse employment, and what policies and programs are in place to address the employment challenges faced by military spouses and support their overall career development. This insight has led to a number of recommendations for how Australia can better support and empower the career development of ADF spouses. This report is not intended to provide a definitive account of the issue – rather it is intended to generate discussion and advance the narrative around spouse employment in Australia and contribute to robust discussions about the issue and its solutions. As such it should be viewed as a working paper for further discussion by stakeholders and subject matter experts.

A note on the Prime Minister's Industry Advisory Council on Veteran Employment:

The Australian Government currently has an Industry Advisory Council discussing spouse employment as part of the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Initiative. As yet there is no publicly available information on the committee's discussion or findings. Without information on the committee's findings I cannot comment on how my Churchill Fellowship findings relate to this initiative. However, it is worth noting that it was leadership from the Obama White House in 2011 that drove employment support programs in America, and in Canada it was the release of the Ombudsman's report in 2013 that led to the acceptance by Canadian National Defence of 18 key recommendations for improving family assistance including the creation of a national employment strategy. Hopefully this initiative from Australia's leader will stimulate this issue as a priority for ADF families.

Recommendations

Recommendation One – Address ADF spouse career development as an essential element of ADF family support and an issue of concern in its own right:

- 1.1 Acknowledge and articulate the importance of spouse career development to ADF families, and therefore to recruitment, retention, family readiness and operational effectiveness.
- 1.2 Acknowledge that there are multiple aspects of ADF life that negatively influence ADF spouse employment and career development; most notably relocation and absence from home.

²⁰ Credit to Todd Weiler, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for the sentiment regarding the military being a reflection of the society it serves, in Waldron, A (2016). *The force behind the Forces: New Survey data on American military families*. Brookings Institute blog.

1.3 Address ADF spouse/partner employment as a separate (but related) issue to veteran employment

One of the key areas of difference I noted between Australia and the countries I visited was how spouse employment/ career development is viewed as a defence policy matter. The UK, US and Canada view spouse employment as a factor in military family quality of life and/or family readiness and, by extension, a factor in recruitment and retention of personnel and operational readiness. The UK '*Armed Forces Families Strategy*' identifies seven areas of offer to families it has identified as important for the recruitment and retention of personnel. In the US, national DoD programs are delivered in recognition of the contribution that spouse education and employment have on family readiness and its impact on overall readiness and retention of the Armed Forces (2016 DoD report).

The UK, US and Canada view spouse employment as a factor of military family quality of life, readiness and retention

In contrast, support for spouse employment in Australia is provided as part of the Australian Defence Force's Family Policy mobility support, rather than as a specific concern in its own right. This misses the opportunity to acknowledge and articulate the importance of spouse employment to ADF family quality of life and its influence on recruitment, retention, operational readiness and capability. As a result, programs are narrowly focused on one (albeit very influential) component of military life affecting spouse employment and don't address the complexity of the issue. The 2016 Defence White Paper acknowledges spouse employment in its chapter on People (Chapter 6) stating that "*we will continue to assist spouses with finding new work, particularly where their employment has been affected through a posting or deployment of their serving partner*" [68]. However there is actually no current support to assist with the impact of deployment on spouse careers. There is also no acknowledgment of the impact on career of family and domestic responsibilities borne by spouses due to the overall demands of ADF life.

Support for spouse employment in Australia is provided as part of mobility support

Given the evidence, the ADF has both an obligation and a self-interest to acknowledge and address that spouse employment/career development is an important quality of life issue for ADF families and one that can impact operational readiness and the recruitment and retention of personnel (and therefore ultimately the ADF's desire to be an employer of choice and its ability to meet its capability requirements). Taking spouse employment out from under mobility support and identifying it as an area of concern in its own right expands opportunities to address it more effectively and benefit from the outcomes. Efforts to better address employment themselves may be a retention factor given the positive impact on morale found in the evaluation of the UK spouse employment trial (see Chapter 3).

As in other countries, the burgeoning interest in veteran employment in Australia provides an opportunity to address employment in the *whole* military community by shining a spotlight on the

employment and career experiences of military spouses. However, military spouse employment is an important issue in its own right with implications for individuals, families, the ADF and Australian society. Efforts to support military spouse employment need to understand and address the unique challenges experienced by spouses. We need to ensure that any spouse employment programs are not simply a case of extending veteran employment program eligibility to spouses. This is not to say that veteran and military spouse employment can't be addressed together, but it is essential that military spouse employment be addressed as an issue in its own right because the populations and the support they need are very different.

Recommendation Two – Gather more qualitative and quantitative data on the ADF spouse population and undertake a career development and employment needs assessment:

Addressing spouse employment as an issue in its own right requires a better understanding of the ADF spouse population and their needs. Further information on the career competencies and needs of the ADF spouse population is required. Current data on ADF spouses is limited. The most recent study (focused on spouse employment) had only a 14% response rate with 4649 participants. The Defence Census has a much larger number of responses, but information is reported by the Service member. The last two Census surveys have contained questions about ADF spouses and their employment but there is opportunity to gather more information. There is currently a lack of detailed demographic information on ADF spouses (which would provide employers with an indication of the characteristics of this talent pool) such as education, and occupation. More information on family status (i.e. children and other dependants), and on military lifestyle factors (i.e. how many relocations a spouse has undertaken, how many deployments their family has experienced or how frequently the serving member is away from home) and their relationship with employment would also be beneficial. As discussed in Chapter 4 there is more nuanced information to be gained from qualitative studies about ADF spouse employment choices and experiences and one previous research project stated that given its importance to spouses the topic of spouse employment warrants further research. Research and surveys should be thoughtfully planned so as to maximise information without over-burdening the target population.

Recommendation Three – Convene an ADF Spouse Employment Steering Committee of key stakeholders to agree on a shared vision and design a national ADF spouse employment and career development strategy and framework:

The complexity of the problem and the range of solutions requires careful consideration and an intentional rather than ad hoc, piecemeal, approach. One of the criticisms leveled at efforts to assist older workers into work is that "*A piecemeal set of measures lacking legitimacy have emerged, with objectives that lack a road-map for how they will be achieved*". There are signs that this may already be happening with veteran employment. With such limited policy and so few programs currently in place to address spouse employment we have the opportunity to design an effective strategy and framework from the ground up.

As discussed in Chapter 4 the ADF spouse community is diverse, and their career challenges and needs complex. As demonstrated overseas, no one organisation has the knowledge or capacity to deliver a comprehensive employment and career development solution [28] – thus a coordinated and collective effort from the government, non profit, and for profit sectors should be encouraged. There are many stakeholders who have the ability to identify needs and design and implement solutions. In Australia these include but are not limited to ADF spouses and families (via Defence Families of Australia and Defence community groups), ADF leadership (Service Chiefs), Department of Defence (including Defence Community Organisation), the Career Industry Council of Australia (and its member organisations), Australian government agencies (e.g. Department of Jobs and Small Business; Office for Women), state governments, the private sector, career service providers, not-for-profits, and researchers. Gathering insights and ideas from the various sectors in order will help identify and implement innovative and sustainable solutions.

No one organization has the knowledge or capacity to deliver a comprehensive solution...a coordinated and collective effort should be encouraged

Recommendation Four – Encourage a collaborative effort from organisations across government, NFP and private sectors to improve military spouse employment and career outcomes, overseen by the Steering Committee:

Different sectors and organisations have different areas of expertise and their own strengths, weaknesses and risks. It is important to coordinate and oversee *collaborative* efforts in order to avoid a piecemeal approach to service delivery, avoid unnecessary duplication (whilst ensuring there is some level of redundancy or guarantee of services), and ensure that organisations and agencies are contributing where they are most needed and where they have expertise. The vast majority of organisations I met with were military spouse-run. Spouse-led initiatives should be encouraged for their insight into and understanding of the situation, the skills contained within the spouse community and the employment opportunities these initiatives provide. The aim should be to deliver genuine, high quality, long term and impactful programs and set a minimum national benchmark for service provision that still allows for local and regional needs. As the Canadian MFS have articulated, uniformity of effort is required which in turn requires **a shared vision, collaboration, continuous communication and ongoing investment** [28].

The UK Partner Employment Steering Group that brings together those with an active involvement in spouse employment and is chaired by the MOD. In Canada efforts are coordinated by MFS in consultation with stakeholders and articulated in a Spousal Employment Operating Plan. In the US (where there is a large number of active stakeholders) there is some level of coordination between groups but no one overarching committee. From the outside, this appears to cause some challenges with respect to coordinating efforts, avoiding duplication and providing consistency and clarity in a busy landscape.

Central coordination was a recommendation of the 1994 ADF FMDS report (See Chapter 1). Given their obligation and responsibility to partners as well as their relationship with them, I believe it

makes sense for the Department of Defence via the Steering Committee to oversee collaborative efforts.

Recommendation Five – Champion the business case for hiring military spouses, facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between ADF spouse job seekers and employers, and introduce ADF spouse hiring initiatives within companies:

5.1 Champion the business case of hiring ADF spouses to employers and organisations via relationship building and education and awareness campaigns.

5.2 Seek formal commitments from employer partners to support ADF spouse employment via agreed actions and obligations.

5.3 Provide a central point of contact for interested employers to find out how to best access talent from the ADF spouse talent pool

5.4 Encourage companies to implement ADF spouse employment hiring programs and working arrangements that are compatible with military life, and support this via recruitment and retention education and awareness campaigns for employers e.g. networking, webinars, presentations, publications, spouse employment ambassadors.

5.5 Create a searchable job portal for advertising ‘ADF spouse-friendly’ vacancies and creating job seeker profiles.

5.6 Require employer partners to report ADF spouse hiring and retention data

Another key area of difference between Australia and the other countries I visited is the lack of formal means to create mutually beneficial relationships between the jobseekers in the ADF spouse community and employers who can benefit from hiring them. Current support for spouse employment in Australia is focused primarily on individual job readiness i.e. skills identification, resume writing, interview preparation etc. This is vital but it is only one piece of the solution.

Military spouses can and do access employers via traditional methods, however given some of the challenges and constraints they face around possible bias, difficulty translating suitability on their resume, and finding work that meets their availability and lifestyle needs, more targeted job searching options would be beneficial.

The UK, Canada and the USA all have formal programs that champion the business case for hiring military spouses and provide job seekers and employers with a platform by which to connect.

These relationships allow military spouse job seekers to target their job search to employers who seek to benefit from the skills and experience in the military spouse talent pool, and who offer employment conditions which are compatible with military life.

Facilitating relationships between spouses and employers was a recommendation of the Hamilton Report and the ADF FMDS study, and at one stage was delivered by the Defence Community Organisation (see Chapter 1).

Defence Families of Australia have begun this important service delivery with the publication of their checklist as an education tool for employers and their links to a few national employers. As discussed in Chapter 3 there are more comprehensive programs that could be put in place to facilitate job opportunities for spouses and enhance their recruitment and retention opportunities with employer partners. It is strongly recommended that such a program be implemented in Australia in line with Recommendations 1, 3 and 4. Key elements would include championing the business case for hiring military spouses, awareness raising and education amongst employers for how to recruit and retain military spouse talent; a central point of contact for interested employer partners; formal commitments by employers to meet the standards and obligations set by the Steering Committee; a searchable online job portal where employers can upload vacancies and spouses can upload their resumes; and regular reporting of hire information.

Recommendation Six – Enhance and expand current services:

- 6.1 Allow spouses to access DCO spouse employment support at any stage whilst an ADF spouse (i.e. remove relocation eligibility)
- 6.2 Encourage (or require) PEAP applicants to seek services from qualified service providers; liaise with CICA (and its member organisations such as CDAA) to assist applicants with identifying and locating qualified practitioners by placing links to these websites on the DCO PEAP page.
- 6.3 Work with CICA member organisations to educate service providers about the unique challenges and experiences of military spouses that affect their career development (e.g. via webinars, presentations, attendance at conferences, publications) and inform them about PEAP.
- 6.4 Increase awareness of DCO services
- 6.5 Deliver DCO partner employment workshops in all areas where there is a Defence installation and ensure there is consistency across locations whilst allowing for local requirements.
- 6.6 Coordinate spouse employment efforts between DCO and DCO-funded Defence community centres.
- 6.7 Increase online employment content (e.g. website content and webinars) to provide a minimum national level of support.
- 6.8 Utilise local DCO offices as a liaison point between the local communities and the ADF community

Individual job-readiness is an important support element currently provided by Defence Community Organisation (DCO) and there are opportunities to enhance the current job readiness support provided by DCO that could be implemented in the short-term.

If support for spouse employment is provided independently of mobility it opens up opportunity for spouses to access support to offset the multiple challenges of military life including, but not limited to, relocation (for example, considering a change to a career/occupation more compatible with ADF life or returning to work after having a child). This approach is more consistent with

career development being a lifelong process and provides support for the ‘age and stage’-related aspects of life that are heavily influenced by military lifestyle factors.

The current outsourcing of individual job readiness to professional service providers via PEAP funding is consistent with both (i) the principle of current Defence policy to utilise existing community support services and resources wherever possible and (ii) ensuring high quality, specialised service as part of the support program. However, the current program could be enhanced. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, whilst the PEAP program funds professional employment services there is no indication of what services are available in the community and how to access them, and many spouses are unaware of career support services. Career development is not a regulated industry in Australia, however the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) ((who benchmark professional standards and qualifications for career practitioners [2]) maintains a voluntary register of qualified practitioners, as do its member-organisations such as the Career Development of Australia (CDAA) (who review and approve all applications from qualified practitioners). Encouraging interested PEAP applicants (and also those spouses not eligible for funding) to utilise these organisations could facilitate an increased awareness and understanding of the services available in the community and facilitate uptake of PEAP. Career practitioners who are members of professional organisations adhere to professional standards and ethics and professional development via their membership, and ADF spouses should be encouraged to access high quality services with their PEAP funding via CICA and CDAA²¹. DCO could encourage and facilitate this by providing information and links to these associations on their website²². It is also important that community services are appropriate for the needs of the ADF spouse population. Educating career service providers on the unique nature of military life and on the unique career development experiences of ADF spouses in one way of ensuring that existing resources are appropriate and optimized to meet the spouse community needs. DCO could liaise with organisations such as CDAA to educate and raise awareness of military life experiences amongst service providers via means such as consultation, webinars and publications (as has been done in Canada- see Chapter 3). In turn, if spouses are accessing these services independently the career practitioner may be able to refer them to PEAP funding and thus facilitate uptake of the program.

Enhancing current DCO services won’t have an impact unless there is greater awareness and utilisation of the services. As discussed in Chapter 4 reaching spouses is a concern for programs in other countries as well but there are some potential avenues such as better use of social media, coordinated efforts between stakeholders, and fostering greater trust in the organisation and services offered. Results from the first evaluation of PEAP will hopefully shine some light on the effectiveness of this program although longer-term evaluation will provide greater insight into effectiveness.

²¹ Disclosure: I am a professional member of the Career Development Association of Australia and serve on the committee of the ACT Division as the learning and development coordinator.

²² I have already approached both CDAA and DCO to discuss this further

With both national and local presence, DCO have the ability to provide national-level spouse career support whilst catering for local population needs.

A more consistent approach to DCO-led partner employment workshops in local areas would be beneficial. It is recommended that workshops/events be held in all areas in which there is a significant ADF family population and that all workshops consist of minimum agreed national content as well as locally relevant content. Scheduling and advertising these in a coordinated and timely manner (such as is done for Transition seminars) would present a polished and professional image of DCO employment services and allow ADF spouses to identify the most convenient event for them to attend and plan their attendance. Support would be further enhanced if DCO were to coordinate efforts with local Defence community centres – some of which deliver employment programs with the support of DCO's FSFP funding.

DCO could also deliver relatively low-cost online programs and courses, such as those run in other countries, which provide a minimum level of service at a national level and are in keeping with the diversity of the spouse population, their geographic spread and need for flexible learning options.

The local presence of DCO around Australia provides a liaison point between local communities and the ADF community which could be used to promote the business case of hiring spouses to local employers and to break down negative stereotypes. It could also provide an important point of contact for employers wanting further information about hiring ADF partners (whether DCO provide the information or field enquiries to other appropriate agencies).

Recommendation Seven – Review how current Defence policies affect spouse employment and how current and future policies can be enhanced to offset negative effects on families including spouse employment:

7.1 Explore the potential of the TWM to address spouse employment challenges and identify and implement enhancements to the model to better address spouse employment challenges

7.2 Consider underlying assumptions of policies that could be contributing to spouse employment challenges particularly with respect to expectations around spouse unpaid labour.

7.3 Expand gender equality efforts and considerations to the whole ADF community.

As discussed throughout this report there are many factors negatively influencing spouse employment. Defence (and other government – see below) should not only address spouse employment support in policies but also consider how other policies contribute to the challenges, or could contribute to solutions.

Most obvious of course is the requirement for many families to relocate. Whilst this is part and parcel of military life it is worth identifying where relocation can be minimised. For example, former US Secretary of Army Eric Fanning recommended spreading out Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves to minimise disruption to families [140].

Another important aspect is the consideration of underlying gender assumptions of policies and the subsequent effects on spouse employment, particularly with respect to unpaid work such as parenting and household duties. Criticism has been leveled at Canadian policies that don't adequately address "secondary elements of a military move" and instead rely on military families to deal with them, and that underlying this is an assumption that a service member has a civilian spouse to take on this labour [48]. Gender equality should not just be a policy consideration for those wearing the uniform but also for their families in order to meet the needs of contemporary ADF families. Creating employment opportunities for ADF spouses will be of little benefit if spouses have limited capacity to participate in paid work due to disproportionate levels of unpaid work or if their health and wellbeing is negatively affected due to workload – and the ADF will miss out on the benefits as a result.

Policies on other Defence matters should also be considered for how they can be applied to improve military spouse employment. For example, the Total Workforce Model has recently been introduced to help the ADF retain their skilled workers in a competitive job market by introducing a more flexible work model. Whilst there is no mention of families in the description of the TWM there is explicit acknowledgement that some ADF members leave service because their work arrangements don't suit their 'personal circumstances'. According to the 2017 Families Study, in the last 5 years two family related factors have consistently featured among the top 10 reasons for leaving permanent ADF service – the impact of job demands on family life, and a desire for less separation from family. It is clear that many of the 'personal circumstances' that require flexible work arrangements and/or influence a decision to leave the ADF relate to family needs. Thus the TWM offers a possible solution to some of the challenges faced by families trying to balance work and family commitments. For example, it may allow an ADF member to transfer to work part-time or casual Reserve work or take an extended break from the ADF after the birth of a child to allow the spouse to remain in the workforce.

Recommendation Eight – Adopt a whole-of-government approach to ADF spouse employment:

- 8.1 Include ADF spouses as a group of women identified as having specific employment needs and experiences.
- 8.2 Consider how existing government employment services could be applied to assist the ADF spouse population
- 8.3 Compile a guide authored by Department of Defence, Defence Families of Australia and the Department of Jobs and Small Business to encourage businesses to commit to hiring ADF spouses and educate employers on the best methods to recruit and retain spouses.
- 8.4 Encourage state governments to facilitate easier and more affordable transition of occupational licences and registrations across states including discussing the introduction of national rather than state based licences wherever possible.
- 8.5 Consider preferential government and ADF contractor hiring programs.

8.6 Consider how policies and programs to support ADF spouse career development could be used to assist other populations.

Defence is not the only government department who has the potential to address spouse employment and nor should they be the only ones who do given the widespread implications of the issue. This is the case overseas, such as in the UK where the Department of Work and Pensions provide assistance to the military community, and in the US where the Department of Labor assists the military community and where there are discussions between states on licence portability.

The gender elements discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 should make the topic of spouse employment a concern for the Office of Women who in 2017 released their 'Toward 2025' strategy to boost women's workforce participation. Contained in that report was the identification of six groups of women identified as having specific needs and experiences and I think there is a sound case for the addition of ADF spouses to this list. The strategy identifies several action areas that relate to spouse employment such as childcare, flexible working arrangements (for both men and women), and economic security (including level of unpaid work and gender segregation in the labor market) [63].

The Australian government currently runs an employment service – the Job Active program, which has already been utilised to address veteran employment. Australian workers who have been made redundant can get help via Job Active. A Jobactive provider can help with resume preparation, job searching, preparing for interviews etc. As discussed in Chapter 3, in the UK and US military spouses who leave a position due to a service-related relocation are not considered to have resigned voluntarily and thus may be eligible for government services. In the UK the DWP JobCentre Plus agencies have armed forces champions who focus on JobCentre Plus support to service leavers and spouses of currently serving and ex-service personnel. There is potential to implement a similar system in Australia in which Jobactive providers are educated on the specific challenges and needs of the ADF spouse population and can assist ADF spouses with their job search needs. However, a recent report on the suitability of Jobactive for mature age workers found that Jobactive staff didn't have the time or resources to deliver the type of assistance required by their clients due to contractual compliance and high caseloads, and that few employers used the Jobactive site for recruitment due to lack of awareness of the site or concerns about the type of applicants they'd get [141]. Thus, in line with other recommendations in this report it should be determined whether this particular support meets the needs of the ADF spouse community before utilising it to address spouse employment.

The Australian government currently provides information and tools for employers to employ certain sub-populations of Australian workers. The Department of Jobs and Small Business has compiled a guide for employers to educate them on investing in mature age workers that includes information on how to recruit and retain the best mature age workers and how to maximise training and development outcomes. The guide also includes a charter designed "to encourage the recruitment and retention of mature age people and to strengthen age-management practices in

workplaces throughout Australia". This guide and charter provide an example of how the government could assist employers overcome conscious or unconscious bias against ADF spouses and benefit from employing them.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) provides an opportunity to coordinate action by state governments to facilitate the smooth transition of occupational licences and registrations across states to make licence transfer easier and more economically feasible.

Governments (federal, state and local) are large employers of Australians and therefore potentially of military spouses (particularly in the ACT in where there is a high percentage of ADF families and government jobs). Whilst it was dismissed when suggested back in the 1990s, the suggestion for preferential employment into civilian positions in the ADF and other government jobs (and for civilian contractors to the ADF to be encouraged to provide employment for ADF spouses) should be re-considered especially in light of the First Principles Review and the subsequent One Defence model and changes to defence contracting arrangements. Recruiting from the ADF spouse talent pool and providing favourable working conditions may also benefit states by encouraging ADF families to remain in location even once the ADF member has left the ADF.

Recommendation Nine – Approach military spouse employment as a global issue as well as a national one.

9.1 Convene an international military spouse employment working group to share ideas, experience and data, to seek new and innovative solutions and to assist in the implementation of identified best or 'promising' practices in other countries.

9.2 Actively seek ways to collaborate with and/or expand existing programs in other countries and provide reciprocity to foreign military spouses.

9.3 Encourage companies with an international presence to offer their military spouse employment programs in all countries in which they operate.

9.4 Provide assistance with licence recognition and reciprocity between countries on employment for spouses re-locating internationally where spouses have working rights.

9.5 Consider military spouse employment in the context of the United Nations Sustainability Goals

One of the key takeaway findings from my Churchill Fellowship is that the career challenges faced by military spouses are similar in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. There are of course differences within and between countries, but the fundamental challenges are the same. This provides an exciting opportunity to share knowledge and experience in efforts to identify new and innovative solutions and to expand solutions that are working in one country to others. There are many international and global 'military friendly' companies supporting veteran and spouse employment and these companies should be encouraged to support military spouse employment in all countries in which they operate. Given that relocations to foreign countries offer up some unique employment challenges countries should work together to minimise these where possible.

Recommendations at a Glance

Recommendation One:

Address ADF spouse career development as an essential element of ADF family support and an issue of concern in its own right.

Recommendation Two:

Gather more qualitative and quantitative data on the ADF spouse population and undertake a career development and employment needs assessment.

Recommendation Three:

Convene an ADF Spouse Employment Steering Committee of key stakeholders to agree on a shared vision and design a national ADF spouse employment and career development strategy and framework.

Recommendation Four:

Encourage a collaborative effort from organisations across government, NFP and private sectors to improve military spouse employment and career outcomes, overseen by the Steering Committee.

Recommendation Five:

Champion the business case for hiring military spouses, facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between ADF spouse job seekers and employers, and introduce ADF spouse hiring initiatives within companies.

Recommendation Six:

Enhance and expand current services.

Recommendation Seven:

Review how current Defence policies affect spouse employment and how current and future policies can be enhanced to offset negative effects on families including spouse employment.

Recommendation Eight:

Adopt a whole-of-government approach to ADF spouse employment.

Recommendation Nine:

Approach military spouse employment as a global issue as well as a national one.

KEY MESSAGES FOR GOVERNMENT

ADF spouse career development is an important quality of life issue for ADF families and therefore an ADF recruitment, retention and operational effectiveness concern.

The effects of spouse career challenges are wide-reaching and have implications for individual and family health and wellbeing, ADF capability, Australian labour force participation and national security.

ADF spouse employment is a national gender equality concern.

Ongoing support for ADF spouse career development is an effective ADF transition tool.

ADF spouse career development and employment is a complex issue and is not just related to mobility.

Investing in ADF spouse career development is an opportunity to invest in the creation of a healthy, thriving, modern-day ADF community that is well prepared for the future.

A national ADF spouse career development strategy and framework is required to deliver a coordinated, collaborative effort between the government, non-profit and private sectors.

KEY MESSAGES FOR EMPLOYERS

ADF spouses are a diverse group of working age Australians with valuable skills and attributes and experience across a range of industries.

Many ADF spouses experience career challenges as a result of military life and the ADF spouse population is a relatively untapped talent pool.

Employers can benefit by tailoring recruitment, on boarding, and workplace policies and practices to suit the needs of the ADF spouse population.

Conscious or unconscious bias against inconsistent chronological work histories may result in you missing out on talent.

Offering flexible work practices will help attract and retain ADF spouse talent in your business.

Mobility is a fact of life for many, but not all, spouses. Don't assume an ADF spouse is more transient than other applicants but if an ADF spouse has 'orders' consider offering an internal transfer or remote work opportunities.

Defence Families of Australia have produced a checklist for being an ADF-friendly employer <https://dfa.org.au/our-advocacy/partner-employment/education-of-employers/>

KEY MESSAGES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

ADF spouse employment is a complex issue. It is unlikely any one organisation will be able to provide a comprehensive solution.

Veteran employment and spouse employment are two very different issues which require different solutions.

A range of services are required to improve spouse employment including policy, advocacy, education, career and job readiness assistance, and employment opportunities.

A national strategy and framework should be established with the input of key stakeholders to ensure a coordinated, collaborative approach using best-practices.

Duplication of services and unnecessary competition between providers should be avoided.

Services should be delivered by the organisation best-placed to deliver a positive impact.

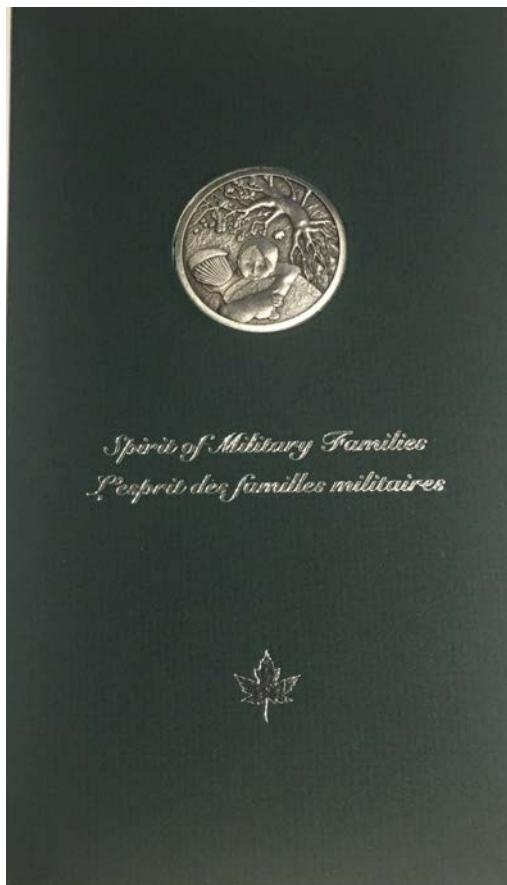
An effective communication strategy is essential to reach spouses.

Military spouse career development is a local and global issue. International efforts should be considered when designing programs.

Military Families

Strength Behind the Uniform

*Thank you to Claudia Beswick from Petawawa MFRC for this gift of the
Spirit of Military Families coin.*



Pride • Strength • Resilience • Support

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