

Joining forces to improve Australian Defence Force spouse/partner career development

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Biography:

Amanda McCue is a career practitioner and CDAA Professional Member who works in private practice serving military spouses, transitioning and ex-ADF clients. Prior to this she worked for a short time with the US military community. In 2018 she travelled to the US, UK and Canada on a Churchill Fellowship to investigate international approaches to military spouse career development. Amanda has been an advocate for military spouse employment for the past 5+ years.

Maree Sirois is the National Convenor of Defence Families of Australia (DFA), the official government body which advocates for families of current ADF members. Maree leads a team of 10 partners of current serving members who are located around Australia. She has led research projects on issues such as partner employment and the policy that underpins ADF support to families and represents DFA on a variety of Defence working groups and committees. For the five years prior to becoming Convenor Maree worked as Defence Families of Australia's Policy Officer. In April 2014 Maree published a book of real stories about the modern-day Australian Defence family called Commanding the Home Front. Maree's passion for advocating for Defence families began when she lived in Canada in the late 1990s.

Surveys of ADF families over the past 10 years have revealed that approximately 80% of Australian Defence Force spouses/partners feel they have sacrificed their own careers for that of their serving member spouse's. The 2017 ADF Families Survey conducted by Defence Families of Australia and Defence Community Organisation reported that 81% of ADF partners feel they have made employment sacrifices because of their partner's ADF career, 14% of ADF spouse respondents are unemployed and 12% are underemployed (both figures higher than national averages). For those who are employed, overall satisfaction with their work arrangements was reported as not very high due to the compromises made in the amount and nature of work they perform. Many of the career challenges faced by ADF partners are attributed to the unique aspects of military life such as frequent relocation and heavy domestic responsibilities due to the frequent and/or lengthy absences from home of the ADF member. In 2018 Amanda undertook a Churchill Fellowship to the US, UK and Canada to investigate how those countries are addressing the career development challenges faced by their military spouses with the intent of applying findings to the Australian context. The presenters will discuss (i) the career development challenges faced by ADF spouses (ii) provide information to inform career development practices involving ADF partners, including common career development needs of ADF spouses (iii) discuss the recommendations from Amanda's Churchill Report – including how various sectors can join together to provide targeted support for the career development of ADF spouses throughout their ADF journey and beyond (iv) discuss current resources for supporting spouse career development and new evolving initiatives.