



## **The Hon Darren Chester MP**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday 31 July 2020

## **WOMEN AND FAMILIES COUNCIL BOOSTED WITH SKILLS AND EXPERTISE**

THE voices of women who have served in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and family members of ADF personnel will be better heard with nine new members appointed in advisory roles to support the important work of the Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester today congratulated the nine women and welcomed their appointments, acknowledging the wealth of knowledge and experience they each bring.

"There has been overwhelming interest from the defence and veteran communities to play a role in the Council, and I am pleased today to announce the individuals who have been successful in securing advisor positions," Mr Chester said.

"Each of the nine new members bring with them a unique and valuable knowledge base and experience, from having served themselves, or having partners and family members who have served, to working and undertaking research in the veteran and defence field.

"With the leadership of Ms Gabrielle Costigan MBE as chair of the Council, these advisors will play a crucial role in ensuring the needs of women and families united by defence service are understood and visible, and their voices are heard."

The 14 current members of the Council will continue to provide invaluable insight and advice going forward, but with the new members providing additional expertise, experience and skills in ensuring the Council is fully informed and able to provide effect and timely advice to Government. The advisors will also participate in consultation and communication with veterans and their families.

Chair of the Council Ms Gabrielle Costigan MBE said the Council is delighted that these nine amazing Australians have joined as Advisors.

"We conducted a thorough selection process and the successful applicants will provide so much experience and expertise to the Council that will enable us to further our work in support of the women and families who have served our nation," Ms Costigan said.

Details of the nine new members, including a short biography, is below.

**ENDS**

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

**Rachel Tharratt: 02 6277 7820**

**DVA Media: 02 6289 6466**

**Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Canberra ACT.**

*Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit [www.OpenArms.gov.au](http://www.OpenArms.gov.au)*

## **Council Advisor Biographies**

<u>Samantha Hodges</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 years' service in the Australian Army, currently posted to the Defence Force School of Intelligence and multiple deployments including domestic disaster relief and overseas operations.</li> <li>• Three years as a volunteer and therapeutic riding instructor for children and adults, including veterans, with physical and mental disabilities.</li> <li>• Holds a B. Psychology (Hons) and Masters of Clinical Psychology and completed Masters placement with Open Arms, providing exposure to veteran's issues outside of service.</li> <li>• Soon to commence post-graduate work through the American Uniformed Service University of Health Sciences.</li> <li>• Co-author of two peer reviewed journal articles on military topics with a third article currently waiting review.</li> </ul>
<u>Dr Amy Johnson</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecturer in Journalism and Public Relations at Central Queensland University, with continued research in military families and social media communications.</li> <li>• PhD thesis was 'Inside and Outside – An Investigation into Social Media Use by Australian Defence Force Partners'.</li> <li>• Spouse of a current serving member of the Royal Australian Navy.</li> <li>• Currently working on funded grants including creating evidence based programs for ADF families with young children and creative workshops for veterans and their families in the ACT.</li> </ul>
<u>Kate Martin</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 years working in transition support and services for police, military and emergency services.</li> <li>• Husband and father are both former police officers with stress and trauma related mental health issues.</li> <li>• DBA candidate at Charles Sturt University, researching post service employment issues for police, military and emergency services members.</li> <li>• Holds a Bachelor of Psychological Science and current co-chair of the Fontline Mental Health Committee of the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association (ANZMHA).</li> </ul>
<u>Sharelle Mathias-Carman</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Mathias-Carman is a strategic communications professional who has extensive experience in public affairs, the media, government relations and stakeholder engagement having held senior leadership roles within the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the Department of Defence and the Victorian Local Government.</li> <li>• Currently the Director of Corporate Communications for Transport Canberra and City Services in the ACT Government, managing the Directorate's internal and external communications.</li> <li>• Holds a Bachelor of Arts in Professional Communication (Journalism and Public Relations) from RMIT University and a Master of Military and Defence Studies from the Australian National University.</li> <li>• Ms Mathias-Carman is a graduate of the Australian Command and Staff College (Joint), is married to a current serving Australian Army Officer, and mother to their son.</li> </ul>
<u>Louise Pitcher</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Pitcher has 13 years' service in the Australian Defence Force.</li> <li>• 15 years' experience working with trauma as a Psychologist, including defence members and Families.</li> <li>• Ms Pitcher is the Partner of a current serving Australian Defence Force member, a mother and has lived experience with mental illness.</li> </ul>

<u>Dr Dannielle Post</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holds a PhD in Public &amp; Population Health and current research investigates the physical and psychological wellbeing of family carers of veterans living with PTSD and mental health issues, their experience of being a carer and the impact of this on their lives.</li> <li>• Participated in Invictus Families Forum in Sydney, 2018 and presented at the Global Conference on Post Traumatic Stress in Adelaide in 2019.</li> <li>• Dr Post is a member of the Australian Veteran and Emergency First Responder Research Network, which includes researchers from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, United States of America and Ireland, and is an Australian Mental Health Leaders Fellow.</li> </ul>
<u>Donna Reggett</u> <u>OAM</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughter of a Vietnam Veteran who served 26 years in the Royal Australian Navy; spouse of a RAAF veteran who served for 23 years, including in Somalia and Rwanda, before being medically discharged; and mother-in-law of a current serving ADF member who has deployed multiple times to the Middle East.</li> <li>• Worked as an advocate for 17 years and established the Ipswich Veterans Centre, founded the Military Kids Recognition program and Operation PTSD Support Inc.</li> <li>• Former member of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Ex-service Matters and accredited Mediator and Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner.</li> <li>• Awarded OAM in January 2019 for services to veterans and their families.</li> </ul>
<u>Dr Kerry Summerscales</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has served 30 years in the Australian Army, been deployed multiple times and currently transitioning out of defence while practicing as a GP, with a patient load of approximately 30 percent being veterans.</li> <li>• Participant in DVA's Female Veterans and Veterans Families and Mental Health and Wellbeing Forums and regional co-ordinator for Womens Veterans Network Australia.</li> <li>• Working closely with local Open Arms psychologist and other GPs to obtain greater outcomes for veterans.</li> </ul>
<u>Penelope Twemlow</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ten years' service in the Royal Australian Navy and current reservist suffering with PTSD and has been a victim of domestic violence.</li> <li>• Founder and Chair of Women in Power – a not-for-profit organisation aimed at advancing and empowering women across the globe.</li> <li>• Runner-up in Veteran Entrepreneur category of the 2019 Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards.</li> <li>• Winner of the Queensland 2016 Telstra Business Women's Award in the 'For Purpose and Social Enterprise' category for her work in the women, mental health and domestic violence arenas.</li> <li>• Participant in the Honouring Women United by Defence Service Forum, national ambassador for multiple organisations providing mental health and domestic violence support and keynote speaker and advocate on a range of issues affecting women and veterans.</li> </ul>