

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a former RAAF Officer with 35 years full time service experience and a veteran of the Vietnam war. I submit the following to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into Suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel.

I was retired at age 55 in 2001 on attaining the compulsory retiring age for rank then prevailing. My preparation for transition was confined to attending a three day "Resettlement Seminar" and some meagre financial assistance for a short training course. My application for financial assistance for my preferred training was rejected in spite of other applicant's higher costs of training being approved.

I was unable to secure further employment either with the ADF reserves or in the private sector. Despite my good health and considerable life and business experience and having applied for more than 400 positions, in government and the private sector, I received only two invitations to interview. The role was awarded to another candidate at both interviews. Clearly, I was uncompetitive on age grounds in spite of such discrimination being prohibited by law.

I wanted to work and I was eminently capable in a wide range of work roles but there was no place for me. I know there are many of my ADF colleagues who encountered the same experience. There have been others, former very senior officers, who have been invited by their "mates" to undertake well-remunerated special tasks. Most importantly, such offers are rare and more importantly are never offered to lower ranked service personnel.

The experience of sustained rejection harms self-esteem which in turn feeds depression, interpersonal conflict and even self-harm or suicide. The ADF preparation of serving men and women for their return to the private sector doesn't deal with this issue.

Apart from that, more effort needs to be made (by the ADF or its DVA agent) to transition serving men and women into meaningful work roles. This must be a policy imperative for every serving man or woman on completing their contracted term and who wants to continue working must be transitioned into a suitable role. The transition process must include psychological counselling, training for the destination role and placement into such a role. It is not enough to simply refer unemployed former ADF personnel to the services of Centrelink.

There needs to be a pool of work roles - in and out of government - for which ADF retirees are eminently suited - which are therefore earmarked for ADF retirees. Access to this "retiree job pool" should be conditional upon completing a contracted term in the ADF. Establishment of the job pool and its management would be a very suitable role for DVA.

I would be happy to elaborate on any of the foregoing if needed.

Kindest regards,

Peter Hayes