



MILITARY VETERANS' GROUP

OCTOBER LUNCHEON GUEST SPEAKER



GWEN CHERNE

VETERAN FAMILY ADVOCATE COMMISSIONER

(REPATRIATION COMMISSION AND MILITARY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION COMMISSION)



As veterans, the vast majority of us have little understanding of the effect of Military Service on our families, particularly our partner. Our guest today is a New Yorker who is providing a strong voice for the families of retired and serving Veterans in places where it counts.

Around five years ago the Department, under the leadership of Liz Cosson, started to understand that the effects of Service were felt by many more than just the veteran. By 2018 over 400 veterans had taken their own lives since 2000. The Invictus Games, in Sydney in 2018, saw the sponsoring of several family forums and Gwen was a games Ambassador following the death of her husband, SGT Peter Cafe, a Commando who had served in East Timor, Cambodia, Iraq and Afghanistan and whom she met in Kabul in 2008 while they were both working there.

Gwen spent three years in and out of Afghanistan doing stabilisation and reconstruction work. She is an Australian war widow, the mother of a currently serving member of the Australian Defence Force and a daughter of a Vietnam veteran who suffered PTSD and moral injury. She has lived experience of military family life, mental health issues and recovery, family and domestic violence and intimate partner violence. She is dedicated to promoting hope and healing through co-designed and co-implemented solutions.

Gwen has been a real 'shaker and mover' in improving the lot of veterans' families, in particular through her appointment in 2020 and her role on the Repatriation Commission and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission. Her appointment has recently been extended by another three years.

Interestingly, perhaps only for some, Gwen once commented . . 'When I came home from Afghanistan, nothing compared to my time there. Everything seemed quite ordinary, even pointless. It takes a while to realise that painting rocks is important'. As you can see, Gwen has an amazing understanding of family life and of military service . . even down to painting rocks.