

Flexible Service: Lance Corporal Kelly Hawthorne

I've served for 17 years, so as you can imagine, the army is a big part of my life. I started my career in 2003 as a regular. 5 years later I moved into civilian employment but continued my service with the Reserves. In 2014, I re-joined into full-time regular service in the Dental Corps. In my current role as a dental nurse, I assist with treating patients in a clinical environment and I manage bookings and patient's records.

While I was on maternity leave, I heard about the armed forces' Flexible Duties Trial that was testing the concept of Flexible Service. I kept a close eye on the trial because I could see how part-time working could make a real difference to the amount of time my child and I would get to spend together.

When I returned to full-time service after maternity leave, I didn't feel like I got to spend much time with my daughter, Gracie. This feeling was magnified because Gracie would visit her dad on alternate weekends. Working full-time as a single parent made life pressured but manageable, but I felt like Gracie and I were missing out on spending time together during her magical early years.

The possibility of reducing the amount of time I served by 20%, so that Gracie and I could have that 1 extra day together each week, was an opportunity I couldn't let pass. The 20% pay reduction seemed fair and affordable, especially when balanced against not having to pay the childcare costs for that day.

Flexible Service is enabling Gracie and I to spend more time together when we need it most, has relieved some of the pressures in my life, and has reduced the stress of the balancing act. My 3-year Flexible Service arrangement takes me up until the end of my current assignment and up until Gracie starts school, when I expect to return to full-time service.

I think that policies like Flexible Service will help people to continue to serve when their circumstances change. There are limits of course; for example, applications are considered against the operational needs of the unit and the Service, and individuals can take a maximum of 4-years of Flexible Service in a 12-year period. This means Defence can continue to fulfil its purpose and keep the full-time ethos of military service intact, while offering flexibilities that are common in civilian employment.

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