

Jeanne Gagnon
Guard of Honour

While military members who get posted have a job lined up, the same is not necessarily true for their spouses, who often find it difficult to find meaningful jobs for which they are qualified. Furthermore, explaining frequent change of employers and gaps in employment can be challenging.

To alleviate this, the Military Employment Transition Spouse Program, or METSpouse, was established as a year-long pilot running from April 1, 2016 to May 31, 2017.

The program was set up on the heels of the CAF Ombudsman's 2013 report, *On the Homefront*, which noted spousal employment was an issue for military families and at times, caused military members to release from the military. This factor, along with the interest from the corporate world to hire military spouses, led to the decision to develop the program, said Katie Ochin, the employment and entrepreneurship program manager at Military Family Services.

Canada Company, a Toronto-based non-for-profit organization, deals primarily with the recruitment of employers, while Military Family Services, which supports the MFRCs, acts as a liaison between the non-for-profit organization and the resource centers.

"Overall, we have over 150 spouses that are in the program," she said, adding about 55 of them are from the NCR.

Spouses of veterans, reservists and regular force members can sign up for METSpouse at one of seven participating MFRCs – Halifax, Montreal, Valcartier, National Capital Region, Toronto, Winnipeg and Shilo. The feedback so far has been positive, noted Caroline Jatmiko, employment services coordinator at the MFRC.

"Many have been pleasantly surprised at the features available, including: the job searching tools, videos, employment resources and a collective location for employer partners to post their employment opportunities," she said. "[The program] ...can alleviate some of the stressors military spouses and dependents experience when faced with having to explain time gaps in employments or the multitude of employment in a variety of locations on their resume/portfolio," she said.

METSpouse employers have agreed to provide military spouses equal opportunity, said Ochin, meaning they won't judge spouses because they are part of the military family. That would help them get their foot in the door, she added.

"These employers have also agreed to explore employment mobility, meaning when a spouse is relocated due to a military posting, they will look to see if there is any way they can retain them in their company. That can be by an internal transfer, it can be exploring tele-commuting opportunities," said Ochin. "This doesn't mean it will necessarily happen every time but it just provides more opportunity for a spouse to do that."

This fall, Ochin said they will explore the possibility of extending the program across the country. They will measure the results of the program using qualitative and quantitative variables, including the number of spouses hired, the effectiveness of the training and the impact on morale.

“We have to get feedback from spouses, the military family resource centres and employers to see if the program is actually benefitting the military community and also employers before we move out and do a national expansion,” she said.