

Study looks at program for Defence Force kids

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A James Cook University researcher has been studying the help given to children with a parent deployed on active duty with the military.

JCU's Gail Macdonald interviewed teachers, parents and Defence School Transition Aides (DSTA) who are employed to help students when a parent is deployed to a [war zone](#).

Ms Macdonald said there was a particular need for the service when parents were deployed for the first time.

"It's a very new experience for [children](#) and can be quite a lot to deal with. Families also go from two parents to one and then back to two again at the end, and at all stages the children have to adapt."

Studies suggest children fare less well at school when a parent is away on multiple deployments, which typically last 6 to 8 months.

Ms Macdonald said many of the DSTAs were spouses of Defence Force members and the system appeared to be working well.

"Before it was set up there were some students struggling socially and emotionally. It's very effective and much needed."

The study found that some Defence Force families were comfortable talking to an intermediary who understood their [family situation](#) well.

"They are more likely to approach the DSTA for low-level concerns, the kind of thing that can be nipped in the bud early so it doesn't become a major issue," said Ms Macdonald.

The program has been in existence since 2001. Ms Macdonald said it was originally set up to cater for the needs of Defence Force children whose [parents](#) were often moved around to different areas of the country and who had to adapt to new schools.

"But with the increased number of deployments since 2001 there has been a dual emphasis on mobility and deployment," she said.

As of June last year around 220 DSTAs were supporting over 11,000 [students](#) in 200 schools.

More information: Gail Macdonald, School-Based Support for Students with a Parent on Military Deployment, *Children Australia* (2016). [DOI: 10.1017/cha.2016.9](https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2016.9)

Provided by James Cook University

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