

Member with Dependents Unaccompanied (MWDU)



Sometimes, when a member is posted, families may choose to remain in their current location while the military member moves alone to their new posting.

When families choose to live apart in this way, it is called “Member With Dependents Unaccompanied” and is often referred to by the military as “MWDU” or “MWD(U)”.

Families choose this option for a range of reasons such as enabling partners to keep their current job, children to stay at their school, maintain support network, and consistent access to healthcare.

Choosing to go MWDU is an important, difficult and sometimes necessary

family decision. Although there are advantages, there are also challenges and it is important that families carefully consider their circumstances in order to make the best decision for their family. They can do this by researching the new posting location and discuss the implications of living apart and its possible affect on each family member before coming to a decision. It is important to consider all available options and weigh up the pros and cons of each.



To help you make an informed decision about MWDU, the Defence Community Organisation has developed a factsheet with some more detailed information and advice, and a worksheet that couples and families can work through together.

The MWDU Factsheet can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/documents/Resources/MWDU%20Handout.pdf>

The MWDU Worksheet can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/documents/Resources/MWDU%20Worksheet.pdf>

The policies governing MWDU and its accompanying entitlements are described in [Chapter 8 of Defence's Pay and Conditions Manual](#). Reading this can help you make a decision about MWDU.

If your family decides to go MWDU, military members may access a range of benefits, including:

- ☐ exemption from the normal contribution for your accommodation in the family's location,
- ☐ reunion visits,
- ☐ separation allowance,
- ☐ utilities allowance, or
- ☐ food allowance.

Defence does not normally provide a removal at Commonwealth expense or subsidised housing if families choose to move to a personal location. Removal and/or housing benefits are only provided in circumstances that are directly related to Service requirements or in approved compassionate circumstances.

Below is advice from some members who are, or have been, MWD(U):

What advice would you give to someone considering MWD(U)?

- Plan how you will communicate;
- Ensure you have accommodation that is nice for the family to visit e.g. furnished holiday unit instead of a house;
- Make sure your relationship is strong enough to cope and you are financially in a strong position to be able to fly back home as much as possible as 6 flights a year is not enough when you have a young family
(Comment – 'I've already flown 22 return trips to Adelaide in 18 months and I still wish I could've gone more often'. 'Money is a big factor on making MWD(U) work';
- Going MWD(U) you must also understand you will not be making money, you actually sacrifice family life and cost of living goes up due to money being put towards trips back home;



- Go home as much as possible 'I actually bought 20 days of leave to be able to spend more time home';
- Seriously think about what you are asking for and consider the ease or lack thereof of regular access to your family. Some are able to transit on a weekly basis while others can only manage the allocated 6 reunion visits annually;
- A strong relationship is required;
- Remember that it is the member requesting this status due to prevailing personal circumstances and not something the organisation is forcing on you. Approval comes at a massive cost to the organisation and this should be appreciated;
- Make an effort to meet half way at personal cost to maintain regularity. Members on lower incomes may find this difficult and should consider the cost in both dollars and leave used to achieve this.



What do/did you find the most challenging about being separated from your partner/family?

- No direct involvement with family routines, school, sports etc.;
- Firstly coming home to an empty apartment, but more so on Fridays and the weekends as you feel you're missing out on the normal activities like going out to restaurants, catching up for BBQ's with friends and family, parties and functions, birthdays and events;
- Not being able to regularly catch up in person.

What do/did you do to make separation easier?

- Find something to do when not at work;
- Get home as often as possible;
- For Member : staying active, runs/walks along the coast, play cricket for a club and rounds of golf, Foxtel and weights in apartment while away from family;
- For wife & Daughter : arrange routine weekly dinners with parents and friends, got a cleaner in once a fortnight (one less thing wife has to worry about so she can focus more on daughter);
- I buy presents every trip for daughter;
- Regular phone contact, although the younger generation will be more tech savvy with Skype/Face Time etc – there may be added costs with this;

SKYPE

- Agreed on frequency of contact - some will need this to be daily while others will be 2-3 times a week dependent upon the relationship and this is more pertinent where small children are involved;
- Having family visit my location also helped as they see what my lifestyle is like without them.

What do/did you do to ensure maintained connections and relationships?

- Very open communication;
- Long phone calls, including speaking with the kids, ensuring calls to my wife after the kids were in bed so we could just chat/Skype;
 - Facetime once or twice a day;
- Help with payment of bills;
- Be a good listener;
- Maintain regular communications and be responsive to the family's expectations.



What traditions/rituals/routines did you find helpful?

- Daily phone calls;
- Exercise routines;
- Planned and regular visits by friends and family;
- Book flights way in advance to help plan and look forward to trips back home;
- Celebrate key events such as birthdays, graduations, anniversaries etc.

If you and your family are considering your options or have decided to post as MWD(U), the Defence Community Organisation can assist you to gather all information to make an informed decision and develop a family plan. If you would like any resources, information or referral to a Defence Social Worker, please call the Defence Family Helpline on 1800624608.