

## Q&A with Adam Lawson

### **Q: So Adam, where did the moniker 'Buzz' come from?**

A: The name Buzz doesn't come from my service in the Airforce, and it doesn't come from Buzz Lightyear. I've always been Buzz. It's a nickname that my Grandmother gave me before I was even born.

### **Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your service?**

A: I joined the Airforce in 1990, about half a week before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I ended up doing Air Battle Management and became an Air Combat Officer. In January of 2000, before we had kids, my wife and I wanted to go off and see the world so I requested a lateral transfer to the Royal Airforce and we moved to the UK.

Living and working in the UK was an amazing experience. I had some truly unforgettable times travelling the world, both personally and on duty. Of note, I was in the Royal Airforce on September 11 and on duty in the bunker at RAF Buchan. Nobody knew what was going on. The government believed that the United Kingdom would be next. We didn't know! From that Cold War bunker in Northern Scotland, I was controlling military and civilian aircraft over the North Sea, helping to them to get back to base, particularly as many of the aircraft had been denied entry into the airspace of the United States.

My wife and I had children, twin boys in 2004, and we soon made the decision that we wanted to raise them in Australia, so I requested a lateral transfer back to the Australian Airforce in late 2005. 18 months later I was deployed to the Middle East for seven months in charge of all C130 strategic planning and operations. On my second deployment, I was made the Master Controller and Executive Officer for the Radar Control Unit in Afghanistan, we were in charge of the whole air war in support of the ground forces.

But the postings and constant moving were getting too much for my family. I have a son with a disability, cerebral palsy, and we needed to settle down. So I ended up resigning from the permanent Airforce in April 2010.

### **Q: How would you describe your transition from the Airforce to civilian life?**

A: My transition from the military to the outside was anything but smooth. I got out for all the right reasons; family comes first. But, it was still incredibly tough.

Within nine months of being in Afghanistan, at the absolute pinnacle of my military career and operational experience, I was standing on the streets of Melbourne working as a consultant wondering what the hell had happened. I lost all my friends and networks, my family and I were living in a rented house in a strange town, and it was just awful.

So I ended up seeking professional help and got a plan to recover my mental health. I threw myself into my local community, I became a Scout leader, a junior cricket coach, a junior football coach. That and the love and support of an amazing wife is what saved me.

### **Q: What made you want to come and work for the RSL?**

A: I have a genuine and deep understanding of what transitioning veterans go through because I've been there. I've also done a bit of volunteer work in the veteran's sector. I've been a member of the Victorian Public Service Veteran's Employment Panel for several years, presented the Box Hill School Children's ANZAC Day address for 7 years, I've always had a real passion for veteran issues since I got

out. So, when the opportunity for this role came up, I couldn't think of a better natural fit for the skills I've learned in and out of the military.

**Q: Did you know about the veteran support services that the RSL offers before you joined us?**

A: I was really surprised to learn about all the support services that the RSL offers. The RSL has always 'flown under the radar' (sorry but had to get that in!) when it comes to advertising the vast array of complex things that it does to help veterans and their families. I think that the prospect of helping the community to understand what we do is exciting, but more importantly essential in positioning our service offering as we move into a new phase of our incredibly important history.

**Q: What are two goals that you would like to achieve in your first six months with the RSL?**

A: I want to meet and listen to the stories of as many veterans, volunteers, advocates, and RSL's as possible. I want to learn from their experience and to understand the lay of the land better.

I want to look at all the services that the RSL provides now, and could provide in the future, to start developing a strategy that we can unveil and then execute over the next couple of years.

**Q: What does the RSL's veteran services offering look like five years from now?**

A: Five years from now, the RSL's veteran services will be an integrated and holistic program of volunteers and paid staff working together seamlessly.

Sometimes veterans are portrayed as 'victims'. I see veterans as strong capable and resilient members of our society. But even the strongest amongst us need help from time to time; be that social, financial or crisis support.

The ultimate goal of the strategy will be to provide advice and services that will allow veterans and their families to lead their best lives, - whatever that looks like.

I'm particularly excited to be working with Jamie as the new CEO. We are cut from the same cloth, neither of us is going to die wondering, it's exciting times at RSL Victoria and for the wider RSL community.

**Q: What are you doing when you're not at number 4 Collins Street?**

A: Well, I'm currently learning to play the guitar, I figured that you are never too old to try something new. I'm also coaching and playing cricket, taking my kids to and from their part-time jobs and sporting commitments, and helping out around the house. If I had spare time, I'd be going surfing, making salami with mates, and trying not to kill stuff in my veggie patch.

**Q: Finally, what is it like being the only RAAFIE in a team of Army veterans? Are you holding up okay, mate?**

A: So, from what I can tell, inside the team there is one RAAF and one Navy veteran, and the rest are all Army. It's been an eye-opening experience, let me tell you. It really struck me the first week that I was here, I was sitting in a meeting with my team, and in the room were six people, four of whom were ex-military. And I had the immense feeling of synergy and relatability that I haven't felt since I left the military. We all had the same sense of humour, we had the same sense of team, the same approach to problem-solving, the same work ethic. It's been wonderful, like coming home. It's not something that you can fully appreciate until you find yourself surrounded by ex-serving members.