

Bridget Clinch

At one point during the course of our interview, Bridget Clinch reflects on the growing visibility of transgender military personnel in Australia. She notes that, while it is wonderful to see, in some ways for her, 'it's bittersweet'. Bridget was a trailblazer, whose bravery and persistence pushed the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to finally overturn its ban on transgender service in September 2010, almost 18 years after lifting the ban on LGB service. In early 2010, after serving for 11 years in the ADF, she was told that she would be no longer suitable for service if she proceeded with her transition to live openly as the woman she had always known that she was. Rather than accepting discrimination, she campaigned for the removal of Defence Instruction (General) 16-16, which since April 2000 had stated that 'a person undergoing or contemplating gender reassignment' was not unsuitable to serve because of the 'need for ongoing treatment and/or the presence of a psychiatric disorder'. Bridget's case coincided with RAAF member Amy Hamblin also challenging this policy – the two examples perhaps indicative of growing transgender visibility and activism in Australia. She ultimately succeeded in overturning her termination and changed ADF policy, making it possible for transgender people to transition and serve openly within the ADF.

Bridget's story demonstrates the way determined individuals have ~~often~~ driven changes to military policy. Now others – both within and outside of the military – have been able to see the contribution that transgender and gender diverse people can make to the ADF. Cate McGregor, who transitioned in 2012²³, becoming the highest-ranking transgender person in the Army then RAAF, has cited Bridget's actions as being directly responsible for clearing a path that enabled transgender women, men and now non-binary people to serve openly. Bridget's experience illuminates the real personal cost of grappling with discrimination and of being a visible agent for change.

Bridget lives in Brisbane with her partner and their young child. Their home radiates love and warmth. It is located quite close to the large Army base at Enoggera,

which to some extent, must serve as a reminder of Bridget's considerable service life. Her life is filled with study, her partner, and their child and two children from a previous relationship, whom Bridget looks after part-time. She was also in the process of developing an enviable level of skill at Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Despite this, she was still adjusting to a life post-military. She was conscious that her efforts in the ADF 'took down that policy', but she felt she was 'still trying to get up. And yeah, it's been a long road.'

Bridget was born in the inner-west of Sydney in 1979, the oldest of three children. After spending the first few years of her life around Sydney, her parents moved the family to Western Australia when she was in the final stages of primary school. A couple of years later, they relocated to Victoria, where she finished high school. This history of moving across states has given Bridget a strong sense of being Australian, rather than holding an attachment to one particular place.

Bridget has spoken publicly about knowing she was female from a young age. She has drawn much needed attention to the experiences of transgender individuals, who still experience prejudice and discrimination. When reflecting on her childhood, she affirmed in 2010: 'I didn't want to be a different person. I wanted to be me – but a girl me.' She noted that 'society and parents and all sorts of influences tell you that's crazy, you can't be thinking like that. You can't be acting on those thoughts. You can't resolve that thing that eats you up'.¹

It would not be until years later that she was diagnosed with gender dysphoria. When she was growing up there were very few representations of transgender individuals in the media or pop culture, and when some examples did surface in the 1980s and 1990s, they were almost always negative, sensationalist and laden with transphobia. The prevalence of the internet today and the growing number of transgender individuals in the public eye means awareness has increased. Unfortunately, though, there is still an enormous distance to be traversed before Australia can claim to have eradicated the discrimination and prejudice transgender individuals experience.

Similar to many of our interviewees, there had been some military background in Bridget's family. Her maternal grandfather had been a test pilot in the Royal Air Force

(~~RAF~~). He died at a relatively young age and her grandmother subsequently went on to marry another man who had also served, a former Royal Marine. When asked about Bridget's decision to enlist, she says that: 'I think I felt a bit lost and the military kind of gives you a bit of direction. And at the same time, it kind of appeals to that ... desire to do something of service. I've never really, even now, I don't really want do anything to just serve some corporate profit making thing.' She elaborates on the humanitarian role the military can play to support vulnerable people in nations needing assistance.†

I knew there was other places in the world that weren't doing so well and we seem to do the kind of peacekeeper thing and go and help people in the region and stuff – and that kind of appealed to me, I guess. So not really the violent aggressor type – more the protection type notion of looking after people that couldn't look after themselves.

The theme of protecting others and the sense of duty individuals have toward the wellbeing and welfare of others is one that Bridget returns to throughout the interview and has guided her post-Army career as well. It is clear that she has a keen sense of service and feels an obligation to work for the betterment of society.

Bridget attended Melbourne High School (an all-boys school), which had an Army Cadets Unit and Air Force equivalent. This also made enlistment in the ADF a visible option. Initially Bridget was attracted to the Air Force Cadets because 'I had it in the back of my head that I might want to be a pilot'. Ultimately, she went with the Army Cadets. She remembers that in almost all of her high school years, there would be a couple of graduates going to [the Australian Defence Force Academy \(ADFA\)](#) or the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Bridget made her decision to pursue a life in the military when she was in Grade 9 or 10. She says, 'It just sort of seemed like something that I could do, because I really couldn't pick a profession outside of the military and I really wasn't drawn to study.' She also ponders whether military life offered an option to move away: 'I wasn't specifically tied to Melbourne like a lot of my friends were. So I was like, "I can go do the Army thing".'

While Bridget did not actively think about transitioning until she had reached the age of 30, there is a growing body of research, particularly from the United States, that

has demonstrated that transgender people are disproportionately more likely than cisgender people (those whose gender identity aligns with the gender they are allocated at birth) to work in occupations such as the military. Some military personnel who later transition from male to female (MtF) may, in part, be motivated to enlist to conform to social pressures to align to hegemonic masculinity. Scholars also argue that some personnel who later transition from female to male (FtM) may find the military to be an environment where they are able to transcend gender expectations and adopt behaviours and attributes traditionally perceived as masculine.²

Bridget notes that when she first began to actively explore her gender identity in the late 2000s, she found a transition diary on the internet which was run by an American sheriff who had a 'network of law enforcement types that were trans in the United States, and I was like "Holy crap!"' She continues:

Just the thoughts that they had and the way they described overcompensating by throwing themselves at their law enforcement type stuff and doing all those blokey things and super-duper overcompensating, it was kind of like – it really hit home and it was like: 'Wow! What a similar character.'

Several other transgender participants in this project, both FtM and MtF, expressed similar sentiments for one reason they wanted to join the ADF: its masculine environment. While there are important parallels between the FtM, MtF and non-binary members' lives and ADF experiences, there are also fundamental differences. The MtF members like Bridget also noted that they were, in retrospect, questioning their gender identities from a young age, even though they were not able to express their internal struggles. For the FtM members interviewed, the self-questioning would come later, and at the time they enlisted they actually identified as lesbians. Non-binary members of the ADF are only now coming to the foray, and the openly non-binary members were already expressing that gender identity in high school.

One common pattern across most transgender interview participants is that they joined the ADF at a young age. Bridget joined the Australian Army Reserve in 1997, immediately after finishing high school. She joined the Army full-time as an officer cadet in 1999 at Royal Military College, Duntroon and found that the life suited her. One

element of serving that she appreciated was the concept of working as a team and the ethos of looking after each other. She reflects, 'I guess that was something that was just part of my character. I wanted to look after my people. I think one of my bosses called me "the diggers' union rep" or something because I wanted to look after my people.' While she cared deeply about looking after those who served with her, Bridget was also keeping a personal distance from those with whom she served. She says that 'a friend from Duntroon days described my personality as prickly – and I guess that I was. I was pushing everyone away and just being, I guess depressed, for want of a better term.'

Professionally, Bridget progressed well in the military. She finished her officer training, served in the infantry and then did tours as a peacekeeper in East Timor in 2003 and 2008. Both of these deployments were well after Australia's initial intervention in East Timor leading INTERFET (International Force East Timor) in 1999. Though the immediate threat of violence had long since passed, there were still occasional flare-ups and these deployments were hardly a cakewalk. On the 2003 tour, she led an infantry team. In 2008, she was deployed as a logistics officer in the parachute battalion. She remembers these as 'interesting times' when there was a lot of organisational change within the Army. Bridget received medals for her tours and attained the rank of Captain, before considering applying for the SAS ([Special Air Service Regiment](#)).

At this point in life, Bridget had a wife, whom she had met at Duntroon, and a young family. Bridget remembers starting triathlons after her first tour to East Timor. She also became involved in ironman distance triathlon events: 'Did all that kind of stuff and was just training my butt off.' She says that she feels, in retrospect, that she was 'throwing myself into that and avoiding everything else'. Computer games provided another distraction during her downtime.

On one level, applying for the SAS held considerable appeal. It was a diversion from dealing with a difficult internal struggle over her gender identity. She remembers isolating herself from others, and 'no one could really tell why' she seemed depressed or was somewhat aloof. She says, 'They thought that was just me. I was just doing my own thing, being prickly, not having many close friends.' What was really occurring was a

voice in Bridget's head, telling her that 'stuff just didn't feel quite right still', and this voice was becoming harder to ignore. Bridget elaborates:

[I felt], like I, what I was doing was right and the way I was doing stuff felt it was kind of right. But just the way I was, just had never felt right ... I guess it was starting to really gnaw at me. And yeah, and then once you sort of acknowledge that internally and start looking for resources and looking for information, that's Pandora's Box. You know, and you can't close it.

Bridget was starting to realise that there was a name for the thoughts she had about her gender.

Bridget's quest to understand what she was feeling saw her seek out information on the internet. She is quick to point out that there was nowhere near as much information available about transgender people back then as there is today. That said, all of the transgender participants in this project started their research online as well, which makes one cognisant about how much more challenging transgender people must have found it to affirm their gender identity before the internet. She found information that seemed to align with what she was feeling and experiencing, although the information was not something to which she had been previously exposed: 'I'd find these blogs and stuff and [think], "What the hell is a transition blog?" and "What the hell is a transgender, or, all these terms?" Transgender, transsexual, gender identity disorder [now known as gender dysphoria] and all these things. And I was like, "No, this can't be right.'" Once she realised that there were others who felt the way that she did and there were terms that described what she was going through, 'there was no sort of going back'.

There was little information available about being transgender from mainstream sources. Bridget says, 'I think I would have been happier if I could have found something on an actual health site.' She notes there is much better information available now. 'Government health sites have got all sorts of good stuff out there. So that kind of puts it into a little bit more generic terms and stuff that you can sort of understand and legitimises it a bit.' Bridget found the blogs of people who were undergoing the process of transition to be 'scary because of the words they're using and how even though they're painting things in the best light they can, they're being realistic about stuff and a lot of

people, especially in the States, had some pretty rough times'. The discovery of information was 'kind of a little bit enlightening; a lot scary ... I used to sort of look it up and find it and then just, ha! Like, you know, stop looking. Go somewhere else'. She also notes that she had a very real fear that others might see her doing the research. She remarks, 'That was one of the things that held me back'.

Meanwhile, the fitness required to join the SAS was extreme so Bridget trained with a routine that involved an extraordinary level of dedication. While her fitness was excellent, Bridget was becoming increasingly concerned about the psychiatric testing she would have to undergo to enter the SAS. She worried it would expose her as being transgender: 'I had a few insights into the process because of some of the people I'd worked with and some of the interactions I'd had ... I just worried that they would find out – that I'd be really tired and worn down on selection or something and they would find out.'

Bridget believes she subconsciously 'sabotaged' herself before her SAS selection course because of these fears. She completed a half ironman triathlon a few weeks before the SAS fitness test. This meant that she was still recovering from the physical exertion when she did her actual test. Still, she notes that previously, determination alone had been enough to take her through significant physical tests at Duntroon when she was only 'a skinny little runt'. Yet, this time, she fell just short of qualifying for entry to SAS selection. She was told to come back and retake the test in another month or so. She thought no, but still trained for and completed the full Australian Ironman Triathlon – clearly attaining physical fitness was not the issue.

When discussing how she feels about not moving into the SAS, Bridget says that 'it's frustrating because I know I would have liked that job if I could have got there'. She also reflects: 'I guess I couldn't just shelve all that internal baggage that I had.' It had become increasingly clear that she could not continue to go on as she had been doing, internalising her feelings, and that she needed to affirm her identity as a woman. As she contemplated this, she managed to secure a non-corps posting. At that time, the ADF still had exemptions from anti-discrimination laws to prevent women from performing combat roles. Bridget was prepared to accept this if she transitioned, as she 'didn't want

to take on every battle in the world' and believed it was an issue that could be revisited. She explains: '~~by~~ By being in a non-corps type place I thought what a perfect environment. I can just keep sort of stepping through and switch hat badges kind of thing, do a few courses and just continue on.' Interestingly, at least one other transgender interviewee later delayed her transition until her combat position was opened to women. While Bridget accepted that she would perform a different role while serving as a woman, she also believed that the ADF would be able to accept her being transgender. Her experience proved to be wrong.

Bridget initially looked up some information about gender clinics and psychiatrists external to the military. Then she thought: 'Actually, you know what? It's probably better to just go through the front door and just do it through the system and let it run its course.' Around this time, the pressure she was dealing with internally was taking its toll. The Commanding Officer on her 2008 deployment noticed this, telling her that he was 'frustrated at seeing all this potential going to waste' and that she should seek help from a psychologist or he would refer her. She took the first step of speaking to a psychologist while on deployment.

The psychologist determined that Bridget was functional and still able to do her job, although she was exhibiting symptoms that appeared to be depression. In the military system, Bridget discovered that psychologists do not write a report when people self-refer unless there is some sort of mandatory disclosure safety concern. Bridget found the appointments with the psychologist initially did not lead anywhere productive, and she did not disclose her gender identity. However, the two did get to know each other. As it happened, at Bridget's next deployment in Wagga Wagga, she ended up in the same location as this psychologist. She saw him again, only this time, 'it took a while but I spilled my guts'. We gently ask, 'Was this the first time that you'd really spoken these things out loud?' Bridget answers quickly and adamantly: 'Yeah. Oh yeah. Really, yeah.'

The psychologist contacted the senior medical officer in the area, a civilian doctor on the base. Bridget spoke to the doctor, determined to 'answer any questions he asks, just spill my guts. And I did. I just laid it all out.' She remembers that he was cool, saying 'I haven't encountered this myself but I've got some colleagues that have and I can look

into this stuff for you and let me get back to you'. She continues: 'He took it pretty well for a sort of gruff sort of blokey sort of dude, and so I left his office, just feeling like totally numb and weird and tingly and just, like, "What just happened?"'

Bridget conveys the aftermath of her disclosure to the senior medical officer, surreal in its ordinariness: 'After doing that, I went back to my office and finished the day.' Meanwhile, the senior medical officer was conducting research and offered Bridget two options where she could seek further assistance from gender specialists, either in Sydney or Melbourne. He arranged contact with a psychiatrist and an endocrinologist in Sydney. Unfortunately, there was a wait of several months before Bridget's appointments, which she found frustrating because she was doing a course in between and everything was business as usual.

The course she undertook while waiting for the appointments was a high-level officer one focusing on tactics. It was specialist work with Bridget being one of the few combat people in her syndicate. She says, 'It was just so weird thinking I told the doctor all this stuff, hadn't yet seen the psychiatrist who specialises in gender, so I'm still like: "What the hell does this even mean? Can they fix me or do I go down this great path of all the other crazy people?"' Looking back, she is amazed that she managed to get through the course, attain an okay report and tick the boxes that she needed.

Finally, in August 2009, Bridget's appointment with the psychiatrist arrived. During a 90 minute consultation, the two had an in-depth conversation; she says it is 'hard to simplify' in the retelling. Bridget describes how 'We went through all the ins and outs of everything. So yeah, it was pretty full on, but that's when I kind of knew and it was like: "Wow, okay".' He told her that 'It's pretty much over to you now whether or not you want to pursue it [transition]. But you can't make it [gender dysphoria] go away.' Bridget emphasises that this had been her question. 'Is there any way I can deal with it or...'; the last part of the sentence is unfinished. The psychiatrist told her that 'Yes, you can deny that part of yourself', but made it very clear that there would be implications. Bridget again reiterates her position and the way that transitioning to live as her authentic gender could potentially impact her life in many ways.≡

I had a family and kids and my career and that kind of stuff. It was just, it's kind of like you're being pulled in two different directions I guess. But then you know one of them; it's not fake but it's almost like a cover of sorts. So yeah ... I knew I was running a risk but it was a risk that I had to take, to risk all that other stuff for this one key identity type thing. It just had to happen.

As Bridget had come to increase her knowledge about transgender people and the options available to them, she had also begun to undertake research on ADF policy towards transgender service personnel. While LGB personnel had been able to serve openly since November 1992, transgender personnel had not been included in this reform. The positive policies towards LGB personnel had still provided her with some hope. As Bridget mentions, 'the ADF had had, for quite some time, you know, the same entitlements and treated same-sex couples the same way they treat married couples [since December 2005].'

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Rather than learning from the lessons of including LGB personnel, the ADF continued to draw a distinction between transgender and LGB personnel. In 1996, ADF officials had been prompted to address the issue of transgender service after the Australian Democrats introduced a *Sexuality Discrimination Bill* into the Commonwealth Parliament. The ADF submission held that transgender service was not in the interests of the military for three primary reasons. Firstly, men might self-identify as women to exempt themselves from combat while women conversely could self-identify as men to serve in combat roles they were excluded from. Secondly, ~~it was~~ the ADF maintained that the assumption of another gender identity and dress 'could reduce team cohesion'. Finally, the ADF argued that the self-assessment of transgender identity did not require clinical or other independent evidence.³

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In 2000, the ADF introduced a specific policy, Defence Instruction (General) 16-16, 'Trans-gender Personnel in the Australian Defence Force', that effectively solidified what had been an informal ban on transgender service. The policy did include a statement that 'a member who is discharged in the above circumstances and subsequently undertakes successful gender reassignment surgery, may apply to rejoin the ADF as a person of their new gender'. Bridget was not the first transgender person to serve in the ADF, as other oral history interviews, publications and newspaper reports attest. Bridget

refers to the policy when she describes how service personnel who told the ADF that they wished to transition wound up being medically discharged. Those who wished to continue to serve then privately 'transitioned, they did everything and paid for everything themselves and then they reapplied'. All of this was done in highly secretive circumstances. As Bridget stresses, the policy and entire process 'forced them to be closeted'.

While the option of disclosing transgender status is a deeply personal decision that should be made on an individual basis, compelling someone to hide their transgender status against their will carries very real risks. There is the psychological toll of having to hide something substantial they have lived through. As Bridget points out, it is also a risk 'if you're trying to hide something and it gets found out at the wrong time, wrong place. That's worse than just being out and overt'. Bridget found this incredibly stressful: 'I don't think people realised how damaging that is.' She continues to recall how:

All my experiences are changing and stuff and you know, how people are looking at me and things like that were different and just, yeah, it was really odd and off-putting to sort of think: 'Hold on, they're trying to force me to keep this under wraps', when I guess I felt there was a bit more protection in being overt and honest and just being out there.

For Bridget, the 2000 policy 'just reeked of being out of date'. The concept that transgender people had a psychiatric disorder and needed to be discharged did not 'really seem right'. Bridget thought: 'that policy seems old and I'm pretty sure with a bit of reason, you can get that changed.' Her confidence was boosted when she researched what culturally comparable countries were doing in terms of transgender service. Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom all seemed to have adapted well to permitting transgender personnel since 1992, 1993 and 2000 respectively. Bridget made contact with some transgender people serving in the United Kingdom, including one transitioning woman at a similar rank level and combat corps as Bridget. She found that this woman still had her job was and was 'just cruising and doing her thing and being a bit of an out advocate'.

Part of Bridget processing her identity as a transgender woman meant telling others. While she did not feel that she had any 'super-duper close friends in the military' that needed to be told, she did tell friends from high school, along with family members. She also spoke to her boss and then his boss 'with the help of the psych, because it was really hard to spit the words out'. She remembers: 'We did it and thought things were going to be okay from that meeting ... they were like, "Well you're still the same person and okay"'. She had no sense from her initial meeting that she would encounter significant difficulty with the military managing her transition process, though she now believes the higher echelons were 'quietly freaking out in the background' when they heard she was transitioning.

In November 2009 Bridget began hormone treatment. She also took one of the steps followed by many transgender people as part of the process of affirming their gender identity, which is to write a letter, informing co-workers about their transition process. Bridget wrote such a letter just before Christmas that year, informing her boss before she submitted it. Her letter told her colleagues about 'how the process works; and it's a medical thing; and this is what I'll do; and I guess I'll take some leave, work on my appearance, let my hair grow, do all this stuff and come back' in around four months. The letter told them about the name she would be using and asked that they do their best not to misgender her. While she was nervous about how people might respond, the levels of support she received from her colleagues took her aback: 'All the instructors were like, "We need you on the courses." Like, "Hurry up and get your shit together and then come back because we need you to help us instruct. Otherwise we're going to have to fly instructors in"'.

Bridget emphasises the difference between the levels of encouragement and acceptance she received from lower ranks, compared with those 'high up the chain' who 'didn't give the soldiers and lower ranks credit for their acceptance and openness'. It is a point she returns to later in the interview:

That's something that's going to really get me. Every time I retell sections of my story or think about stuff, I'm just like, 'The soldiers were awesome; the hierarchy was not.' It's disappointing because I think we've got really awesome soldiers.

We've got really awesome people and they deserve better. You know, they deserve, yeah, they just deserve better leaders, basically.

Bridget describes the 'hostility and resistance at every step of the command chain from then' onwards, which made her experience 'really, really difficult and painful'. She was told that her decision to transition would have 'political outcomes and become a PR nightmare'. Based on her extensive international research, Bridget was able to point to ways the ADF would be able to deal with her transition positively:

There's me going, 'Hey, we can front foot this, here's some articles from the UK media. Here's the UK MOD's (Ministry of Defence's) statement in that article. And I'm like, you know, 'Delete UK MOD, insert ADF and just, we're done ... We can front-foot this; we can make this a positive thing', and they're all like 'No, no, don't tell anyone, keep it quiet'.

In December 2009, command informed Bridget that she was not allowed to dress as a woman at work while she was still legally male. She recalls an incredibly traumatic process: 'Every time they made me fight for something, like you know, telling me to cut my hair whilst, after a few months of me being on hormones and saying, "You have to cut your hair. You have to adhere to male dress standards and whatever.'" Some (though not all) other transgender members have expressed similar problems – even after the ban was lifted – in matters of dress, pronoun usage and even accessing prescribed hormones at base pharmacies. Misgendering a transgender person, such as forcing them to wear the clothing of the gender they do not identify with, may cause considerable trauma.

Bridget was compelled to take long-service leave to continue her transition. This was not necessary from a work standpoint, and it had long-term implications for her. She has raised this: 'I sort of said, "You kind of forced me into taking this thing which I didn't really need to take." I could have gone back to work and should have been able to.' She notes that 'Since that time when I went on leave at the end of 2009, I haven't properly been back to work'. This occurred because in March 2010, she received a termination notice on medical grounds in line with DI(G) PERS 16-16.

Bridget appealed her termination within the ADF and lodged a complaint the same month with the Australian Human Rights Commission. It is interesting that Bridget

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embarked on the same route that a brave dismissed lesbian had taken in late 1990, culminating in the end of the LGB ban. The Commission entered into conciliation with the ADF, and the ADF withdrew Bridget's termination in July 2010. In September 2010, the ADF released a DEFGRAM (Defence telegram) announcing the repeal of DI(G) PERS 16-16; the transgender ban was gone, though there was nothing clear to take its place. There were also lots of questions: Would the ADF pay for Bridget's and other transgender members' medical care, including gender reassignment surgeries? What would be the medical classification of members going through transition? What would be the standards set for ADF applicants going through transition? How would the ADF present transgender service to the media? Would the ADF implement training modules or guides around transgender service? How would the ADF deal with transphobia? Only gradually since 2010 has the ADF grappled with these and other questions. Most importantly for Bridget, one early policy decision was that the ADF would support medical care for any member undergoing transition, including paying for gender reassignment surgeries.

The toll of having to battle continually each step of the way impacted on Bridget's health and she was forced to take sick leave due to the stress. Her stress was further exacerbated by the ADF downgrading her psychological and medical ratings to a level that would not enable her to deploy. ~~This was~~ despite positive medical references testifying to her ability to do so. The issue of medical downgrades has been an ongoing problem for transgender members undergoing hormone treatment or gender reassignment surgery, with a new medical policy from April 2015 issuing a blanket set of downgrade guidelines instead of examining each case individually. Feeling she had little option but to draw broader attention to her situation and the experiences of other transgender personnel, Bridget went public with her story. In November 2010, she and her then-wife did an interview with a television show *Sunday Night* and also shared the story with the magazine *New Idea*.

Even though the next few years were marked by more transgender members coming out, and the Diversity and Inclusion sections of the ADF, Department of Defence and the three services were slowly working on guides and policies on transgender inclusion, for Bridget the fight for transgender rights in the ADF was over. In 2013,

Bridget was medically discharged from the Army. She says, 'I guess it was a long time coming. There was a lot of reviews and redresses and levels of arguing the case, I guess. And doctors and stuff trying to sort of, I guess, look after me to soften the crash a bit.' She continues to explain that medical professionals noted the damage her experiences caused.

They came to the conclusion that definitely it was broken before I did, and they were kind of waiting for me to get to that conclusion myself and accept it because I couldn't. I don't think I would have accepted being medically discharged a few years earlier. I just wouldn't have been ready. That would have been pretty disastrous, I think. And so I sort of fought it and pushed and we were trying to push for a new medical class that would sort of allow me to be in and administered by Defence but then sort of do my study, sort of transition in to a new thing. But they just didn't want to; the hierarchy didn't really want to run with that. So yeah, so they just discharged me and kind of, luckily sort of the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) picked me up, I guess.

We asked Bridget whether she would have stayed in the Army for the long term had she been treated with the respect and dignity she deserved. She tells us the constant moving involved with the military life would have become increasingly difficult. She had also been experiencing some 'struggles with my partner at the time and just interpersonal stuff between people and just how I dealt with the world'. Bridget and her wife have since separated, and they share custody of their children. This considered, eventually she probably would have left the Army for more stability. She would have stayed much longer than when she was forced out, though. Now, she reflects, 'I didn't feel like I'd achieved all that I wanted to achieve. I left before my time was up. So yeah, it definitely feels like something I didn't get closure on... if the support was there, I would have stayed on for a bit, yeah.'

As Bridget's case illustrates clearly, ignorance and a failure to accept transgender people saw the ADF lose an enormous amount of talent. She points out that allowing transgender people to serve as their authentic gender only enhances what service personnel offer the ADF. After all, the content of your character still remains, along with the training and expertise that has been absorbed. Bridget feels that being able to openly

live as who she is means that the self-defence mechanisms that she had to deploy are no longer needed. For her personally: 'I'd like to think that people don't think I'm prickly anymore and that they can actually approach me and talk to me, before they get to know me. Whereas I think people before they got to know me back then would have been like, "Oh God; What's her problem?"' not realising.'

Bridget is aware of the enormity of what she achieved in working to remove the policy which discriminated against transgender people. She is self-effacing about her contribution; as she describes it:

It was my final thing I did before I got out, you know, was to attack that policy and get it changed, and then I guess it opened the door, you know? However, you want to say it, it kicked in the door, or whatever it was ... and someone had to do it.

There's always the first. And I didn't want to. I don't know – it's not like you'd want to be remembered for doing any one particular thing, but I guess that's what I did.

Bridget is still living with the ongoing trauma of her treatment by the ADF. At the time of the interview, she said, 'I'm still sort of just in a really, weird isolated place.' Her story and her experiences show how military change has often been driven by those who have made significant sacrifices at enormous personal cost. Everything she went through affected Bridget's 'self-acceptance and self-esteem and just everything'. She says that she was 'still working through that stuff now' by seeing psychologists. She found an ex-military psychologist, who had been beneficial because 'they understand that loss of that aspect of your identity, because they deal with other people that are medically discharged ... so they get how important that is'.

Bridget points out that going through the process of transitioning means that you're changing one aspect of your identity, but it should not mean that you have to change all of it. Yet for her, because of her treatment by the ADF, 'I've had to change everything and lose everything and start again.' That said, since our interview, Bridget has changed her career direction and has been more confident as a public advocate for social justice. In the 2016 Federal election she ran for the seat of Brisbane as candidate for the Australian Defence Veterans' Party. That particular race was all the more interesting because the both the Liberal and ALP candidates were openly gay men, with

the ALP member also being an ex-Army Major. After the election Bridget joined the Australian Greens and ran as a candidate in the 2017 Queensland state election. She was also nominated and shortlisted for a 2018 Australian LGBTI Award in the 'Hero' category.

Speaking to us and allowing her story to be included took considerable courage on Bridget's part. While she was a very high achiever in the military and takes pride in her accomplishments, sharing her story required her to revisit some very painful areas of her past. Her current partner, Emma, whom she hopes to marry now that same-sex marriage is recognised, is a source of ongoing support. Bridget has always believed in supporting the vulnerable. We sensed a realisation on her part that, even though it was painful, she knew that sharing her story had the potential to help others and to emphasise the pointless cost of discrimination. Bridget shows no signs of slowing down in her determination to speak out for social justice. She realises that her role in history has provided an important platform for change and she has shown ongoing resolve to work for reform for others who might also be vulnerable.

¹ Maris Beck, 'Sex-change soldier forces army to scrap transgender policy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 2010, <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/sexchange-soldier-forces-army-to-scrap-transgender-policy-20101204-18ks9.html>>, accessed 29 January 2018.

² Riseman, 'Transgender policy in the Australian Defence Force', 143.

³ *Ibid.*, 145.