

CASE STUDY UNLOCK A BRIGHTER FUTURE

SAM GREEN, CHEF, 30



From high-end restaurants to the mess halls of Australia's Defence Forces, chef Sam Green has thrived in the heat of all kinds of kitchens. After more than three years in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), where she says she received excellent training, Sam knows she has developed skills and qualities that enable her to take high-pressure food service in her stride.

Brisbane-based Sam, 30, joined the RAAF at the age of 21, having completed an apprenticeship as a chef. She was looking for a career pivot within the armed forces – but after further training at Tafe and HMAS Cerberus in Victoria and learning how to operate bulk food service, she realised she'd found a vocation she loved. "I was going to remaster into a different field [within the ADF]," she says. "But I liked doing bulk cookery – I really enjoyed the structure. So, I didn't end up changing."

In 2018, Sam left the armed forces so she could see more of her partner. In the transition to civilian life, she found that her skills were very transferable. Hers is a "trade qualified Certificate 4, which you can take with you anywhere", she says. She also discovered that networking – drawing on the contacts she'd made in the services – was key to finding employment, and further experience in workplaces ranging from restaurants to remote mines in the Northern Territory helped her identify the strengths she'd developed, including resilience, team work and a respect for structure and hierarchy in the workplace.

"Working in the mines, it was buffet style in large quantities," she says. "When I went to work in restaurants, I found it wasn't my cup of tea. It was all smaller and a la carte. I did find that a little bit difficult at first, the lack of structure in the main kitchens, and that was when I decided to return to bulk cookery."

Moving to Queensland, Sam started work with Compass Group, a large Australian food and support services company with contracts across sectors including hospitals, schools and the Defence Forces. "I was the chef supervisor at Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane and that was very similar to mining, and basically identical to the work when I was in the Air Force," she says.

"I thrive on having a chain of command. I think being able to work within that structure is really important."

As part of a program run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Sam acted as a mentor for ex service employees at Compass Group. "It's quite a large company, and large companies can be quite confusing to navigate at first," she says. "I've been partnered up with another ex-military chef and can answer any questions about things like the ordering systems."

"It helps to be able to talk with someone who is ex-military. We kind of talk the same, and sometimes it can come across quite blunt and direct. It helps to know it's nothing personal, we're just getting the job done."

One day soon Sam hopes to strike out on her own, perhaps with a "café on wheels". But whatever she does, the values she developed during her service will be a big part of her life and work. "Being a team player is super important to me," she says. "And having patience too."

And her tip for others leaving the armed services?

"Just don't go in it alone. Find people, build a network, get advice... and reach out to others for support."



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