

Discovering resources to overcome MST

Tawayna: I'm Tawayna. I was in the U.S. Army and I was a Unit Supply Specialist.

My dad was a Veteran. He was actually in the Navy and so I used to always hear about his wonderful stories and stuff. I wound up having a son very early in life. I was 16. I had this baby. I wanted to have a career and that was when I decided to go into the Army.

I was sexually assaulted, but the thing about it was, I thought it was something maybe I did because I was really new at the unit. I just kind of sucked up, like as they say, suck it up and drive on.

I still was able to perform at my job. I think I did very well. I did have a lot of problems with authority. I just did lots of self-destructive things, like I would drink to the point of passing out all the time, all day, every day. I couldn't sustain healthy relationships basically. I would always seem to find the people that just basically wanted to use me for what they could and then discard me when they were finished and that was just a recurrent thing. I was being evicted for like the fifth time and I think that I basically ran out of other resources and so I was just like, well let me go up to VA.

When I walked into the VA, I just started crying and I just didn't know where I needed to go. I didn't know who I needed to talk to and so I was just kind of walking around and I ran into a poster that had Military Sexual Trauma and I just started crying and crying and crying because I was like, oh my God, like that happened to me. They have a name for it, like. I was so shocked and so relieved and mad and sad. I immediately tried to reach out to the numbers that were on the flier and I actually didn't tell my family about what happened to me until I started to use the VA from that point. And so, I utilized their in-patient substance abuse program.

I went in-patient November 1, 2010 and I didn't come out until February, like the end of February 2011. I remember when I got to rehab, like, I was so happy to be here. Like, I was, I just felt so grateful and relieved and I really got a chance to sit back and observe a lot of things. That's when I started to come in touch with how I was affected by what had happened to me in the military.

I feel really good about the things that I've learned. It's a very painful process, but it's so worth it in the end. They had a program for homeless Veterans called the HUD-VASH Program where HUD and the VA get together. They give out Housing Choice Vouchers which is known as Section 8. So, I was eligible for one of those and my rent is really cheap and I been paying my rent on time, every month.

I can't say nothing but good things about the VA Hospital, I mean, they literally saved my life. I'm still in therapy. I'm in treatment for the trauma. I was there yesterday. I'm at the VA, like at least twice a week and it's not only just the resources, like the Veterans themselves are a resource because you get to meet so many different kinds of Veterans. You can get so much support from them as well.

Recently, I was at, this was probably about a one or two ago, and so we had what's called Military Sexual Trauma Awareness Day and so I saw a lady just, standing there looking at the poster and I saw her eyes were really misty. It was like we just



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immediately made this connection, like I didn't even have to say, are you a victim? I didn't have to take her through all that questioning, I just basically like put my hand on her shoulder and I was like, It's not your fault. You are not alone and you have so many resources that you'll be able to stand up for yourself.



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