

## I get to work with heroes everyday

**Lauri:** I am Lauri, I am a United States Army Veteran. I served in Europe, Germany and in Ft. Carson, Colorado. I served six and then got out and married my husband. And he stayed in for 20. Once I got out I continued to work for soldiers. I worked in a variety of different jobs for the Department of the Army throughout my husband's career. When it was decided that we were going to retire from the military I worked for the private sector and my son had been serving for 14 months in Iraq and had come home after his end of tour. He was stationed at Schofield barracks in Hawaii and 3 months later July 4, there was a knock on the door at six o'clock and there was two soldiers in uniform informing us that our son had been killed.

We went to pick up his body and decided almost immediately after I got off the plane and talked with his friends and the challenges that they faced with him, they all surviving Iraq and then having come back and having this happen that I was going to quit my job and work with soldiers again. And that is how I became a County Veteran Service Officer. When I took the job, it was cathartic for me to actually work again with the same people that I had such a heart for. They saw in me a couple of different things. They saw a kind of Veteran's Service Officer that was a soldier, the wife of a soldier, and also the mother of a soldier that had been killed. They came in and they saw me, and I could get where they were coming from. I think I have the best job in the world because I get to work with heroes everyday. They walk through my door, that is the only thing that walks through my door is a hero. Whether it be the soldier, the Veteran, or their family. I think that they are all heroes and it is great.

My job is to find the best plan for the Veteran that walks in the door. The biggest part is finding the opportunity for them to create their new normal. We can't make anybody who they were even yesterday, so we just need to make sure that we honor everything that they have gone through. There are memories and there's trauma that you go through, but we need to honor that and get them to move forward. And part of that is developing a new normal. And if one option isn't going to work then we go on to the next one. The first one might not always fit, whether it is the VA, a vet center, private psychiatric care, but then we go to the next.

Katie is a psychiatric assistance dog. In my office we found that Veterans telling their stories was really difficult and one way that we found that alleviated some of the pressure was being able to talk to a dog. You know, it just like a child, a child will tell a dog many things they will never tell their parents. And so Katie comes in and she is actually trained to feel or sense the anxiety in someone. Katie keys off of adrenaline. So if the anxiety level goes up Katie can sense that and just comes and lays her head on your lap.

We find a couple of different – the retirees, all of a sudden they have been busy which is one way to deal with PTSD and battle trauma is to keep busy and not try to think about it. Then all of a sudden you retire and you are sitting at home and you start thinking about your life a little bit more when you come to that retirement age and it really brings back lot of memories that guys hadn't thought of for years and years, if ever and they don't know why now. Another big issue is an aunt and uncle or a grandparent that has a grandchild or a niece or nephew that all of a sudden will go off to Iraq or Afghanistan and had been fine all of these years saying that good-bye or knowing that they are there and having to watch the news will bring it all back. So you struggle then with why now and



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they're the same issues that the younger generation is dealing with. We just take it step by step and say it is valid, it is a trigger that has happened and we need to deal with that and find you the best assistance that we can.

In my office I have a saying when a vet comes in it doesn't matter if they are 92 or 19, in my office you have come in, let me try to help you, but you are going to get the finger and this is the finger. There have been a lot of people that have sat there in that chair that have said the same things, "it will never work, I can't get help" and they come back and we give them five fingers at that point and shake their hand and say "you did it, we will continue to work on it." When they find out that they are not the first person that's ever sat there and said "I don't know what to do." Well then let's figure it out together, you are not alone.



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