

Battling through addictions became my new mission

David: Hi my name is David. I served in the US Army National Guard from 2001 to 2013. Being in downtown Baghdad you never knew who the enemy was. You never knew what the intent was of the person that you were walking through the crowd or the marketplace was. Very, very stressful times.

I developed a very healthy alcohol addiction. You're expected to get back into Civilian life and just kind of be good to go and the military teaches you, trains you to be a Soldier. They don't train you to be a Civilian and so transition was definitely a difficult task, it was very daunting. I actually started hanging out with the wrong folks and started getting into hallucinogens. Mixing that with alcohol and all kinds of stuff. Just not being who I should be, as number one, a father, a husband, a Soldier.

I ended up winding myself in the hospital, in the ER because I was so high. I was gone. Went back home after getting out of the ER and my wife gave me an ultimatum. She was like, "It's either your family or that, what you're doing. You need to pull your head out of your ass and start doing what you need to do." It was kind of after that I made the determination, I really started doing some soul searching. I was like, I'm not gonna let myself be defined by my disabilities anymore. Even though I was just a National Guardsman at the time, I was still expected to maintain tact and bearing outside of the uniform as well, and I wasn't doing that. I got pulled into our Medical Commander's office and he was like "Sargeant Donaldson, where are you trying to go?" "Back to Iraq with my boys, sir." And he was like, "That's not gonna happen."

He knew what he was doing by sending me to the VA. I went down there and got enrolled and everything else, and started seeing Therapists and started seeing different mental health practices, so started engaging in services, because I knew "I gotta beat this. I can't live like this. I don't want to live like this." And I started helping the guys that had not been through it and kind of found out, I was like wow, so I can't fight in the war anymore but there's a new war. Battling with recovery. Battling through the symptoms. Battling through the addictions. That's the new war. And that became my new mission.

I think my relationships have gotten a lot better. My relationships with my family now. My kids are my life. Everything I do is for them, everything. And I am a better man because of it, you know. I am so thankful that I didn't lose them during that time and I was able to recover from that.

Don't keep to yourself. Don't isolate. You have to reach out. You have to reach out. So many of us military folk are bound by pride. We let pride get in the way of our recovery. The main issue is not being connected to those resources. They are out there. You have to have the willingness to accept the help.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION