

The Veterans Treatment Court turned things around

Ray: My name is Ray. I served in the United States Army. I served as an Infantry Soldier from 1998 to 2001. It was a good experience for me. The brotherhood, the camaraderie amongst us Infantryman was unlike any other that I've ever experienced in my life. Getting out of the military was very difficult for me. I didn't know how to adapt to the civilian life. I felt lost in the world. I felt very lost. The brotherhood that I was a part of, I was no longer around my battle buddies. I was no longer doing something around other people that thought the same way that I do, and I chose the drink as a way to deal with life.

I was drinking every day and I was a fully functional alcoholic for a better part of a decade. Once I became a one man party is when I knew I was in trouble. Once I started pushing everyone away from me, anytime I was out of work, or even including work, my entire life revolved around me consuming alcohol.

Because of the alcohol, it was a downward spiral. I went through a divorce, I lost my children, I lost my home to foreclosure, I gave up my career with the Federal Government. I ultimately, I gave up on life. There were times in my life where I actually contemplated suicide. I ended up homeless out on the streets, in and out of jail.

I woke up in a jail cell. I was in for felonies, endangering the public, aggravated assault on a Police Officer so I had really gotten into trouble there. I did a little bit of time and I was introduced to Veterans Court. Veterans Court is a program for us Veterans. You know, they help us with programs, they court order us to mental health treatment. They order us to get the help that we need. They said I needed the help, let me go talk to somebody. Let me go see what kind of help I need, and so I did it.

Going to mental health treatment, meeting with the mental health provider, I was given referrals for a transitional work experience program. It's through the compensated work therapy program at the VA. It's work therapy. You're working, whether you're working the food service, laundry, housekeeping. You're doing different duties throughout the hospital there just to kinda get you around other Veterans and people and trying to get you back to the world of working again.

Being around other Veterans, trying to overcome barriers and struggles was good for me. I was in other group sessions with Veterans that had similar situations as myself. We could definitely relate to one another. We'd just sit there, we'd talk about what's going on with our lives and try to help each other, try to motivate each other to make positive life changes.

I learned to set healthy boundaries in my life. I learned of different ways to cope with reality than having to self-medicate. Today I practice a lot of self-care. I do things that make me feel good in the heart. Instead of numbing the pain of reality, I do things that make my heart feel good.

Because of these programs, the VA sent me to school to be a Certified Peer Support Specialist, and it's helped me become a better person. Now I get to help others, others that are going through some of the struggles that I've been through. I've been down some very dark lonely roads, and if I can inspire one person to make certain changes in his or her life, then I've done my part.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION