

There are people out here who care for you

Stephen: My names Stephen. I served in the United States Navy. I served from 97 to 2001 aboard the USS Carl Vinson stationed out of Bremerton, Washington. I joined at the age of 17 with my parent's signature. I was really thankful to be able to leave the situation that I was in.

My father has substance issues, his own issues going on, physical, emotional abuse towards my mother, and I had to see that firsthand and I had all these issues, and I never really understood it. So, therefore I self-medicated and I ran away from home all the time.

I got in trouble down the line. I came across drunk to the MP's right there at the gate, and they gave me a sobriety test and I got in trouble. They gave me the option, at Captain's mast to go 30 days to San Diego for inpatient treatment. I didn't comprehend that I had a substance abuse issue. I thought it was normal because that's what I grew up with. There was a lot of anger and resentment, a lot of questioning of why and a lot of blame. So, I just wanted to get out. So, I chose the latter, and I got out.

And, I didn't like the way I felt because of the way I went out to being looked down upon as family, not serving my full commitment. I wasn't sleeping properly. My nutrition was bad. I gained 50 pounds and it was a bad experience, just isolating myself off to the world. I just felt like I was, the tires were just spinning, and I was getting nowhere. I would revert back to alcohol. It was just a natural, for me a mechanism just to drink, just to numb myself.

I was in a near fatal accident in 2011 where I hit a telephone pole, and I don't remember any thing but waking up in a hospital bed handcuffed to the bed. Everyone thought I was an alcoholic like my dad. It caused a lot of stress and harm to the loved ones around me but that's when my life truly changed. That was my lowest moment, lowest point. The Core System there in Cincinnati, they connected me with the Vet Court, the Veterans Court and going to the Veterans Court they connected me with the Vet Center and I was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder and that just opened a door of self-discovery.

My counselor, Ken, he's a Veteran as well. That man was a mentor as well as my therapist. He helped guide me along the way. He saw me from my lowest to me graduating and just keeping my sanity and my composure because my anxiety was really, really high. I should be dead or in jail. I should be a statistic. Me standing in front of you today is just a testament to the people in my life that helped me along the way.

Right now, I'm working as a volunteer research assistant in the scan lab. They actually work with posttraumatic stress disorder as well as TBI. I also work as a behavior coach and mentor. So, my goal is to give back, pay it forward to the Veterans as well as the community like they've done for me. I'm really proud that I opened up and put down the guard, broke down those walls and its community. Tap into that community, there's people out here that care for you, that want to help you.



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