

VA support for getting back on your feet

John: My name is John. I'm a United States Marine Corps Veteran. I served from 1988 to 1992. Whenever I did get out, I was going to school full-time. I was 22 years old. I got things going there in San Diego and built a business. I really didn't have any problems at that time, and I didn't have any problems for a great number of years.

A few years ago, I got into trouble. There were some bad things that happened in my life. My house burned down. The economy kind of took a crap on my construction company. And I got really drunk for a little period of time there. I ended up getting four DUIs in a matter of two days. Of course, that's what put me in prison. And while I was there, I managed to lose just about everything.

There was a Veteran's representative that came to see me. His name was Tony. He came to see me, and he explained some things that were available to Veterans, to prisoners who are Veterans. I've never used any of my benefits. I'm not a disabled Vet, but I never had any idea that there were things that were still available to me.

The two and a half years that I spent in prison cost me everything. I would have got out with nothing if it wouldn't have been for Tony coming and talking to me. He started lining some things out. I think it's called the HVRP. I didn't consider myself a homeless Veteran, but I guess if your house is foreclosed on while you're locked up, that's basically what you become. He hooked me up with another program called the HAV, Homes for All Veterans. And that's administered through the Department of Veteran's Affairs.

As soon as I got out, they helped me get into a house. They provided money, which I had none. They provided me with financial assistance to help me get into a house and to find a place. Dealing with the Department of Corrections, you come out and segue way back into society. It's not easy to deal with that just by yourself if you're completely broke and you've lost everything. And it was the VA that helped me get some of that on-line.

There was a psych eval that I had to have. They took care of all the paperwork for the parole board and got everything taken care of for me. They've certainly addressed the issues that I've had, which is DUI and alcoholism. It's been a good program. It's arranged with my schedule. I'm able to deal with anything I need with scheduling to get that taken care of. And of course, like I say, I think the biggest, most immediate thing for most people would be the cost. And the VA has taken care of that.

Parole has something to say about whether your kids are going to live with you or not. With my Vet rep, he actually talked to my parole officer and said, "Is there any trouble at all?" And they said, "No, none whatsoever." And here in two more weeks my 16-year-old son is going to be living with me.

I've also gotten into college. I'm going back to school, finishing my degree in journalism. I thought that my Motgomery GI Bill had expired. And as it turns out it has but working with Veteran's representatives and there at the school financial aid center, they have a department for Veterans. And if you're a Vet, they sit down, and they figure out what they can do. I'm going to school full-time right now.



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I don't have my life back that I had three years ago, but it's going to be there because we've taken care of the issues. You may have to do a little bit of work and dig around a little bit, but it's there. There's no telling what I might have done without the help. I'm so grateful for finding them.



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