

Getting Back on Track

Michael: I was in such a dark, dirty place that I never thought there was any light at the end of the tunnel. And now that I found it, I'd like to guide other people to it. My name is Michael, United States Army, 1981 to 1984. I was a tow and dragon missile repairman. Life wasn't really all that great, so I decided to join the army and see the world.

My life changed. I did whatever it took to get the job done. I was out surviving. After I served my time, I was just so beat down. There was some transition anxiety in what I was going to do with the rest of my life at that point. That's where I think that I found substances. For several years I party all night. One beer turned into a bottle of whiskey, turned into not showing up for work, turned into unemployment, turned into everybody in the family suffering. Just making a lot of really bad decisions. And it just got worse and worse. I was homeless and I was full blown addict. I got arrested. I had a family intervention. My family all got together and told me you really need to get some help. So I went to the VA. I really had no expectation of what it was supposed to be like. The VA said, yeah, we can help you. And this is what you got to do. I did prolonged exposure. I did CBT-E, I did self-taught, prolonged exposure, I think is what I made the most progress with.

Reliving my incidents, even though that was the toughest, it did allow me to process some of the things that I've been through with my PTSD. Eventually you can sleep again and desensitize yourself from the experience. I would recommend anybody starting out fresh to take a look. It's just amazing. And then there was a year of transitional living, which I worked in the community, still lived at the VA, paid rent. I found my niche. And I'm just so grateful that the government has provided me with that. If I wouldn't have given myself a chance to do so many different options, I wouldn't be here right now. I wouldn't be here.

I like riding motorcycles. I like hiking, like going to the movies. I'm very responsible. I just do lots of volunteering. I do feeding the homeless. My whole life really is revolved around recovery now and helping others and paying back. Peer specialists is a job that I can provide service to people that are in the same situation as I am, and show them that there's a way out of it. It provides a lot of hope and a lot of success. For me, it's more of a lifestyle. I know part of my life now will always require some tuning up. And it's okay. It's okay to call somebody. It's okay to talk to somebody. Don't be afraid to get the assistance. The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.



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