

## **A better life after treatment**

**Francille:** My name is Francille. I originally enlisted for Germany. I was in the United States Army from September 1979 to October 1982. I got out for 15 years and went back in with the United States National Guard doing medical support for the Blackhawks during Bosnia.

My troubles began after my divorce. I was on my own raising 4 children. I started drinking, started using. At one point during my addiction, I lost my parental rights. I was busted for selling drugs, and I lost custody.

Through my drug addiction, 21 years of my life was just gone in one day. And my children were gone in one day. I had gotten to this point with my addiction that I weighed like 98 pounds. And I just knew I was going to die. I said this can't be the way that this ends. I have to change things about myself so that I break this cycle for my children's sake.

The last time that I was busted in Sacramento, the sheriffs actually have a program there. When they found out that I was a veteran they thought that it would be good for me to use my benefits, but one of the things that would help me the most would be to get out of the area, get away from people, places and things. All those things that kept me going down that same street and falling into that same rut.

The outreach team from the VA would come and look for veterans to see if they wanted assistance with mental health, and that's how I ended up in Menlo Park. An \$18 ticket put me on the bus, and I've been here since.

When I go to the clinic, I do have my meds that I take for my depression. Then the mental part is actually being able to speak to someone. Going into therapy, going to counseling and talking about the things, the traumas in your life and getting that off of your chest. A lot of times you carry around baggage that should have been dropped off a long time ago. Realizing where my weaknesses are, setting boundaries with that and just staying away from the things that tear me down versus build me up.

I'm an in-home care provider, CPR certified. It feels so good to have my children still love me because when I talk, I've talked to many vets who no longer are a part of their kids' lives, so I know how fortunate I am to still have that piece in my life. So, I protect it with every breath that I take because I'm fortunate enough to have them all in my life. And there was a time that I didn't have that, and it was devastating for me.

No matter what you find yourself up against, if you want it bad enough, you know, like basic training, you just have to hang on and climb over those walls and you have to tunnel through some things. Sometimes you get down and dirty, but you can get up and make it to the top.

You're not alone. You're not the only one that has made a mistake. You've earned the benefits that are provided through our military system. There are numbers to call. There



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are hotlines and crisis lines and there are clinics in most areas. Just tell somebody and get the help that you need.



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