

## Overcoming homelessness with support from VA

**BriGette:** My name is BriGette. I was in the Army. I really felt that serving my country and having an opportunity to travel was going to be a good opportunity. When you're in the service, the structure's set pretty strong. If there are any difficulties, you have someone within your chain of command that you can go to who has either the resources that you need directly or somebody that they can direct you to. When you get out, not only do you lose that level of structure but then you also lose that level of resources.

I didn't have any family, I didn't have any friends, and I was basically just starting from scratch. By that point I had a small child who had a very severe illness so it was just trying to navigate through all of the different systems and work and transition out. So it was tough. It got bad pretty quickly and there were periods of time when I would recoup, but then there would still be that transition where I would have some difficulty. I've been classified as chronically homeless, right now I have housing, post traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, all of those things were there. Taking the skills that I had and applying them to jobs in the community, that was difficult because here I came from the military and then trying to say "Well, here are my skills and this is what I can do," and people were like, "Well, how do we fit those skills into this situation?"

I ended up at the VA out of severe distress. At that point I was married and we had insurance, but my medical care had started to just basically eat up all of our money. It just became too much, and so I figured maybe I could go to the VA and at least get my prescription. Once my health began to deteriorate my marriage deteriorated as well and I basically ended up homeless again. I found out about the HUD-VASH program through one of the social workers at the VA. They really worked with me to get me some type of financial resources, get me the kind of care that I needed for my daughter. These are outside resources but they plugged me into the information so that we could get stabilized. The VA has the supportive part where they come in, and they have the social workers come in and help you get the resources that you need so that you can keep your housing.

I think initially I was pissed off because here I was all these years, short of going to a witch doctor, I had pretty much done it. I was like, "What is wrong with me? I'm not connecting, I'm not understanding what's happening, why I feel this way, why I'm struggling, why is this so difficult? Why is going to work every day difficult?" So I was trying to still take ownership of it, that it's something I wasn't doing or something I needed to do, and they kept saying "This isn't your fault, these are the things that happen and these are all the events that took place, so now you have to just get some help and come in and talk to somebody."

Your quality of life doesn't get better until you begin to implement things to make your quality of life better. I am currently using vocational rehab through the VA. I'm on the independent living program and I know this sounds funny but my conditions are so severe that right now I'm not in a position to go back to school or to be working at all. What they're trying to do is get me to a point where physically I'm able to do more and getting out more.

If I can just reach one person and say, "Hey, don't take your life, go get services, go talk to someone, reach out, because everybody's not always going to be able to reach to you, but just reach out and just start asking questions. The help is there. It may be a



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little bit challenging to get the help, but take the energy that you were going to take to do something negative to do something positive for your life.”



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