

## **I absolutely love what I do**

**Ryan:** My name is Ryan and I was in the Army for 12 years. After I got out of the military, after I left Fort Campbell, that was when things really started getting bad. I couldn't find a job doing anything because nobody needed somebody with my skill set.

I ended up having a lot of different arguments with my now ex-wife, but the one that really took the cake was, we were discussing what to do with a tax return. That whole thing gradually just escalated into how much she hates me and, you know, how much, how unhappy we both were in the relationship and I went and I got my 7 mm-08 hunting rifle out. I loaded a round and then I was sitting there trying to figure out and get the gusto up to put a round in my head. So, I called the 911 operator and she was the one that actually talked me down and the officers that they had sent out to the house; one of them was an old Marine gunny and he's like, I just lost one of my guys to suicide two weeks ago. He's like, I'm not about to sit here and let you go out this way. And I was at the VA there for ten days in the psych ward.

When I got back, I realized that I didn't want to be in that relationship anymore. That was not helping me get any better, so I ended up being homeless for six months. I was walking because I needed to relocate my camp and a guy had stopped and picked me up. I was wearing my old fatigues because it's what I had and carrying a military assault pack because it's what I had and he said, Are you a Veteran? I said, "Yes sir, I am." Over time, I ended up working with him. He did landscaping, and fix-it stuff which was a good experience for me. I was learning some skills. I was learning some skills that I could actually use on the outside and I started getting hooked up with the VA out in Detroit which not all of my experiences there were great, but the one experience that was absolutely amazing was with the Operational Enduring Freedom case manager that I had. She was amazing and over time, you know, if she asked me to do something, if she asked me to make an appointment with somebody or keep in touch with her, I did. And she said, I'm doing as much as I'm doing for you because you're actually trying to help yourself.

I used the Post 9/11 GI Bill to go to Massage Therapy School. So, I got paid to go to school and I ended up graduating from Massage Therapy School with a 3.7 and I went from 18 medications to 4 and I absolutely love what I do. You have to figure out what your next mission is. Nobody's there to give you that next mission, but there are all kinds of people both at the VA and other Veteran service organizations that can help you figure out what your next goal should be; what your next mission is. Most of the people at the VA that I've encountered are prior service members. They get it. They've been there. You have to be okay asking for help. It's okay asking for help.



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