

Finding Support To Manage Bipolar Symptoms

Shannan: My name is Shannan. I served in the Army for 12 years, from 99 to 2012. The transition for me getting out of the military was like a fish out of water I'll describe it. There's a lot of different services and things that you get used to in the military that kind of help you along and really don't allow you to fail, and as a civilian those things aren't in place. I really didn't feel like myself. I didn't feel like I was kind of taken things to personal or I was more-quick tempered you know, had a shorter fuse.

I have sleep apnea, I have insomnia. I've just had like various sleep disturbances. I had issues that I needed to take to someone about. I knew, especially being a medic and having that medical background that the intervention of mental health services, was required really at a time when I couldn't manage it on my own.

I've been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and a part of what led to that diagnosis is an extreme depression where I was at a point of literally committing suicide. It's been close to a decade of mental health services that I have continued to seek, both on my own and by recommendations from, from other battle buddies. I have tried both individual and group therapy and I feel like I've made the greatest progress in these past couple years because I'm rooted. I'm here near my homeland which is only 4 hours away, I'm half Navajo. The Native American Church Services were like definitely monumental in my change.

I also get weekly therapy from, or individual counseling through the Gila River Health Care, which is awesome because that comes from my native benefits rather than, it's in addition to the VA.

I definitely believe there was a huge change in the way in which I communicate with my community, the way, even with my children, my kids understand more what mommy went through and they can better relate to, there's a difference between old mommy back fresh out of the military as compared to now. Being a mother, being a wife, being a soldier, or especially like a leader of soldiers, I was so used to and in tune to taking care of other people that I didn't really ever take the appropriate time aside for myself to balance it with self-care.

Going through tough times of going through the struggle, if you have someone right there, especially like a spouse or a partner that's saying, "Hey, we're going to make it through this," or someone to even present that the flip side of it, how things could be worse. It gives you an insight that is really like you can't see at the time when you're going through it. It's kind of like you have that tunnel vision and depending on the support staff that you have around you, they're the ones that help you peel back those blinders to really see the whole picture. This time, this moment, this may be like overwhelming, but there's a bigger picture.