

A Hand Up

Peter: Peter. Air Force Veteran. Served 1996 to 2002, where I was medically retired.

I did Air Base Ground Defense, so we protected the personnel on the planes. I worked in the restricted areas. When you work around nuclear weapons, there's certain things like medicine that you can't take, and if you become unreliable, they pull your certification so that you no longer have a normal job function. I was injured just doing my normal function of security forces. I developed problems where I was just falling the time. I'll be walking and next thing you know, I'd fall to the ground. So unfortunately, when I got injured, I was reduced to cleaning up the base, just because I had lost my clearance. It was a horrible time at the thing to feel worthless, to not have a purpose.

It was a horrible experience post-military, just because I was physically ill. I'm having these back spasms, I'm incapacitated, I can't walk properly. And so, I was going from job to job, to job here in Las Vegas, and I just couldn't get my life together. I upset a lot of people. I was no longer the smiling person that they were used to, or friendly person. I was very closed off. I was angry, but I was in so much pain that it just... I rubbed a lot of people the wrong way. They didn't know how to deal with me, they just thought I had a attitude problem, but they didn't understand the physical disabilities. And I kept a lot of that to myself. Being a man and being prideful, I didn't want to show weakness, and so I didn't let everybody understand what I was truly going through. Until people understand what you're truly going through, a lot of times they can't give you that compassion or give you the help to move forward with your life.

I didn't think I needed mental health. I thought just because I was in pain, that was the issue. But one particular marine encouraged me to go to the mental health professionals at the VA. I'm going to go ahead and accept the help and just deal what I have to be able to start getting better. I went to the war-related illness center, and Palo Alto through the VA, and that really changed my whole life around. And we have these different options, like Veteran peer support outdoor recreation. They recommended a recumbent trike, and that was the genius of me getting my life together is that the VA actually recommended a recumbent trike. It's a three-wheel bicycle.

Recumbent trikes have electric assist on them, so even if you can't physically pedal, it pedals with you or even pedal by itself. So, it allows me to escape and allows me to get out and get outdoors. I have an ability to participate in life with the other Veterans. Unfortunately, we have permanent disabilities. The personal pain doesn't go away, but through Veteran peer support outdoor recreation, that's the hand up that we need. So, I would encourage Veterans to get down to their local VA.



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