

## Recovery after depression and substance use

**Mary Ann:** I'm Mary Ann. I am an eight-year Navy Veteran, and when I got out I was an aviation support Equipment Technician, second class, which is an E5, but when I got out of the Navy I really didn't see any issues happening at the time. I got out, I got little jobs here and there, I was a security officer on a submarine base in Kingsbury, Georgia for a while, then I went back to Buford and I was a Correctional Officer. My drinking increased and started to be just drinking, but I still didn't see it as a problem. I ended up going to Virginia and I stayed in Virginia for about eight years. I lived in Virginia, and during that time the drinking still increased and some drug use came into play then, and I still didn't see it as a problem. I felt like I was handling everything and when I came back to South Carolina there again the drinking and the drug use and then it started to really be an issue. It took over my life.

I started not to be a very good parent for my teenager. I have an older daughter and she brought that to my attention. "Mom, I don't know what you're doing but something is not right and you need to get help," and depression just set in. I don't know where that came from, but I was going to work one morning and I could not stop crying. I could not drive, I had to pull over on the side of the street and I called my daughter and I said "Look, I don't know what's wrong but I need something. Something's wrong," and we left Buford and went to the VA in Charleston that day.

I was an inpatient, severe depression, I got the medication I needed and I was assigned a Doctor in Buford, so I saw her about every month, and she kept telling me "You need to go to substance abuse treatment, I need you to this." "No, ma'am, I don't need to do that." Well, I needed to do that. And because of substance abuse one night I decided I got into a fight with my boyfriend and the police were called and I was a detention officer in one county and I sent to jail in the next county, so once I got out of jail the next day I went and sat in front of that Doctor and said "Sign me up, because it's time for me to go."

When I came to Charleston to start the substance abuse treatment, I still had an apartment in Buford and when I realized that this is where I needed to be because if I went back to Buford I would probably end up in the same position that I was, I ended up having to get rid of the apartment and put my things in storage and then I realized "I'm homeless for real." Even though I was—the VA had me in housing, I knew I was going to continue to do what I needed to do because I had to get my daughter back, so that pretty much was my mission, my vision, to keep me doing what I was supposed to do. I completed the program, I was given transitional work experience, therapeutic work experience. I was told about a position as an Employment Specialist, I put in for it, and I got it, so now I can help other homeless Veterans, and I feel good about that, I feel good about being able to help somebody the way that I was helped.

The tools that I use to cope with being in recovery, definitely paying attention to the triggers that are there. Knowing when I feel that feeling coming what I need to do to avoid using. Everything that my counselor has told me or taught me about looking for the signs of depression, because depression was really a big thing for me. With the counseling, with the medication, it helps, and I lost my Mom in February, and that was a very big event for me. It was so very hard for me not to use, because I really wanted to, but I stuck to my guns and I had a lot of counseling, I think I talked to my counselor every day, but you have to be able to reach out and you have to be able to accept the help that's given to you, because a lot of times we don't want to reach out because we



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think that, “Oh, they’ll think this of me,” but it’s something that you have to do because you have to take care of yourself. If you can go to war and you can be in combat, and you can take care of yourself there, when you come back here you still have to take care of yourself.

Today is better compared to that day that I decided to say “Okay, I need help.” Today is better because I cope better with things, I cope better with life. I feel like I’m a better parent than I was then because my whole 100 percent focus is on being a parent. If you feel like you need help, my recommendation is to seek help, because it’s not that easy but once you make that decision and make that first step, there’s no looking back.



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