

Armed Forces Day 2023

Simon's Story

About Simon

Simon, hailing from Scarborough, joined the British Army at the age of 16, entering the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers as a vehicle mechanic. A serious accident in Canada resulted in low back and neck injuries and subsequent medical discharge after 10 years' service.

Following his discharge, Simon spent several years living a chaotic life which included numerous jobs, house moves, divorce and illness all whilst trying to cope with the injuries he already had and raising his daughter on a full-time basis.

It was following a stomach illness, as a result of the medication required to control pain, that Simon was put in touch with Help for Heroes and the Band of Brothers, and during his early engagement with H4H his key worker contacted the hidden wounds project who subsequently signposted Simon to a local NHS service to undergo therapy for PTSD and depression.

During this period, Simon was also signposted to various other agencies where housing and finances were stabilised.

Following 3 years of treatment, Simon successfully disengaged from therapy and now lives a fulfilling life which has seen him set up a project to assist other wounded veterans through carp fishing, undertake watercolour painting with work exhibited both nationally and internationally and joining the Help for Heroes/Invictus Games Choir.

In recent years, Simon graduated from his degree BSc in Psychology as part of the Open University disabled veteran's scholarship fund and is now employed by the Trust as a Peer Support Worker. He uses his lived experience and knowledge to empower others in their mental health recovery.

Through his love of carp fishing, Simon has also gone on to raise over £50,000 for Help for Heroes and other military charities.

About Simon's experience with Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust

I was put in touch with the Veterans Outreach Service via a referral from the Hidden Wounds project in 2015.

I had spent a number of years following my discharge living a life in a vicious circle whereby relationships, employment and housing would all break down as a result of my own destructive behaviours that resulted from PTSD and depression. Following the breakdown of a relationship and ongoing illness partly relating to stress, I knew I needed help and spoke to Help for Heroes who referred me to the Veterans Outreach Service in Hull via their Hidden Wounds project.

It's fair to say that before my first appointment I was fearful and anxious, I had no experience with mental health services and for many years I had been in denial that I needed such help. I felt I was resilient enough to be able to cope without help and thought that others were more deserving of the support. I was also concerned that my daughter would be at risk of being taken into care by social services as I was a single parent who had her on a full-time

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basis. I couldn't have been further away from the truth in all aspects of my worries and concerns.

My first appointment in the September of 2015 was with Rebecca, a CPN with the service and almost immediately my worries and concerns were alleviated as Rebecca explained what the Veterans Outreach Service did, how they did it and what they expected from me. It was made clear that my daughter was not at risk and the 'men in white coats' scenario I had in my head was not a reality and not what the service was about.

I worked with Rebecca for around 9 months as I was stabilised, this meant working with other agencies in sorting my housing, finances and such like so that I was in a position to be able to undergo treatment with a Clinical Psychologist. Without the stabilisation I am pretty sure the success of my treatment would have been significantly reduced. Rebecca also gave me some basic coping techniques to use for the PTSD and depression until my referral to the Humber Traumatic Stress Service had been accepted.

One of the key aspects of Rebecca's work was the ability to gain my trust which I feel was hugely important in keeping me engaged with the service, and something I have gone on to talk to student Clinical Psychologists about. Veterans are notoriously weary of those who have limited knowledge of military life, especially those in a therapeutic setting. Gaining the trust of the veteran is so important, otherwise they can be at risk from disengaging from therapy.

Following the work of Rebecca and the Veterans Outreach Service I then underwent a 2-year period of therapy with the Humber Traumatic Stress Service. The treatment I undertook was mainly Compassion Focused Therapy and EMDR.

The experience I had with the Veterans Outreach Service has been life changing and I can't thank the staff enough for their support. At the time it was also filled with compassion and empathy which helped to alleviate my fears. I also had to work at things in between the appointments, but the way in which the service was delivered and the positive reinforcement I was given allowed me to succeed. Not only was the stabilisation a hugely helpful aspect of the support I received, but the education about PTSD and depression was also of massive help.

Looking back, I don't think there was anything negative I experienced about the service, other than the building it was delivered in, and I urge anyone who feels anxious about reaching out for support with their mental health to not hesitate and ask for help. The Veterans Outreach Service truly changed, not only my life but that of my daughter and those close to me, as I'm now able to live a more fulfilling life that's stable and less chaotic.

Find out more about Armed Forces Day and [how you can get involved here](#).