

WILLIAM'S STORY

When you think about drug addiction you will normally picture someone, probably unemployed, dirty, few teeth and who are in trouble with the law. Well, that is how I pictured a drug addict right up to the time I became one. I was an Army Officer in the 2nd Commando Regiment. I had 30 odd years military experience with Operations in Somalia, Rwanda (including the Kibeho massacre), multiple tours of Afghanistan and a number of Domestic Terrorism operations. It was after returning from my last tour to Afghanistan, with the Special Operations Task Force, that I became sick. When I look back now, I can see that my mental health went down hill very quickly. At the time I did not understand what was happening. I stopped doing the things I liked, I stop socialising and I started withdrawing. It was a perfect storm because not only was I struggling I was struggling alone. Because of the operational tempo of the Unit my Wife and kids decided to remain in Darwin while I went back to Sydney. It was then I was introduced to Methamphetamine or ICE. Initially it fixed everything and made everything right again, that's until it didn't. For just under 12 months I was living a double life. An Officer enforcing the Army's drug policy during the day and then sticking needles in my arm at night. I knew I had a problem and the only thing I could do was run away from it. I initially put in my discharge papers from the Army thinking that if I got back to my family that would fix me. It didn't. I was only home for a month or so when the Army asked me to come back. I thought that going back to the career that I loved would fix me. It didn't. Finally I decided to come forward to the Army and ask for help then things got worse. The Army did not know what to do. I lost my security clearance so I could not work and for weeks I was sent to my room to wait. This suited me fine and I kept using. I thought that coming forward would save me and my career. It didn't. The next four to five years were a nightmare. The Army accepted liability for me using and medically discharged me. I moved back here with my family, who only found out I was a drug addict after I informed the Army. I was still using heavily when I got here and could not understand how I had ended up like I did. In 2015 I found myself banging on Banyan House's door crying and begging for them to let me in. I think I spent two weeks there before telling them that I was cured. I remember my wife sitting in the office crying and begging them to keep me and help me. I was not ready for recovery. That was my first of three residential rehabilitation centres. I was very fortunate because Veteran Affairs paid for all my treatment. Unfortunately, after completing my second go at rehabilitation I used again within a week of leaving. My addiction was getting worse. So bad that I left my wife and kids and headed to Brisbane where I knew ICE was cheap. For the next two years I was homeless and couch surfing. Finally an organisation called Veterans 360 who find homeless Vets and help them, got me into my third rehab. This time I completed the three month program with the Hader Clinic in Queensland. I then did a further six to seven months further rehabilitation in their transition house. It was while I was living there that my wife asked me to come home and I did.

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It was back in Darwin, at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, when I heard a member sharing that they work for Mission Australia. I had been clean for nearly two years and had been playing with the idea of doing something to help those who were struggling with addiction. I was given a number to ring and a day or so later I was sitting in an interview with the Program Manager of the Mission Australian Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Service (MARRTS). This process alone created a lot of anxiety. You have to remember that I had been in the Military since I was sixteen and had no experience with job interviews. I commenced work as a Support Worker in October of 2019.

I know Mission Australia has been very supportive of me. Although my work ethic could not have been faulted the way I dealt with certain situations needed work. As an Officer in the Army I generally needed to confront problems face on and tell it how it was. Now, and still today, I am trying to feel my way around certain situations. I am definitely a work in progress. My journey has been difficult. Certain things and conversations still have a triggering effect on me. It is amazing how out of nowhere I noticed that I am daydreaming about using. My brain still wants that feeling. There have been a few rough patches where my anxiety would tell me that Mission Australia was going to sack me but 12 months later I am grateful to still be working here. I have filled all the roles at MARRTS and have been fortunate enough to now be the Program Manager. I am really enjoying this job along with study at Charles Darwin University. I am learning every day and enjoy being of the Mission Australia team. It has been a long road out of addiction but I am starting to feel like the man I once was.

If you or someone you know is struggling with an alcohol and other drug issue, call Alcohol and Drug Information Service for free confidential counselling, support, information and advice on 1800 131 350.