

Fred B

“If you are one of those people who just needs to STOP, you can start to rehabilitate yourself in prison. You have time to think.”

Life does workout

Putting your life back on-track sometimes requires taking it all apart, seeing what makes you who you are and who you do not want to be then having the courage to allow yourself to be vulnerable as others help you rebuild; just as the Boston Release Network (BRN) did for Fred.

Fred was the oldest of six kids growing up in a sexually abusive household. At the first chance he had, Fred left that destructive environment, joined the Army and at 18 years of age found himself fighting in Vietnam. He doesn't talk a lot about it except to say that combat showed him the very worst that humans are capable of. Eventually, he was honorably discharged, got married, started a family and tried to find work. Yet, the trauma of his youth and images of war overwhelmed and restrained his ability to maintain a job. Under such stress it didn't take long before, in his words: “I went crazy, smashed up my apartment, thank god I didn't hurt my wife or baby.”

Rightly or not, on the advice of mental health professionals, Fred's place seemed to be in the Army



so he re-enlisted. It didn't last even a year before the Army recognized the damage in Fred and discharged him.

The next few years of Fred's life continued to spiral downward; he had panic attacks, could not sleep, was in and out of mental hospitals, went through two more marriages and divorces. He could not keep a job. “Something was warped in me.” Alcohol became his “treatment” and at seemingly the lowest point in his life, so drunk he was unable to remember, he molested three children. For this he was sentenced to 10 years plus probation.

Incarcerated without any treatment, and life lessons founded on abuse and war, Fred wasn't successful after his release and found himself again behind bars, this time with a 25-year sentence. Fred says that it took him months to admit to himself that he was guilty of a second sexual offense.

In prison he truly “hit bottom,” and understood that he needed help. “I learned that my victims were victims, that I had damaged them; I had told myself till then that since I didn't physically hurt them, they were OK. I also learned that I was a victim too, which I never thought before.”

BRN

Baystate Reentry Network

When Fred re-entered society for the second time, the world had changed – and he had never lived in a city. “It was just a concrete jungle to me; all the concrete buildings, people rushing around” – but again, he was on his own and living at a veteran’s shelter in Boston. “After 25 years in prison, I didn’t know how to do anything; I was fragile and insecure; I was waiting for permission.”

Learning of Fred’s past, his convictions and the troubles he is likely to face with the stigma of a sexual offense on his record, another veteran, JJ, also living at the shelter who himself had been helped by the BayState Reentry Network (BRN) approached Fred with a calm attitude and said “he’d be hanging around with me for a while.” Slowly, with the financial logistical support of the BayState Reentry Network, JJ helped Fred get a smartphone and learn to use it, find his way around the streets and subways, get an ID and drivers license; just as someone associated with BRN had done for JJ not too long before. But, most importantly, JJ and BRN found Fred a place to live where his background is known and he is accepted.

“The Veterans Shelter and BRN were my lifesavers. I had nobody. Just being in Boston was stressful and confusing; I was lost and disoriented. JJ became a friend, a guide, and a big brother. Without the compassion and guidance of BRN, I’d be back in prison. Not for a sexual offense; I would have probably hurt someone. Without support and self-esteem, people crash and burn.”

Without the compassion and guidance of BRN, I’d be back in prison.

Fred has now been functioning in society for many years. He voluntarily attends a weekly support group and understands that he has a long road ahead of him. But what Fred understands the best is how one small act of kindness makes the difference between life and death. And he believes in giving back, so he takes time every week to



BayState Reentry Network
PO Box 57
Prides Crossing, MA 01965
baystatereentrynetwork@gmail.com
www.baystatereentrynetwork.org