

Mark's Story

MARK JOINED THE ARMY TO ESCAPE FAMILY ISSUES AND TO GET AWAY FROM HIS HOMETOWN WHERE HE WAS INVOLVED IN THE DRUG SCENE, BOTH TAKING AND SUPPLYING.

Mark served in the Parachute Regiment, his new 'military family', for five years, including an operational tour in Northern Ireland. He was subsequently diagnosed with anxiety and PTSD, although his PTSD was not service related.

After leaving the Army, Mark drank heavily due to his untreated mental health condition. This resulted in numerous offences of being drunk and disorderly and, eventually, an offence of Actual Bodily Harm which saw him go to prison for the first time. Things didn't really change for Mark after leaving prison and it wasn't long before he found himself back inside with a 2.5 year sentence.

During this second sentence, Mark made a conscious decision to change his life. He completed all in-prison courses required as part of his rehabilitation plan, and he also signed up to work with Care after Combat.

Through Care after Combat, Mark began engaging with much-needed mental health treatment as part of the Veteran Care Through Custody programme (collaboration between Care after Combat and Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust), taking part in group forums and working alongside a Care after Combat mentor, one-to-one, as part of Project Phoenix.

“I AM NOW LIVING A CRIME FREE LIFE AND WILL NOT GO BACK TO PRISON. PETER WAS WITH ME AT EVERY STEP AND HELPED ME TO DEAL WITH EVERY CHALLENGE I FACED, BOTH IN PRISON AND WHEN RELEASED, I COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT HIS SUPPORT. IMPORTANTLY, I KNOW THAT THE SUPPORT OF CARE AFTER COMBAT WILL ALWAYS BE THERE SHOULD I NEED IT.”

— MARK



Mark and his mentor, Peter, walked together every step of the journey, to ensure that Mark remained focused on his personal goals and did not go back to prison.

Mark faced numerous challenges upon release, including those created by the liberty constraints imposed due to his crime, constraints that did not consider the individual trying to turn his life around. Challenges such as these are borne of an automatic assumption that people who commit crime, will always commit crime. Mark challenged this assumption in the best way possible; by gaining employment and turning his life around.

Mark's mentor worked with Probation services to negotiate pragmatic adjustments to his liberty constraints that would allow Mark to be able to travel for work in his home city. Immediately after his release in 2019, Mark applied for jobs and within a couple of weeks found employment. He has remained in employment since, with jobs in construction and engineering.

Mark continued to work hard at his reintegration into society, meeting challenges head on and, ultimately, changing the opinion of others.

“TO HELP SUPPORT MARK WAS AN HONOUR. HIS DETERMINATION TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES HE FACED AND TURN HIS LIFE AROUND, WAS INSPIRATIONAL, AND AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS OF WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED, EVEN WHEN FACED WITH ADVERSITY.”

— PETER, CARE AFTER COMBAT MENTOR



Mark was an integral part of the development of the collaborative ReGroup pathfinder project, invited to London to sit on the inaugural workshop to shape the project, sharing his own personal experiences from both in prison and post release.

He was also invited to present his experiences at a training day for Probation staff. Whilst it would have been understandable for Mark to decline such support given his own negative experiences, he accepted the invitation with the view that it was an opportunity to educate those that dictate the rules by which offenders must live on release from prison.

Mark worked with Care after Combat, as part of Project Phoenix, for a total of 16 months post release. The support continued beyond the mandated 12 months to help Mark through what was probably his greatest challenge. Mark was released 'on licence' and approaching the 12-month licence endpoint, became anxious that Care after Combat support would be withdrawn. Mark's anxiety was borne of a fear that without his mentor's support, his chance of returning to prison would be significantly increased.

Going back to prison would have broken him – the need was clear - Care after Combat support continued. Mark lives his own life now. Mark and Peter still talk.