

John's Story

JOHN SERVED IN THE ARMY FOR 15 YEARS. ON LEAVING THE ARMY, HE FELL INTO A LIFE OF CRIME THAT INVOLVED DRUG USE AND EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE. AS A RESULT, HE COMMITTED A SERIOUS OFFENCE RESULTING IN HIM RECEIVING A LIFE SENTENCE, HIS JOURNEY THROUGH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BEGAN.

Care after Combat met John in 2018, when our veterans service was set up for the first time at a Category C prison. John had already served a significant number of years in the system and attended the very first forum, along with several other veterans.

It was clear that John was a very angry individual who had no trust in the prison system or the people within that system. He felt that he had been let down numerous times when things that had been promised did not materialise. This lack of trust, a common trait with long term prisoners, extended to an obvious suspicion of the intentions of our group, and in his own words, he had seen charities 'come and go'. At the end of the first meeting, he declared that whilst he wished us luck, he would not be attending

another forum. The message to John at that point was that we would always be there to support him, and he would always be welcome to join us at any time during his journey. John returned the following month and every other month for the remainder of his time at the prison before progressing to a Category D establishment, with open conditions, where our support continued.

A continual challenge with John, was trying to help him address his lack of trust with the system and convince him that there was life beyond prison with light at the end of the tunnel, he had to work with the system to achieve this. John could just not believe that this was the case, and it was a block to him signing up to our peer mentorship support project, Project Phoenix. Twelve months after our

"THE TRUST I HOLD WITH GORDON AND CARE AFTER COMBAT, HAS PREVENTED ME FROM RETURNING TO PRISON AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, ENDING MY LIFE. IF THIS STATEMENT CAN HELP OTHERS, THEN IT IS A MUST THAT IT BE WRITTEN TO ENABLE ANOTHER VETERAN TO HAVE THAT BROTHERHOOD THAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED."

— JOHN

initial meeting with John, he requested that support. Along with the available peer mentorship, he also engaged with the Covid response platform, Project Bowman, supporting veterans through unprecedented challenges.

The challenges continued throughout his time at the Category D establishment. He was turned down for parole on multiple occasions, he was also returned to closed conditions for a breach of regulations. However, following continued support from Care after Combat working alongside the Prison Veteran in Custody Support Officers and Offender Management teams, parole was eventually granted. John had spent numerous years in prison, he had become institutionalised, society had changed, the truly hard work required to prepare John for future challenges

and new issues was apparent, but his mentor Gordon, was there to walk alongside him all the way.

John was released to Approved Premises in a location far removed from the area he was familiar with; in essence he was having to start a completely new life. There were a lot of temptations that John had to negotiate to ensure he would not return to a life of crime.

Gordon continued to provide wellbeing support along with other Care after Combat staff and volunteers, a real team effort on a weekly basis. John was referred for support with cooking and personal wellbeing via an external agency, this developed John's life skills and allowed him to carry out housekeeping and personal day-to-day tasks, developing

“IT IS AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY ALONGSIDE A LONG-TERM PRISONER WITH INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND MILITARY EXPERIENCE. TREATING A NEW HOME AS IF IT WERE A CELL OR BARRACK ROOM WERE BARRIERS THAT WILL BE AN ISSUE FOR SOME TIME. BUT REGULAR FACE-TO-FACE SUPPORT HAVE, AND WILL CONTINUE, TO MANAGE HIS INDEPENDENT LIVING AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY.”

— JOHN'S MENTOR

his self-pride and esteem. John was referred to the local council, and with collaborative support from councillors, more permanent, supported accommodation was acquired. With further support from Care after Combat's collaborative partners; SSAFA and Hull 4 Heroes (V3P partners), the accommodation was furnished. John also received assistance in sorting out his military pension and receiving the correct benefits that allows for important financial stability.

John's lifelong fight against drug and alcohol addiction will continue, but he signed himself up to AA meetings and has attended them ever since, content in the knowledge that he will have the Care after Combat team to call on for support if required.

John continues to respond positively in his life choices and is progressing well in his current environment, he is stable, and his confidence has improved. John is constantly tied by the restrictions of his lifelong license, but he will work with statutory and support agencies to ensure that he does not return to a life of crime and prison. Collaboration, which has been a defining element of the support plan for John, will continue, and Care after Combat will be at the forefront of that support for as long as John requires it. Gordon continues to walk alongside John; John is now also supported by a serving member of his old Regiment.

John is a completely different person to the man who presented himself at the first forum; he now trusts.

Mathew's Story

MATHEW JOINED THE ROYAL NAVY SOON AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL AND ACHIEVED MUCH DURING HIS 6 YEARS' SERVICE. HIS REPORTS DESCRIBED HIM AS AN ABLE INDIVIDUAL, QUICK TO LEARN AND COMPETENT IN APPLYING NEW SKILLS.

Mathew was deployed on operational tours, but he does not report any related ongoing problems. Mathew does report being the victim of, and witnessing, significant bullying during his time in service.

Mathew left the Royal Navy because of the ongoing bullying. He felt unable to report the experiences he and his peers endured for fear of further recriminations for himself or them.

After leaving the service Mathew was apparently successful. Supported by family, Mathew gained employment and afforded good accommodation, however from a mental wellbeing perspective he was not coping. He described himself as "short tempered" with a tendency to "lash out";

personality traits Mathew said were not applicable to him prior to joining the Royal Navy. He struggled to maintain friendships, was drinking excessively, and used non prescribed drugs to manage increasing anxiety. Mathew described himself as increasingly unpredictable and bad tempered and recognized that this was why people avoided him. Despite his insight, he did not seek support, he lacked knowledge of what was available and did not approach his GP due to the shame he attached to the cause of his problems.

Mathew was eventually convicted and given a prison sentence following a physical altercation on a night out. When Care after Combat met Mathew he was acutely anxious, and described himself as "out of control".



“PRISON TRANSFERS CAN BE UNAVOIDABLE LEADING TO DISRUPTIONS IN SUPPORT, CARE, AND TREATMENT, OFTEN REMINISCENT OF THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF SERVICE LIFE. CARE AFTER COMBAT MENTORS PROVIDE A CONSISTENT SOURCE OF TRUSTED SUPPORT, ENCOURAGING ONGOING ENGAGEMENT WITH ESSENTIAL SERVICES SUCH AS HEALTHCARE.”



A Care after Combat mentor made regular visits to Mathew, building a relationship that would form the basis of trust for Mathew to engage with mental healthcare services within the prison. This was the first time Mathew had engaged with any mental health service. He was diagnosed with service-related PTSD. The mentor remained part of Mathew's multi-disciplinary team which included healthcare and probation services. With the support of his mentor, Mathew engaged positively with healthcare and made significant progress, learning how to cope with anxiety and strong emotions.

Mathew was released from prison and, once again, from a practical perspective he was successful. He remained engaged with his Care after Combat mentor but on a

reduced basis. Mathew believed that he had mastered his difficulties and was less receptive to regular support meetings. Unfortunately, another physical altercation resulted in Mathew being recalled to prison with additional charges pending. At the time Mathew frequently voiced thoughts of “giving up” and harming himself, he formulated plans to end his life believing that the world and people were “out to get me”.

Mathew had a much longer stretch in prison following his second conviction. However, with the consistent support of his Care after Combat mentor he reengaged with psychological healthcare. Custodial sentences can mean transfers from one prison to another, and this was the case for Mathew. He was transferred to three different

prisons during his sentence. Consistency was provided via his mentor and via the healthcare provider which had set up a veteran specific service across several prisons. Consequently, Mathew's treatment was not disrupted despite the transfer of prisons. On release Mathew was referred to, and continued to engage with, community healthcare services provided by NHS Op Courage supported by his mentor. These were stabilising contributions to what Mathew found to be extremely challenging license conditions. Engagement with his mentor and ongoing psychological interventions were instrumental in helping Mathew navigate and adhere to his license conditions.

Mathew has now been out of prison for a significant period. He was supported by Care after Combat for over a year and

has developed skills compatible with a crime free life. He is working full-time in employment of his choice; he has a home and is maintaining long term relationships.

He no longer uses drugs and manages his alcohol intake. Difficult life situations continue to present, and Mathew does at times need additional support, however he is knowledgeable about the services available and is confident in his ability to access them.

Mathew is now an advocate for Care after Combat, and he has made valuable contributions to the development of services dedicated to veterans involved with the justice system.