

Coming Home and Giving Back: The Richard Waddell Story

Coming home after serving our country overseas can be a difficult transition for many of our veterans. After 15 years in the United States Army and serving in three foreign wars, Richard Waddell was honorably discharged. Like so many other veterans, he returned home with something he did not have when he left—post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Moreover, he did not know where to turn for help.

Desperate to provide basic needs for himself and his family, Waddell committed a robbery. Soon after the crime, he was apprehended at a grocery store, where he had spent the money purchasing food for his family. Less than 10 months after his release from the military, Waddell found himself serving a 22-month sentence at Blackburn Correctional Complex in Lexington, Ky. His return home had not been the comforting experience he had dreamed about while serving abroad.

Fortunately for Waddell, a representative from Volunteers of America of Kentucky's Incarcerated Veterans Transitional Program (IVTP) met him at a halfway house. The IVTP representative knew immediately that Waddell was a perfect candidate for the program. They talked at length about how IVTP could provide the supports Waddell needed for successful reentry into the community.

Upon Waddell's release, IVTP provided the standard of care that the program gives to all clients—a trip to Wal-Mart for clothing, a Kroger gift card, a bus



Richard Waddell

pass, and more importantly, the dignity and respect he deserved. An IVTP program representative transported him to the Veterans Affairs (VA) office to activate his benefits and register him for disability benefits. These case management services, as well as others, would continue until Waddell had achieved stability and success in his new life.

Within a few weeks Waddell was hired by a local electric company, an important first step toward rebuilding his life. Volunteers of America's IVTP program continued to provide and connect the veteran with a comprehensive support system to ensure his continued success. Waddell was referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation program offered by the VA, and with their help began to attend college at ITT Tech.

Today, Waddell is giving back to the community that helped him rebuild his life. He works full-time for Interlink Counseling Services, a human services agency providing chemical dependency treatment and education through inpa-

tient and outpatient programs. While receiving long-term substance recovery support from Interlink, Waddell serves as the nonprofit organization's assistant IT manager and education instructor, which includes varied responsibilities from Web site maintenance and social networking, to educational training and grant writing projects.

His five-year goal is to build a no-fee computer training center open to all veterans living in the Louisville area. "Veterans are like family to each other," Waddell said. "Through this program, I can help give the tools and motivation for other veterans to better their lives."

Waddell is a powerful example of how Volunteers of America of Kentucky's IVTP program reduces recidivism by supporting veterans' return to society. Although he has achieved an impressive measure of success and stability, Waddell continues to meet regularly with IVTP program representatives. He knows a supportive network is important to building and sustaining his new life.