

THE ROAD HOME:

HELPING VETERANS GET BACK ON TRACK AFTER THE MILITARY

After serving two tours in Iraq with the United States Army and spending nearly a decade in the military, Justin Miller returned to civilian life with three priorities: an education, a career and giving back to others who served.

He has accomplished all three, including working with the Road Home Program as a Veteran outreach coordinator to help Veterans adjust to civilian life. The non-profit, focused on helping Veterans and their families with no-cost outpatient mental health, is affiliated with Rush University Medical Center's department of psychiatry.

Since launching in 2014, Road Home has seen significant growth, now with 70+ employees who work to break down the stigma of Veterans getting help with issues like PTSD, depression and anxiety.

Miller brings his own experiences into his career, passionately working to help fellow vets get on track once they exit the military. "I've been through my own struggles and years of therapy, so I can meet that Veteran at that level," Miller says.

He knows first-hand what it's like to be immersed in the military culture and environment, and then go home to your own family and look for work. Miller explains, "The increase in decision-making coupled with being self-sustaining and autonomous isn't easy. In the military, we're told where to go, where to sleep, etc." Additionally, there is the stress of mental health issues often faced by transitioning Veterans.

BACK ON TRACK: STRENGTH VS. STIGMA

Every Veteran is dealing with a unique set of issues, but "therapy worked for me and can for anyone if you really put effort into it," Miller says. "After a couple months even, I realized it was helping me get better." Unfortunately, not everyone gets the help they need when they need it. More than 20 active duty and retired Veterans commit suicide on a daily basis, and it has to stop."

"This is a national public health issue that requires a concerted, national approach." Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin said in 2017. This is also the biggest battle organizations like Road Home are fighting, Miller says, "It's a staggering number that includes lots of Vietnam vets, but also from the post-911 generation."



Miller has seen positive movement toward acceptance of Veterans' needs. "More and more Veterans are realizing that getting help is not a weakness but a strength," he says. The Road Home organization, the beneficiary of a \$45-million dollar grant from the Wounded Warrior Project in 2017, offers an intensive outpatient program

Like a boot camp for your emotions. Road Home will fly Veterans from anywhere, work with them for a set amount of time, and the resulting graduations demonstrate why the program works, Miller says. "I've been to more than a dozen graduations and every one is very emotional, very impactful for the Veterans and their families. It's a meaningful experience."

MOVING FORWARD: HEALTH, COMMUNITY, CAREER

Miller grew up in Chicago's suburbs. He joined the United States Army in 2003, and then to the Chicago area in 2011, where he earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from DeVry University.

Active in issues affecting Veterans since he got out of the military, he worked hard to develop and grow the DeVry Military Resource Club (DMRC), building an active following of Veterans attending monthly meetings and helping turn a small group into a nationally recognized Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter.

During that time was when he started therapy himself, at least partially to set a good example for other Veterans. "I felt I needed to be able to say, 'I did it. You guys can do it, too.'"

Now, after a year and a half at the non-profit, he wears many hats "so more funds go to the Veterans themselves. I run our social media accounts, work on campaigns with partners and more. I'm confident I can do more of those tasks well because of the education I've received." He's now working toward his MBA with a focus on marketing, thinking he'd like to start his own non-profit one day.

HIRING VETERANS: LOYALTY, FOCUS, POTENTIAL

Passionate about giving back, Miller also serves on the executive committee of Roll Call Chicagoland, which works with corporations to help Veterans obtain more gainful employment. He hopes to see the effort toward connecting corporate sponsors with job-seeking Veterans duplicated across the country.

Miller has found that companies who hire Veterans and challenge them to do their best work often realize Veterans are strategic assets in a variety of ways. "They can drive change in any organization," he says. "Their hard skills are already well developed from the military, although those don't always transition well to a résumé.

"Going from combat to career, or combat to college to career, is a major transition," Miller says. "If you are in a position to give a Veteran a chance, please do so, and challenge that Veteran to their utmost potential. Veterans' true abilities often go untapped. We are mission-oriented, focused, gung-ho about our jobs, and very loyal."

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, should call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or send a text message to 838255.

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