

Transcript

Life-changing scholarships and bursaries at The Open University

Offering disabled veterans a new start

Steven Wilson: I'd first of all like to thank everybody that's given their ongoing support to everyone who has given their ongoing support to DVSF. It's been quite frankly life-changing for me.

A little bit about myself, I trained as a mechanic when I first left school before I joined the army because my father wanted me to get a trade before I joined the Services. I spent 4 and a half years in the Territorial Army because there's a lot of people that join the Services and don't like it and have to wait a year to get out so I wanted to make sure that it was right for me.

I absolutely loved it, so the recruitment Colour Sergeant was of the parachute regiment so strangely enough I was qualified to join the parachute regiment, so all my friends didn't think I'd qualify because I was a bit of a 'rogue' as they say. But I loved it, loved the discipline, loved the way of life. It's like joining a great big family.

I went over to Sierra Leone and got injured quite badly with multiple shrapnel wounds. Once I left the army, medication... depression... drinking a lot. I was in quite a volatile position when I stayed down in England. Packed a bag, left, came up the road to Scotland, got a factory job, just mundane work, going from day to day.

My stepdad had heard about the disabled veterans scholarships fund and I just thought on the off chance of applying for it. I was quite intrigued in mental health purely for the fact because I was suffering from it myself with PTSD especially with the physical injuries that I got and I got accepted onto the programme, which was huge, absolutely huge for me. I didn't know what direction I wanted to go if I didn't get onto the programme.

I'd still have been working my way into the ground in a factory but I decided to go through the mental health route, with Health and Social Care, not just to educate myself in what I was going through and to make me better understand it, but I also wanted to get to a position further down the line to be able to give back to sufferers of PTSD, someone who is going through the same issues that I went through.

As I've been homeless, living on the street, my marriage of 10 years had broken down when I came back home. I ended up doing the first 6 months of DVSF in my car on my phone because I left her [my wife] with everything. I've got an autistic son of 10 years old so I knew I'd be able to survive from my training and stuff like that so I gave her everything and now I've got my own house, I've got my computer set up and I'm bashing on with my course studies.

So if it wasn't for all the supporters, everyone involved with putting this programme together and all the ongoing support I wouldn't really know where I was or where I was going to be, so a massive, massive thank you, it's a huge turnaround for me.

You actually get to belong, like you are part of a group again, a great big wider network. I mean you've got all your forums, all your activities, like this, putting your story out and you can interlink with ex-services users, ex-service personnel – it reconnects you. Rather than thinking that you're on your own, it brings you back into something and gives you a sense of purpose to be able to carry on and better your life.