

Veterans Housing Scotland tell their story on TV

Veterans Housing Scotland have commissioned their first TV ad which will air on STV from today for two weeks.

John Tonner is a Visiting Officer with the charity which has its main base in Edinburgh and shares his story and that of the disabled veterans who benefit from the charity's work.

John (30) joined the military in 2012 and served for ten years including two operational tours in Afghanistan. After joining the RAF in 2012, he underwent training and was posted to 58 Squadron RAF Regiment based at RAF Leuchars. When he arrived, the squadron was training to deploy to Afghanistan where he went at the age of 19 as Force Protection supporting a Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT).

John said that he enjoyed the operational tour however he had no idea of the impact serving on the MERT during the tour would have on him in later life. He transferred to 2 SCOTS and was promoted to Lieutenant Corporal.

He said: "I was able to work my way into a trusted position within the signals platoon and was selected to move to C Coy where I worked within the company's signals detachment. I completed another seven years' service in 2 SCOTS including another operational tour in Afghanistan. During which I suffered a severe head injury when medical evacuation was a real possibility.

"Ten years' service and two operational tours began to take

its toll on my mental health and around the start of 2021 I began to think that something was wrong. However, fearing being seen as weak and worrying about not being able to deploy, I kept this quiet. My mental health had been impacted by the horrific injuries to the casualties I had seen and dealt with on my first tour supporting the MERT.

“My cry for help came in the summer of 2021 when I attempted suicide. I felt that I had no one to turn to. I was very lucky that a stranger helped me.

“After months of reviews and treatment I was diagnosed with PTSD and told that I was being recommended for a medical board review. At that time, I would learn if I was able to carry on my career or if I would be facing medical discharge. This created additional stress and anxiety. All I had ever wanted to do was be in in the armed forces.

“On the day of my Medical Board I learned that I was being medically discharged. I didn't know what I was going to do or where I was going to live.

“It was around that time that I heard about Veterans Housing Scotland. One of the best days in my journey.

“It was the Personnel Recovery Centre that introduced me to VHS. There was the perfect property for me and my family available in Hawick. The application process included an interview to be sure that the property was suited to my needs. It was.

“I was over the moon to be able to move into the property quickly. Everyone at the charity helped make my transition and move as easy as possible – and the support didn't stop there. I had regular calls and visits from my Visiting Officer who just wanted to keep in touch and ensure that life was getting back on track for me.

“One of the highlights of these calls was telling him that

after a short time I no longer needed the property as I had been able to buy my first home. The benefit of the rent reduction offered by VHS had helped me significantly to reach this truly memorable milestone.

“With help, the move-out was just as straightforward. In addition, I felt that by moving out I was able to help support another veteran and their family with a home so that they too could have a better, brighter future just like me.

“Later that month I saw an opportunity for a Visiting Officer Role with VHS and applied. I am passionate about supporting fellow veterans, to be able to share my story with them so that they too can see that there is hope and opportunity after leaving the armed forces. I was delighted to be offered the role and joined the team in November 2022.

“With the benefit of hindsight and never forgetting that I have support all around me from friends, family and colleagues, I’m starting to enjoy life again and look to the future. I’m truly grateful to be in the position I am today, thanks to the help and support, I received from VHS.”

Kevin Gray, Chief Executive of Veterans Housing Scotland, said: “John has a remarkable story to tell and we are privileged that he has allowed us to share it as part of our awareness campaign.

“It is one of the founding principles of the charity that rents were to be kept as low as possible to allow veterans to devote more of their money to securing employment to help secure a better and brighter future. John’s story highlights all areas of the work of VHS and how in many respects we remain committed to our founding principles.”

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