

‘It Totally Changed the Man I Was’

Realizing the toll his service-connected condition was taking on him and his family, Navy veteran Andres Reyes turned to the VFW for help

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Veteran Andres Reyes Sr., 53, lives in Vallejo, California, and has a wife, Mary Grace-Morgan Reyes, and four children, Andres Jr., Alexander, Tatyana and Dominique. He enlisted in the Navy to continue a family legacy.

“I’m a fifth-generation service member. My family has served through every war or conflict, including World War I, World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam,” he said. “I served in both Desert Storm and three tours in Iraq.”

Service, particularly his time in Iraq, was trying for Reyes.

“Being a member of the explosive detection team looking for explosives every single day puts stress on anyone, especially when your K-9 finds something,” he said. “I called it ‘the last walk’ because you never knew if something would detonate or what was going to happen to you.”

As a result of those experiences, Reyes copes with a number of service-connected mental conditions, including severe Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), depression, anxiety, memory loss, hypervigilance, anger outbursts, nightmares and panic attacks.

Physically, he has a compressed disc in his back and has endured several injuries, including to his shoulder, knees and ankles.

“My service-connected injuries have 1,000% made me the person I never wanted to be,” he said. “It totally changed the man I was.”

Realizing the toll his condition was taking on him and his family, Reyes turned to the VFW for help and was introduced to VFW Accredited Service Officer Nakeisha Jones.

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“When I met her, I noticed instantly how caring and knowledgeable about veterans and benefits she was,” he said. “Nakeisha is very outgoing and understanding of my PTS, anxiety and depression. When talking about my situation, she always asks if it is okay to speak about certain topics and gives me breaks to relax.

Today, Reyes has a 90% disability rating from the VA. He encourages other veterans to find support, not only to file claims but to work through any other struggles associated with service.

“Please, use all your resources — PTS treatment, groups, therapy and, especially, peer support services,” he said. “I have utilized each tremendously over the last 18 months in my recovery.”

Learn more about the [VFW's National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).