

Case Study two

Steve was born in 1960 in Wigan and moved to Ramsbottom when he was very young. His father had served during National Service in the Army Catering Corps, he has two sisters and his mother brought up the family whilst working. Steve had a happy childhood and was inspired by a friend who had joined the Royal Navy and Steve enjoyed the stories so much he joined the Royal Navy himself in 1976. It wasn't a difficult decision as he was unsure of what job he would do after he left school.

He completed his basic training at HMS Raleigh and at Chatham; he completed his Catering Accountants course at HMS Osprey. He was drafted to HMS Sabre, a patrol boat before being drafted to HMS Hermes for three years. On completion of this draft, the Falklands Conflict was starting and was drafted to HMS Intrepid for the duration of the conflict where he was a catering accountant and medic for those injured in the fighting to retake the Islands from the Argentinians who invaded in 1982.

On Steve's return to the UK he returned to a shore base until he left in 1983. The decision to leave was taken only after his father asked him to leave the Royal Navy following the Falklands conflict. Steve now says it was the worst decision of his life, it wrecked a career he could've had if he'd remained in and was only a 'knee jerk reaction'.

On returning to Ramsbottom he struggled with the transition that many of those who have served experience on leaving and settling down into a new life in 'Civvy Street'. He has had a variety of jobs in civilian life; Labouring in paper mill, working in a sweet factory and the textile industry, a short spell as self-employed, furniture manufacturing, installing fire and sprinkler systems, an LGV driver and many other jobs which could not give him the same satisfaction as serving in the Royal Navy.

In 1985 he married and is the father of two children; a daughter and a son who also joined the Royal Navy. Steve didn't realise until 2012 when he went to a doctor for a lung condition, and he broke down in front of the doctor and it was evident that there were some underlying mental health conditions. They referred him Live At Ease who referred him to the NHS Military Veterans Services (MVS). They referred Steve to Veterans In Communities in 2013 as he had an interest in art, and this was one of the activities that he wanted to get involved at a time when he was struggling with confidence, self-esteem and couldn't motivate himself to return to work.

Steve joined VIC as a volunteer member and very quickly made friends with the arts and craft Co-ordinator who had common interests and experiences to himself. Both served during the Falklands Conflict and found a shared interest in art. Steve started to support the arts and crafts Co-ordinator with exhibitions and helping those learning to paint in the existing art group. Steve started to feel he was ready to return to work and was referred to the Royal British Legion Industries 'Poppy Factory', who could fund a position with a charity called Gateway in Bury as an Arts Co-ordinator for a group of service users with Special Needs. The RBL Poppy Factory contacted VIC and thought with his experience he would make an ideal person for a placement with VIC. The position was funded for two years, which was 12 months longer than he would've had with Gateway.

Steve was employed as an outreach worker in Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale, and he also continued to support the art group as well as many of the other activities that VIC were delivering to the service community. During the two year placement he took a lead on a number of Peer Support

projects and activities; gardening, outreach, WW1 Projects, community based projects, and even supported the Singing Group that another VIC member was developing. He also took a number of qualifications; Level 3 Information Advice and Guidance, Suicide intervention, Mental Health courses, photography and many other short courses. VIC were keen to keep Steve employed and he has been working on an NHS funded Pilot 'Overcoming Barriers' in Greater Manchester.

Steve says that VIC has been life changing, and VIC and MVS came into his life when he was at his worst. He enjoys working with like-minded people and feels that the Peer Support model he has been through has got him into a position where he can change other people's lives and make a difference. He says his personal issues and the mental health difficulties are transitional and although related to him serving in the armed forces are not from his experiences during the Falklands conflict. Steve has returned to Falklands Islands twice and has made friends. On his return from his first visit in 2014, he has put some words together that he hopes will be turned into a song. His art work has improved and he regularly takes commissions for his work.