Gretchen Klingler’s Story

It was not until Gretchen joined the military that she really fell in love with anthropology. Being active duty in the Air Force for six years allowed her to experience different cultures and lifestyles. Gretchen spent a lot of her time in the military doing training. Two of those six years were dedicated to learning Iraqi Arabic. Gretchen was able to use her knowledge during her deployments. While in service, Gretchen deployed twice, Afghanistan (2013) and Djibouti/Iraq (2014).

Gretchen was initially dubious about sharing her story. In her words, she felt her experiences were not very “veteran-y”. A lot of veterans on campus feel this way. Unfortunately, there are two very divisive ways in which veterans are portrayed in our society. Veterans feel that they need to conform to these molds. The stereotypes of veterans either being a hero or a broken person are damaging to say the least. The truth is veterans’ personas vary greatly and should not be defined by these harmful preconceptions.

Gretchen’s deployments went smoothly, and she remembers them as “positive experiences”. She shares, “I think my service has literally made me who I am and made me passionate about the things I feel are important.” Gretchen has a passion for other cultures and learning about them. She explained that, “because of my training I had an opportunity to be a translator on top of my regular job. I had a chance to sit down with the locals and have lunch with them. I also had a chance to talk to some of the children or teenage boys who had been out of school for years but couldn’t go back because they had to work and support their family.” Seeing the disparity between the

Hosted by The Suicide Prevention Program and The Office of Military and Veteran Services.

A student veteran success series focused on mental health and reduction of stigma.
life and the U.S. helped her understand why so many people come here wanting a better life.

Gretchen came across the Vets4Vets organization while she was deployed in Djibouti. She was planning on applying to the Ohio State University and found that there was a strong veteran community on campus. Once she got accepted, she started getting more and more involved. She believes that “veterans who are active participants on campus have a sense of belonging and are like a part of a family”.

She is currently the president of Vets4Vets on campus, an organization with the mission of supporting and assisting veterans, service members, and their families in their transition. When talking about her support system, she says “taking the opportunity to put myself out there has given me the support network that I have.”

Gretchen believes having a strong community to help you out in times of need is essential for good mental health. It is stressful going through hard times and on top of that feeling alone. However, she explains how alone time is also important. “I tend to take a lot of time to myself, not having all the chaos around me helps me process things and figure out the direction I want to go with.”

Gretchen maintains a healthy mind by surrounding herself with supportive friends and taking plenty of time to herself. It is important to her to have scheduled time to decompress and take care of herself. “As much as I love hanging out with my friends, I need ‘me’ time.”

“The difficulty for me is finding that balance. I feel dedicated to the community and to my friends, but I also know that for me personally continuing to pour out my cup in some ways does not help my mental health.”

Finally, Gretchen wants others to know that “talking about mental health is important, because it can show others who need help that they are not alone and like it is completely normal to seek therapy and support from friends.”

Check out Vets4Vets Facebook at www.facebook.com/osuvets4vets/

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Remember, you are a valued student of this university. You matter. Seeking help makes you strong. Taking care of you is always the right thing to do.