

At Ease



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.

Colin Winter's Story

Nearly 2200 military connected people attend our university as graduate and undergraduate students. A small number compared to the non-military undergraduate population. Many veterans describe that going from a structured military environment to a loose college environment presents challenges. Others report isolation and feelings of alienation as they acclimate to a new setting. Society tends to look to media for information about our military veterans. Unfortunately, media often portrays veterans in a dualistic way, as either broken or as super heroes. This damaging view leaves veterans wondering where they fit in. Most times, these stereotypes prevent veterans from seeking mental health services in fear that they will fall into the more negative stereotype.

At Ease aims to undermine these stereotypes. It is a monthly student veteran story, which also aims to bridge the gap between student

veterans and non-veterans by offering some insight into their lives.

Some may have heard about **Colin Winter** from the non-profit organization *Run Down the Demons*. He has been a powerful mental health advocate in our university community. Colin, a 6-year army veteran, is one of many similar stories. As an infantryman, Colin recalls his two deployments to Iraq with bittersweet feelings. He remembers the brotherhood and camaraderie, but also the loss and the pain. The first deployment was hard for Colin's unit. They lost about fourteen soldiers overall. Shortly after his first deployment, Colin's best friend completed suicide. Having re-enlisted together in Baghdad and being so close, this certainly affected him deeply. He says, "**what's crazy is because we are who we are, as veterans, I didn't grieve.**"



Colin is certainly not alone, one of the most popular military mantras is '*suck it up, and drive on*'. As a soldier, Colin was just coping with things the way that he saw everybody else coping. They simply did not. He goes on to say, "**the focus was definitely not on the mental health side of things, it was the physical wounds.**" Colin was focused on coming home and getting to his next duty station, his mind was avoiding his feelings.



College of Social Work
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List of resources on campus

Counseling & Consultation Service (CCS)- 614-292-5766

On campus counselor for veterans- Jaclyn Hillis Hillis.20@osu.edu (Available at Vet's Lounge & CCS)

Suicide Prevention Services- 614-221-5445

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 800-273-8255 (ext. 1)

OSU Military & Veterans Services- 614-247-8387

BART (Bias or Discrimination)- 614-688-8449

Office of Disability Services- 614-292-4190

LGBTQ Resources- <http://multiculturalcenter.osu.edu/resources/lgbtq-allies/>

Veteran's Lounge- Smith Lab 1132

He explains, “ **I didn’t want to be seen as weak, and I was growing in the ranks. As a leader, I wanted my guys to know that I was strong. I never discouraged anyone from seeking mental health services, but it also wasn’t promoted. There wasn’t enough emphasis put on it. It sucks, and what makes it even worse is you can’t see it. If there’s a guy walking around, struggling, thinking about taking his life, you wouldn’t know**”.

It wasn’t until his second deployment that everything finally hit him. His mind might have blocked everything out, but his body remembered. Everything had finally caught up with him, and the only escape he found was alcohol abuse. Colin thinks that if the stigma didn’t run so deep in the military, he would’ve gotten help sooner. His mom, a veteran, noticed he was struggling after getting discharged. On top of finally feeling the full effects of PTSD, he was also going through a divorce and a custody battle. After a heated argument with his sister, which was uncharacteristic of him, he realized something had to change. He could not ignore it any longer. Reluctantly after, Colin asked for their help. The Columbus VA and the support at our university pleasantly surprised him. **“The Columbus VA has been awesome; going through their interventions, the tools, and thinking about my kid helped me figure out that I can use the bad experiences and turn them into something good, use them to my**

advantage”. Colin has been grateful for both good and bad experiences. It has given him perspective and strength to keep fighting. **“If I can advocate in any way to help other fellow vets, I want to do it. If I can pull myself out of the negativity, the substance abuse, the ideologies of suicide, anyone can do it. If I can create something out of it, co-found a non-profit then anyone can do it. Those bad experiences are valuable”**. Today, Colin is one semester away from graduation and will continue to pursue his education and passion for raising awareness surrounding mental health. He plans to expand *Run Down the Demons* to civilians. He believes it’s important for people to know that PTSD is not exclusive to the military and that anyone can experience it.

“It’s complicated to explain, but some days I feel very proud. I feel proud that I’ve been able to do the things that I’ve done through Run Down the Demons. Being an advocate, finding the College of Social Work, being here at OSU, you know, just the overwhelming support from that perspective and knowing that I can help, kind of, I guess, honor my friend.” Colin has found meaning and purpose again in honoring his fallen comrades by educating others.

Check out Colin’s non-profit at www.rundownthedemons.org.

The contents of this site are for informational and educational purposes only. Nothing found on this site is intended to be a substitute for professional psychological, psychiatric or medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified mental health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or mental disorder. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or 911 immediately. **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.**