

Veteran in the Spotlight: *Dan Bultman*



Daniel Bultman, retired U.S. Navy Veteran and Minneapolis VA Medical Foster home client.

*Sarah Grave,
MDVA*

In September, the “Minnesota Veteran” newsletter introduced readers to the Minneapolis VA Medical Health Care System’s (VAMHCS) Medical Foster Home program. Since that time, the Department has had the chance to meet with two Veterans who are in the program. Over the next two months, the “Veteran in the Spotlight” column will share their experiences with readers. Their stories help highlight the flexibility and personal attention this new care option brings to Veterans health care in the Twin Cities Metro area.

Dan Bultman is a Navy Veteran who served in Asia following the end of the Vietnam War. In 2009 he was involved in a motorcycle accident

near Peppin, Minn. that resulted in a severe arm injury and traumatic brain injury. Bultman entered the Minneapolis VA Medical Health Care System’s (VAHCS) traumatic head trauma unit to receive treatment.

He spent time working to regain his memory and rebuild mental functions damaged in the accident as well as regain the use of his right arm. At first he remembers being confused, and then frustrated at his lack of freedom. Every minute of his day was scheduled and monitored by staff. After six months in the unit he was ready for something new. It was frustrating for him to be restricted to the ward and be supervised 24 hours a day. He felt that his recovery had progressed past the need for a hospital setting.

“You know, independence is my word. I’m the sailor that can get around in any country. You know I don’t need anybody tell’n me where to go and what to do,” said Dan.

At that time Bultman felt that he was capable of living a more independent life and began looking for alternative options. During this time, his daughter heard about the VA’s Medical Foster Home program and suggested he look into it. He thought it would be a good change and applied for placement.

Dan has been in the program for just over five months and is making great progress. He and his VA home care team look at the foster program as the next step in his recovery. After he has met his goals in foster home care, Bultman will move on to the Minneapolis VAHCS’s Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP). PTRP provides intensive rehabilitative care to Veterans and service members who have severe injuries to

more than one organ system. PTRP is a time limited, goal oriented program designed to improve a patient's physical, cognitive, communicative, behavioral, psychological and social functioning under the necessary support and supervision. Dan's ultimate goal is to become totally independent and live in his own home.

His transition to foster home care has had its high and low points, but in total Dan is happy and feels he is taking the right steps forward to meet his goals. One element of the program that made the transition easier was the fact that foster homes are in the Veteran's respective community. The home is located in Dan's hometown of Columbia Heights. The familiarity has helped him recover faster and feel more independent.

However, Dan does clash sometimes with Sybil, his caregiver, and VA representatives about his freedoms and independence. "I've been very independent for my whole entire life."

He did soon realize that because of his injuries, he needed to prove to staff and Sybil that he was capable of safely taking on these freedoms.

Sybil has been in the nursing field for more than 15 years. With her kids are getting older and moving out of the house, she was looking for something different and felt that foster care would be a good option. Dan is her first Veteran, and so far it's been a positive experience. She is thankful to the VA for their support.

"The VA is very very supportive, it's a wonderful community. They are like our family," said Sybil. (Sybil asked to be identified by first name only.)

"I've very happy with the job...I'm so glad for Dan, it's a good thing and he's getting better and has really come a long way in his recovery," she continued.

She, like other caregivers in the program, has committed her life to caring for others. Caring for another person in your home is a lifestyle, not a career. For Sybil and her family, the program is also special because they are serving those who fought for their freedoms.

"Veterans have served our country" and we have great respect for them," said Sybil.

As a part of the program Dan and Sybil are supported by a full VA Home Health Care team, whose services are tailored to Dan's needs. Dan's care team consists of a social worker, a nurse, recreational services, pharmaceutical services and financial assistance.

Dan is anxious to live on his own, and is actively working to meet several milestones to ensure he'll be successful and safe once he does. This idea is at the heart of the Foster Home program, providing Veterans with the tools and support they need to reach their own personal level of independence. Each Veteran is different, but each is given the opportunity to better their lives and work toward their goals.

Dan will soon move on from foster care and take the next step toward his ultimate goal. The journey has not been easy, but he believes that the Minneapolis VAHCS Medical Foster Home program is a good option for Veterans looking for something different. Dan's advice to others looking for different health care options is that "this is a good, next step." 

Dan feels it's important that Veterans know the full spectrum of the services are available to them. If you are interested in learning more about this program please visit www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/serv_fosterhome.asp or call (612) 467-2619 or 866-414-5058, extension 2619 (toll-free).