Full Benefits Secured for Homeless Disabled Veteran

“I was in such confusion and chaos coming out of the military. My body was screaming.”

Army veteran Dan Riley* had been badly injured twice as a member of an airborne unit in Afghanistan. Mortar, RPG, and small-arms fire were near-daily occurrences. But far worse were the psychological wounds he suffered as a combat medic and first responder. He treated devastating injuries -- from IEDs, gunshots and land mind. On one of the worst days of his life, he responded to the death of a friend who had been shot accidentally by a fellow soldier.

After he was discharged, Dan continued to suffer from chronic pain in his neck, shoulder, and back, and numbness in his hand. He had severe headaches, was tired all the time and felt depressed. He developed asthma for the first time, perhaps from being so close to burn pits in Afghanistan.

He spent the next ten years dealing with Veteran Affairs, trying to get the correct level of disability compensation. But the VA treated him as if he were healthy young man, capable of working and enjoying life. Time after time, they rejected his claim for full disability benefits. Dan eventually found himself living in a homeless shelter for veterans in Hollywood.

That’s when he met Kara Mahoney, Directing Attorney of the Homeless Veterans Project at Inner City Law Center. He talked about his years of suffering that made it impossible for him to function. “It feels like my body uses so many resources to address the pain and all the physical and mental impairments I have, that it is drained of energy,” Dan told Kara.

Kara filed an appeal for benefits on Dan’s behalf, but he still waited 18 months for a hearing.

Finally, Kara had a chance to fight for Dan and to present evidence, including voluminous treatment records, to demonstrate the totality of his ongoing disabilities. She argued relentlessly that because of his PTSD, chronic pain and other symptoms, he was entitlement to a 100% disability rating. In a sudden and stunning reversal, the VA agreed and granted the claim.

Dan received more than $83,000 in back pay and $3,300 a month for the rest of his life. He can now focus on combating his constant, daily pain, and has developed an interest in research about the causes of chronic fatigue. His adorable and loyal service dog Spook is by his side everywhere he goes. He is deeply grateful for ICLC, and for everyone who makes their work possible. “Thank you for helping me to get my life straight.”