

Matt Adolfson: A veteran in need



Veteran Matt Adolfson

The Salvation Army helps prevent veteran homelessness.

By Craig Dirkes

Matt Adolfson was flying somewhere over Germany on March 17, 2003, when President George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein an ultimatum: leave Iraq within 48 hours or face U.S. military action.

Matt, then a 25-year-old U.S. Army medic, heard the news when he landed in Kuwait. Two days later, he was at war.

Adolfson would spend the next eight months using every bit of his medical training.

“I was part of a mobile hospital—like what you see on the TV show ‘M*A*S*H,’ only smaller,” he said. “I helped a lot of people who were in explosions; one guy had his leg blown off. My nerves were always going crazy. Everything was always happening fast, fast, fast.”

Adolfson’s tour ended that November. In August 2004, he completed his military career and moved to Michigan to live with his uncle; his parents had died years earlier and he has no siblings. Civilian life was difficult.

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“I always felt hyper-vigilant, like I wasn’t doing enough,” Adolfson said. “In the military, I was doing more in one day than some people do all week.”

In 2007, Adolfson began suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Seemingly innocuous sounds, sights and smells triggered terrible memories.

“The smell of burning garbage, seeing a military vehicle—it all brought me right back,” said Adolfson, who is doing much better today after years of counseling. “At first I tried forcing myself to forget, but that didn’t work. I learned to embrace my past and not run from it. I learned to get used to things and adapt.”

Adolfson eventually moved to Minnesota to be near his other relatives and work his way through college. The war changed him, but he remains proud to have served his country.

In 2012, Adolfson had to adapt to another hardship: an empty bank account. While working that summer, several of his paychecks were delayed due to an administrative blunder. He fell behind on his bills and couldn’t recover. By November, he was facing eviction from his North St. Paul apartment.

Thankfully, a friend told him about The Salvation Army Veteran’s Homeless Prevention Program. Since 2011, the program has provided financial assistance, case management, referrals and much more to nearly 180 veterans or veteran families in Ramsey County.

“Veterans have risked their lives serving us—giving back to them is our duty,” said Lt. Col. Robert Thomson, Salvation Army Northern Division commander.

Adolfson met with Salvation Army case manager Krystle Englund, who gave him financial assistance to catch up on his rent.

“She even called my landlord to advocate for me,” Adolfson said. “I’m not used to asking for help; I’m the kind of person who would rather bite the bullet. Krystle took away all my anxiety.”

Adolfson is no longer in danger of being evicted, and his life is looking good. After completing an associate’s degree in 2011, he plans to study for a bachelor’s degree in social work—a field he’s been inspired to pursue because of the help Krystle gave him. The lifelong volunteer also wants to start donating his time to The Salvation Army—particularly at its food shelf in Maplewood.

“Matt is a very strong individual who served his country and still wants to give back by volunteering,” Englund said. “He is always optimistic for the future. Working with veterans like Matt is the best part of my job, hands down.”

The Salvation Army operates a number of veteran housing programs throughout Minnesota, including a 10-unit apartment complex in South Minneapolis.

“The Salvation Army is committed to serving veterans,” Thomson said. “Helping them is a privilege.”