

Graduate of Compensated Work Therapy Program Thrives as VA Employee

By Kristi Young, Communications Specialist, MGVAMC – July 2019

Michael Gonzales, an Army Veteran who served from 2007-2011, became employed in April 2019 at the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC in Spokane through the VA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program.

Michael is "super grateful" for the CWT program. It provided him with a work ethic, some structure... and yes, even a reason for living.

Before entering the CWT program, Michael used to spend his days playing video games and surviving on his Social Security income. That was, until his baby girl came along. He knew he needed to find a job, but he was 30 years old and hadn't worked since he was 22; he didn't even know how to make a resume'.

Michael wasn't sure what to do, but he had received a lot of intensive outpatient therapy over the years from the MGVAMC. Since he was already coming to the VA for his Veteran care, he came in and asked for help. A staff member recommended the CWT program, and Michael inquired further. "It happened really fast," he said. He interviewed with a counselor, filled out paperwork, and they walked him over to Housekeeping and he started coming in to work.

CWT was a six-month program, during which the counselor checked on him regularly. Michael was taught life skills, given structure and responsibility, and received trust in return. He began looking forward to coming in to work each day. "I would feel better about myself at work. I was appreciated, accepted... validated." He enjoys the routine, the people he works with, and the team effort they all put in. "It feels good to be around people who think highly of me." Michael finds satisfaction in helping others here at the MGVAMC. The fact that he receives compliments on his cleaning abilities clearly gives him pride in a job well done. "It was easier than I thought it would be to work here, as long as I show up and do what I'm supposed to. Do what's right even when no one is looking."

Michael has nothing but praise for the CWT program. When asked what he would tell other Veterans who might consider this program, he said, "It gets better. Even when it seems like it's over, it's not. You'd be surprised at how different you'll feel about yourself when everyone sees you being yourself."

One of the perks of working at the MGVAMC, is that local celebrities and sports players occasionally drop in to visit patients. Michael was working in the main hallway on the day that two Gonzaga Men's Basketball Team

players arrived for a visit, and he had his photo taken with them. "I've never played basketball before, and didn't know who they were until I met them. But now I can watch them on TV and know that just because they were young, they made good choices in their lives and they are going somewhere."

Even though Michael doesn't need to attend regular sessions anymore, he still sees a counselor occasionally. His long term goals include moving up and getting promoted at work; going back to school to finish his AA degree; buying a house with a VA home loan; and getting back into tattoo artwork.



"Even when it seems like it's over, it's not."
-Michael Gonzales



Gonzaga University Basketball Players visit MGVAMC, January 2019 (Josh Perkins and Jeremy Jones)