

VFW Supports Grieving Widow and Daughter

'It is amazing to have the help, it means a whole lot ... I couldn't have moved home without it'

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Katie Bouchard and 6-year-old daughter, Piper, are getting a little bit better every day.

Katie and veteran Keith Bouchard had been married for over a decade when he took his own life. A family in despair with so many details to handle have managed a lot in the past year. What seemed to be a sudden occurrence had a long, telling trail leading to the loss of their hero.

Iowa native, Keith Bouchard joined the Marines in 1988 at 17 years old with the permission of his mother. In his 10 years, he experienced the Gulf War, deployments to Panama and Okinawa, and cold weather training in Norway. These trips were not without injury. Bouchard broke both legs during a helicopter jump performed in Panama.

Bouchard went on to join the United States Coast Guard after departing from the Marines. In addition to the Panama injury, he had to go through shoulder and back surgery. But, he truly loved the work he did in his 16 years with the Coast Guard before retiring in 2014.

“He was very good at what he did. He was in federal law enforcement and did search and rescue. He was very passionate about it. He loved being out on the water and serving the community,” Katie recalled.

Despite a career that meant so much to him, Bouchard started to lose himself. Gradually he lost interest in hobbies and activities that he used to regularly enjoy.

“It was so hard to watch. I look through pictures and I can see him deteriorating, I see his mannerisms and expressions change,” Katie said.

He finally reached out for help, but it was simply too late.

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Understandably, Katie had a difficult time keeping everything running while giving her all to making sure Piper would be okay. She needed support to get home to her parents, but with no life insurance and a lengthy paperwork process for benefits, Katie was stuck.

That's when a friend told her about the VFW's Unmet Needs grant. But Katie was so distressed she felt she was "not in a position" to apply for assistance. So, her friend helped her fill out the necessary online form. After the simple application process, Katie had the funds to cover moving expenses.

"It is so important for people who are in my situation. I was completely left hanging and didn't know what to do or where to go. It is amazing to have the help, it means a whole lot. I couldn't have moved home without it," Katie said.

And moving home was just what her and Piper needed. Piper started at a brand new school and Katie says she is doing well. While nothing about their situation is easy, they are piecing together the best life possible.

Katie remains concerned for the mental health of veterans, and she believes proactiveness is the answer. She urges service members to get in a program and attend to their psychological and emotional well-being as soon as they return home from deployment.

"Even if they think they don't need the help, even if they think they're okay. I've witnessed firsthand, by the time they get to a certain point, it is too late. Without help, it ruins relationships and affects children," Katie concluded.

Veteran Keith Bouchard's story is all too common for veterans across the United States, but there is help available. The VFW is committed to changing the narrative and stigma surrounding mental health in America with the VFW Mental Wellness Campaign. [Learn more](#) about this initiative and how to get involved.