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# News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**We invite any media interested in interviewing our VA staff to learn more about care and services to contact our Public Affairs Officer at 989-497-2500, extension 13020 or e-mail [carrie.seward@va.gov](mailto:carrie.seward@va.gov)**

## **May is Mental Health Month—"The Moment When" Campaign**

In conjunction with Mental Health Month in May, Make the Connection has launched "The Moment When" campaign aimed at starting a conversation about mental health to include treatment and recovery. If you visit <https://maketheconnection.net/> you will find heartfelt videos of veterans who share their stories about the moment when they decided to seek mental health help to the moment when they realized treatment was helping. The goal is to destigmatize mental health and provide hope for Mental Health Recovery.

On a local level, the Aleda E. Lutz VA employs five Peer Support Specialists who are trained to use their stories to help engage patients with serious mental illness and substance use disorders into care and act as role models of recovery through facilitating group and individual sessions.

Local Peer Support Specialist, David Slaughter, shares his moment and recovery with us. "It was April 2014. I was standing out in front of a Homeless Shelter in Saginaw, MI with a little more than 2 years of sobriety. I felt hopeless and lost; I was at a familiar fork in the road. I had a decision to make: One, continue to stay clean and sober and utilize community 12-Step self-help programs or two, seek mental health treatment for what was obvious mental health issues. I decided to commit to something I never committed to in the past, a wholistic approach to mental, physical, and spiritual care at the same time. On January 29, 2019, I celebrated seven years of clean and sober days, four years of no smoking cigarettes, and almost five years of continued mental health treatment. I am living my best life!"

Peer Support Specialist Spencer Daniels recalls the following about his moment and his journey. "My years of denial resulted in untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and my anger had become rage, hypervigilance was nearly constant, and nightmares were almost nightly. Depression had now set in and my relationship with family continued to get worse. Suicide now became an idea of "the only way" to escape. My moment was realizing I could not do this to my two beautiful daughters. I sought counseling here at the VA. Through my recovery journey I was introduced to the concept of peer support. I loved the idea of turning the aftermath of combat and a

career in law enforcement into something that could help others with the “demons” they face from PTSD, anger, depression, etc. Helping Veterans regain a sense of purpose and hope has been the most rewarding job I have ever had. I’ve learned to not hate the journey and continue to work on keeping my perspective of life in check.”

Everyone has a story. As VA employees, we are lucky to be a part of our Veteran patients’ stories and hopefully help them along their journey.

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center, with an additional 8-bed acute medicine and telemetry wing. It provides care to over 36,700 Veterans in a 35-county geographic area, from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge. Veterans also receive care at one of our nine VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Michigan. More information about this VA can be found at [www.saginaw.va.gov](http://www.saginaw.va.gov).

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