

Unmet Needs Grant Turned on Heat for Veteran's Family

'Because of the VFW, I was able to give my kids a bath with warm water for the first time in over eight months'

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For Matthew Royer of Broadview Heights, Ohio, joining the United States Marine Corps came naturally after seeing his father, uncle and grandfather all serve. When his time came, he decided to enroll in the delayed entry program in June of 2001 and planned to leave for camp the following February. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Royer went into the Marine Corps earlier than planned.

He served in the Third Battalion, Seventh Marines during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Royer suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury and Bilateral Achilles Tendonitis when his Humvee was hit by an improvised explosive device.

The deaths of two of his brothers-in-arms, Corporal Jason Dunham and Gunnery Sergeant Elia Fontecchio, affected Royer deeply and he still suffers Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) from these losses. Dunham jumped on a grenade to save his men and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions. Royer attended the ceremony at the White House when President George W. Bush presented Dunham's family with the Medal of Honor. To honor Fontecchio and his sacrifice, Royer named his son Elia.

After he retired in 2005, he had a difficult time transitioning to civilian life. "I struggled with not having to go from one to 100 in a second anymore. I felt like I was in a war zone and everyone was going to hurt me." Royer was studying political science and homeland security at a local university, but PTS prevented him from finishing his degree.

In addition to all of his struggles, Royer's world turned upside down when it was discovered through a sonogram that his daughter's arm stopped growing after her elbow socket. On top of that, she was born prematurely. As medical expenses continued to pile up, he began to fall behind on his bills and did not have the money to turn on the gas or heat for his house. With

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winter quickly approaching, Royer knew his family would not survive without the basic necessities he was unable to provide on his own.

“I was in a hole and could not dig myself out. I felt like I was failing my children,” he said.

After researching help for veterans online, he found the VFW’s Unmet Needs grant and applied. “The application was a simple process,” he said.

When he received the grant, the sense of relief was overwhelming for Royer. “Because of the VFW, I was able to give my kids a bath with warm water for the first time in over eight months.”

Royer plans to join the VFW to use his voice to advocate for veterans who fall on hard times. As of right now, his main focus is to provide for his children, Elia and Brynn, and make sure they know they are loved.

Royer concluded, “I want to take a moment to thank readers for their service and dedication to their country. Without your support to the VFW, I am not sure where my children and I would be now.”