

Depression doesn't care if you're a 22-year Veteran of the United States Army or a kindergarten teacher sounding out letters.

Sometimes it strikes one in the same.

That's the case of **Clinton Alston**, who successfully transitioned from serving his country to serving his community at Long Branch Elementary in Jacksonville. Alston returned to his hometown after traveling the world, rising through the ranks and retiring from the Army in 1999.



"I wanted to come back to Jacksonville because I grew up middle class and I saw the struggles of a lot of kids," says Alston, 69. "As I looked back, I didn't see a lot of male role models."

Alston became a husband, a father and a college graduate while enlisted in the Army. He is back in the classroom following a sabbatical to care for his wife of 40 years. Within four months, Alston's wife passed away from a terminal illness and their only son died due to heart failure.



If that isn't enough, "Father Time has raised his ugly head and now I'm walking with a cane," Alston says.

His physical and mental health are being challenged simultaneously. So Alston went to a Veterans Affairs clinic in Jacksonville to see a psychiatrist and seek disability.

Though the wait for compensation may have just begun, Alston quickly got the mental health help that he needed when his psychiatrist referred him to **Here Tomorrow**.

"When you go to the VA, you take a number and they give you a little bit of time," says Alston. "But with Here Tomorrow, there is more of a personal touch... You're still in their thoughts even when you're not physically there."

Alston hit it off with Here Tomorrow peer **Mariel Acosta**, a Marines Veteran who encouraged him to attend support groups on Mondays and Thursdays. The help has only just begun.

"Here Tomorrow has not stopped with the group sessions," says Alston. "I'm now linked up with a psychologist and utilizing 12 sessions that are free to me."

Alston calls Acosta his "lighthouse."

They share the same goal – that he is *here tomorrow* for himself and his students, who are learning the alphabet and reading their first words thanks to Sergeant First Class Alston.

"I'm not going to give up my pride and joy, which is teaching these young minds," he says. "I'll teach until they kick me out."

