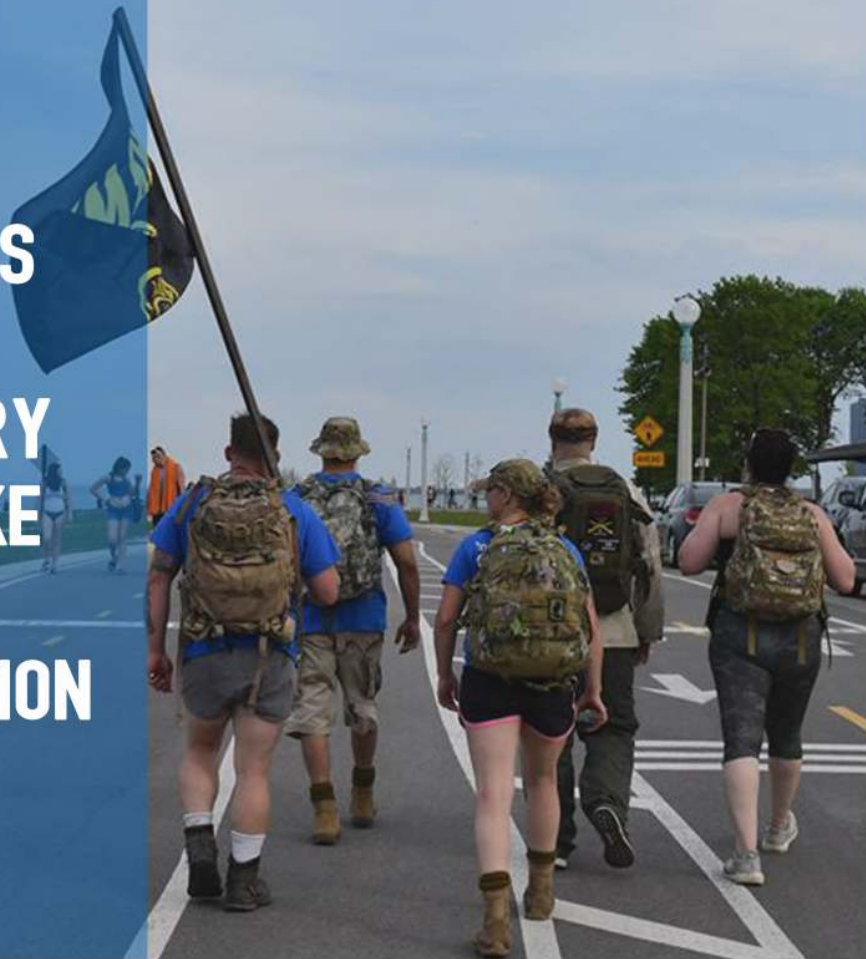


A man in military gear, including a blue cap with a Pikachu logo, glasses, and a tactical vest, is smiling. He is wearing a grey t-shirt with the text 'HONOR IN THOSE WE HAVE LOST' and a silhouette of a soldier. He is holding a water bottle. The background shows other people in military gear and an American flag.

**5 YEARS OF EMPOWERING  
VETERANS AND COMMUNITIES  
IN CHICAGO**



# OUR MISSION: CHICAGO VETERANS MISSION IS TO EMPOWER MILITARY VETERANS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR TRANSITION THROUGHOUT LIFE.



## OUR APPROACH:

We empower Veterans by providing resources and building meaningful relationships to help take control of one's transitions throughout life and improve overall well-being.

Empowerment is accomplished by providing Veterans the resources, opportunities, purpose, and motivation they need to become more productive in their communities.

The concept of empowerment consists of three core components – **Camaraderie, Employment and Education.**

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



For those that have watched Chicago Veterans grow and develop, I know they'd agree that the organization has vastly changed, while the mission has remained the same. We want to empower our fellow military brothers and sisters to take control of the multiple transitions they will experience in life. Whether it is a change of career, family structure, or a move to a new city; we want Veterans to know that they are not alone.

In retrospect, 2018, was an opportunity for Chicago Veterans to expand our reach, and to continue to find the best way to serve the needs of the Veteran community. I am always proud of the accomplishments our teams of volunteers, the Board of Directors, and our supporters are able to accomplish. Chicago Veterans is an outstanding example of a non-profit that has successfully navigated a public/private collaboration, and in turn, has delivered tangible results for our community. We were able to establish firm, supportive relationships with organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, in order to be able to continue to serve Veterans at the forefront of the mission.

When there is work to be done, we do it. As a nonprofit organization, we are governed by a Board of Directors consisting of a volunteer group of community members that are all Veterans. The diversity in the Board of Directors allows for the organization to have input and views through the lenses of the very same community we are serving. In support of this, in 2018, a Strategic Planning Taskforce was convened to review/update the Strategic Plan, including the mission, 3-year vision statements, goals, and objectives for the upcoming years to ensure that we are focused on our commitment to serve Veterans that need us the most.

We operate by listening to people's wants and needs. We always listen first, support the development of a plan, then search for connections that can lead to improving one's quality of life. The dedication of our extremely committed team members and invaluable support from our Board of Directors and community partners make this possible.

Without the amazing volunteers that we have gathered in support of the mission, we truly could not be where we are today. Without the relationships we have built in the community, we could not fund the programming that we do. I need to acknowledge the incredible connections and relationships we have been able to build with corporate sponsors, donors, and service providers. We truly could not do this without you.

The accomplishments and strides that we have made in the past 5 years since the date of incorporation, have been incredible—but we will not stop here! We will continue to advocate for our fellow brothers and sisters in the workplace, in the development of policies and procedures at the governmental level, and directly in our communities. There is much work to be done, but for an organization with a 95% volunteer-based leadership team, I think we are doing an unbelievable job. It has been a blessing and an honor to be able to lead such an extraordinary organization.

*Karen Hernandez*

**KAREN HERNANDEZ** | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





## **OUR PROGRAMS:**

### **SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM:**

Our Social and Community Involvement Program (SCIP) builds on our belief that engagement is directly related to empowerment. SCIP provides recreational therapy that helps Veterans improve their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. SCIP provides opportunities for Veterans to engage and interact in their local communities, which helps them to create a support system for challenging times.

### **EDUCATIONAL PEER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:**

Our Educational Peer Mentorship Program (EPMP) assists Veterans in two ways: (1) individual peer-to-peer mentorship and (2) group mentorship. Our peer-to-peer program connects a Veteran who has lived through a specific experience with a Veteran who is new to that experience; this allows for targeted guidance and assistance obtaining resources and benefits available in the specific situation. Group mentorship is provided through workshops and other group events.

### **EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAM:**

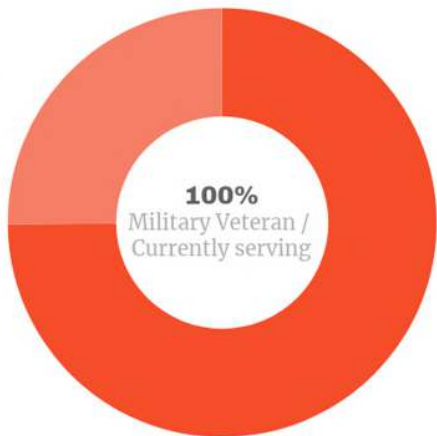
Our Employment Readiness Program (ERP) focuses on creating pipelines to careers for Veterans through direct access to local employers helping mitigate hiring barriers that Veterans face. Many service members leaving the military and relocating to Chicago are not prepared for the transition and as a result, struggle to find employment.



# COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS:

## GENDER AND AGE:

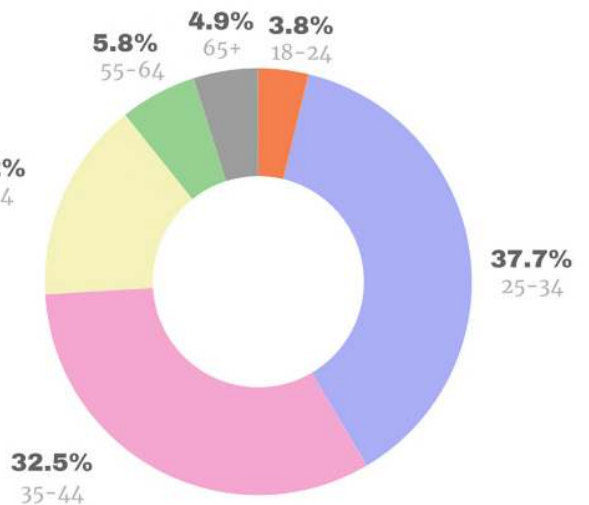
**25.1%**  
Women



**74.9%**  
Men

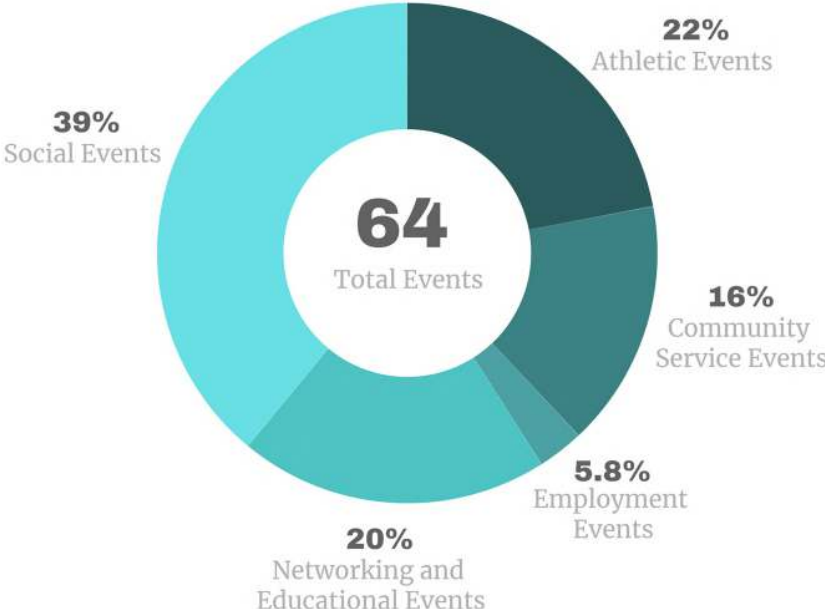
**100%**  
Military Veteran /  
Currently serving

**15.2%**  
45-54





# COMMUNITY IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT:



**64**  
Total Events  
in 2018

**37**  
Chicagoland  
Neighborhoods

**4286**  
Total in person  
Interactions







## **SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM:**

Our Social and Community Involvement Program helps to maintain the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of Veterans by seeking to reduce depression, stress, anxiety, build confidence, and socialize effectively.

Our holistic support approach provides a sense of community and belonging which fosters conversation and interactions between veterans to discuss challenges they may face with their peers; as well as allowing for Veterans to utilize their new social support system until they feel ready to seek other forms of help. By doing so, Veterans can reach out to their neighbors (peers) when they might have a question, need support, guidance, or when they may be experiencing a crisis. Through our social events, Chicago Veterans connects Veterans to various organizations that may be able to offer the tangible support in need, organizations such as the Road Home Program at Rush University and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Centers.



Chicago Veterans is continuing to expand their Recreational/Social Therapy aspect to help reduce the risks of suicidal thoughts and PTSD symptoms among Veterans by introducing more family-based events including sporting events such as Chicago Bulls, Chicago White Sox and Chicago Cubs games, glass blowing workshops, art shows, plays, as well as starting their own co-ed volleyball and softball teams. Chicago Veterans also partners with multiple organizations who feature similar programs to help Veterans heal, such as Learn Scuba Chicago to provide free dive sessions to Veterans, all in an effort to provide these Veterans in the community an alternate outlet that may be a better approach to their continued healing and transition.

**“If it wasn’t for Chicago Veterans, I would be part of the statistic” [referring to the 20+ veterans that commit suicide every day].**

– Tyler USMC Veteran







## NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND EVENTS

### CHICAGO VETERANS VOLLEYBALL



Chicago Veterans joined a Wednesday evening league in Chicago's West Town Neighborhood. Recreational activities such as volleyball give Veterans an opportunity to get out of their homes, clear their minds, exercise, and spend time with like-minded individuals to help reduce symptoms of depression and PTSD.

"I didn't know anyone when I first joined the volleyball team," said Isaura, a U.S. Army Veteran. "I only knew that Chicago Veterans was promoting it. I was a bit weary about showing up and feeling like the 'new kid' on the block. However, I reminded myself that if they weren't so inviting to strangers, they wouldn't post an invitation. I am happy to say I am glad I showed up and became part of a team that is so welcoming, they are suck with me now!"



## **CHICAGO VETERANS ART INITIATIVE**

Veterans from all over the Chicagoland area showcased their art and invited fellow service members and friends to experience their gallery. Many Veterans have turned to art therapy as a new path to overcoming the trauma of war, helping them heal.

The Veterans Art Initiative featured over 30 art pieces ranging from photographs to paintings from 12 local Veterans. Over 100 attendees stopped by throughout the evening to see the displays and mingle with one another.



## **CHICAGO VETERANS RUCK MARCH**

The Annual Chicago Veterans Ruck March helped bring together more than 1,750 Veterans, service-members, family members and supporters during the Memorial Day weekend to continue building a social support system for Veterans as well as to raise awareness around PTSD and the prevention of veteran suicide. There were over 20 government, nonprofit and health care agencies onsite providing information about resources available in the community.

Veterans and supporters from as young as one year old in strollers with their parents to older Veterans in their late 60s walked 20 miles from the suburb of Glencoe to Chicago's lakefront raising awareness along the route and speaking with community residents and onlookers. The 20 miles represents the 20 Veterans we lose every single day to suicide according to a study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.







## CHICAGO VETERANS BALL

In 2018, we held our 4th Annual Chicago Veterans Ball. Over 320 guests, including 10 Veteran organizations, came together for an evening to honor and celebrate Veterans Day as a community. Our Annual Chicago Veterans Ball provides an opportunity for Veterans and family members to experience one of the military's oldest traditions.



Veterans had the opportunity to wear their service uniform or pin their military medals on civilian attire. These events allow Veterans to continue building their social support system as well as increase their confidence levels and feel proud to have served in the military.

**“I have not seen my Husband smile this much in years, it’s like he found his purpose again.”**  
**[Speaking about her husband attending the Chicago Veterans Ball]**

– US Army Veteran Spouse







## **CHICAGO VETERANS EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAM**

The Employment Readiness Program focuses on creating pipelines into careers for Veterans by providing direct access to local employers helping to mitigate hiring barriers Veterans face.

Chicago Veterans is directly connecting local employers to Veterans in our community. The Veterans Hub also serves as a resource for Veterans looking for career opportunities. Veterans and their family members utilize the VetHub and have access to professional resume paper, folders, binders, WIFI, printers, scanners, and office equipment to better prepare for their upcoming interviews. Veterans leave with a higher level of confidence knowing they have a professional resume, and are better prepared for their upcoming interviews.

In 2018, Chicago Veterans implemented new technology systems to help qualified Veterans connect with local employers looking to hire. The new platform provided 184 unique employment opportunities from over 50 local employers. The programs efforts connected over 200 Veterans to employment/career fairs to help with resume building, interview practice, job preparation and direct hiring.





## **EDUCATIONAL PEER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:**

Our Educational Peer Mentorship Program assists Veterans in two ways — we use a unique peer-to-peer mentorship approach defined as a form of mentorship that takes place between a person who has lived through a specific experience and a person who is new to that experience, to help provide guidance and access of resources and benefits available to Veterans. Second, Chicago Veterans hosts various workshops and events to continue their education and transition throughout life.

**“I wish this group existed when I left the Marine Corps in 1979 it would have saved me and my loved ones a lot of heartache.”** - George, USMC Veteran

The program helps provide Peer Support to fellow Veterans and their loved ones by meeting with service members who may be transitioning at different times in their lives, or who may have recently left service, in an effort to facilitate their transition. This support can range from navigating the initial claims process with the VA, continuing medical treatment plans for those that have been medically retired, gathering information and services for their loved ones, family support, assisting with access to educational resources, or to simply spend time with another likeminded individual who shares a common connection. These connections help build rapport, as well as establish better lines of communication, not telling them what to do, but instead sharing what worked for them and what didn't.



## **THE VETHUB**

The Veterans Hub, our Chicago Veterans office, serves as a hub for collaboration and coordination of services for veteran resources and information provided by government entities, veteran service organizations, educational programs, and universities, so that Veterans and their family members are able to navigate existing resources successfully. Veterans also utilize the Veterans Hub for personal development in a variety of ways such as: strategic planning for their own small business or organization, Wi-Fi, printers and office equipment for work or school, hosting meetings and workshops.

## **SOCIAL PLATFORM**

In addition to in-person peer support, Chicago Veterans also created an online social platform where Veterans could post questions and get immediate answers from their peers. Our online social platform has over 3,000 members comprising of Veterans, family members, health specialists, program directors, veteran outreach coordinators, veteran service officers and other nonprofit professionals who regularly answer and post topics related to the successful transitions of Veterans.







## **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **CHICAGO BOOTH**

Chicago Veterans worked with The University of Chicago Booth School of Business to help 11 Veterans enroll and graduate from their Executive Education Course.

Executive Education is a 6-month executive level course in finance, marketing, strategy, leadership and comprehensive management. Veterans met weekly to study, learn and help one another with class work and exams.

### **VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER PROGRAM**

Chicago Veterans helped 4 Veterans attend and graduate from the National Association of County Veteran Service Officer Program. NACVSO is recognized officially by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs "for the purpose of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.





## **FROM HOMELESS TO UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO BOOTH GRADUATE**

“My name is Jose and I am a United States Marine Corps veteran of OIF and OEF. I became homeless about three years ago. It was a very difficult time for me. I left the mother of my daughter due to our relationship becoming destructive to my life. I was diagnosed with PTSD years ago but I never searched for help. As a homeless Veteran in the city of Chicago it was hard to find resources. I reached out to the county offices who introduced Chicago Veterans to me. Once I met the Chicago Veterans group I felt great. They made me feel like I belonged. I see them as mentors, Veterans who became professionals in order to help other Vets. It inspired me to change things. They helped me get services to include a National Veteran Service Officer certification.

Chicago Veterans provided the necessary resources I needed to grow and evolve both emotionally and professionally. I am thankful and blessed to have met and created a friendship with members of Chicago Veterans. Chicago Veterans helped change my life. I went from a homeless veteran to graduating from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.” – Jose, USMC Veteran.

## **ENDING 2018**

In 2018, Chicago Veterans held 12 Educational workshops and events to foster personal development bringing together over 370 Veterans to interact and learn topic such as university/college enrollment, post 9-11 GI Bill, applying for veteran benefits, disability claims, and home buying seminars.





# CHICAGO VETERANS FINANCIALS

## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY FOR YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2018

### REVENUE

Donations .....	\$159,445
Sponsorships & Grants .....	\$9,500
Other Revenue .....	\$9,437
<b>TOTAL REVENUE .....</b>	<b>\$178,382</b>

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### EXPENDITURES

Program .....	\$139,359
Operational & General .....	\$29,178
Development & Professional Services .....	\$12,250
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES .....</b>	<b>\$180,787</b>

<b>TOTAL ASSETS .....</b>	<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES .....</b>	<b>YE TOTAL</b>
<b>\$175,990</b>	<b>\$6,726</b>	<b>\$169,264</b>





**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**KEVIN BARSZCZ**

BOARD PRESIDENT

**JAC CHARLIER**

BOARD CHAIRMAN

**KAREN HERNANDEZ**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**KARINA LOPEZ**

BOARD MEMBER

**MICHAEL PALAGUACHI**

BOARD MEMBER

**NOEL RIVERA**

BOARD MEMBER

**NESTOR ZAVALA**

BOARD MEMBER





# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

Our mission to empower Veterans would not be possible without the amazing support from our community volunteers, partners, supporters and donors. Thank you for your continued dedication and believing in the work of Chicago Veterans. We are extremely grateful and we would not be able to serve our community without you.







**ANNUAL REPORT**  
YEAR 2018

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