



2020

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**



# CHICAGO VETERANS YEAR IN REVIEW

## OUR MISSION

Empowering Military Veterans to take control of their transition throughout life. We define empower as sharing information, increasing access to programs and services, and helping Veterans build a positive social support system to take ownership of their transition throughout life.

## OUR GOAL

Helping veterans find their "tribe." Our goal is to introduce veterans to new organizations, experiences, and opportunities to help them find their tribe, grow their network and take control of their own transition.

## OUR VISION

A world where no United States Military veteran feels alone. Self-isolation is a known problem within the veteran space. Veterans often feel embarrassed to ask for help or that they don't deserve help. Our goal is to help change that stigma. We want veterans to know it is ok to ask for help, and let them know they are not alone.



## EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

Our Educational Support Program helps simplify the transitional process by increasing access and awareness of programs and services in the communities we serve, therefore improving systems navigation for veterans. Our program features educational courses, workshops, and webinars featuring subject matter experts in various fields such as veteran benefits, employment/career opportunities, and features existing community programs that address veteran issues.

## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Our Social and Community Involvement Program helps veterans build a positive social support system by providing consistent opportunities and platforms to participate and engage with other veterans and their local community.

## EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAM

Our Employment Readiness Program helps prepare veterans for careers after service through workshops, virtual training, and in-person events. Our workshops and virtual training give veterans an opportunity to practice their interview skills, enhance their resumes, learn best practices and meet local employers. through our virtual employment board, veterans have an opportunity to search and apply for current employment opportunities directly through our website.



# 450

VETERANS SERVED THROUGH  
SOCIAL PROGRAM

# 180

VETERANS SERVED THROUGH  
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

# 40+

HOSTED/PARTNERED ON OVER  
40 COMMUNITY EVENTS



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I could not be more excited to share the 2020 Chicago Veterans Annual Report with you. What a year it was. A devastating pandemic rocked the globe with challenges we never saw coming; so we at Chicago Veterans did what we do best: we took those challenges as a call to action, rolled up our sleeves and got to work. It is times such as this when we learn how selfless, understanding and committed our community is.

We all experienced changes in our lifestyle as the COVID-19 pandemic tightened its grips on the country. Our family and work lives were altered dramatically and we had to quickly find ways to adapt to a changing world while still providing Veterans with the resources they very much needed. Responding to the pandemic, we launched our Chicago Veterans Academy, advised government agencies on Veteran issues, and advocated to ensure the Veteran voice was heard.

As we look back at all we accomplished, we realize we could not have done it without the support and partnerships we've developed. In times of uncertainty and confusion, when health and wellbeing became the doctrine of our daily lives, you continued to make an effort to give back, and for that we thank you. In a time of crisis, I'm inspired by Chicago Veterans' vision for a future where we ALL can thrive—where Veterans are supported throughout their lives as leaders, students, workers, and family advocates.

This Annual Report is a testament to our collective community power. Together, we can build the world we want to live in. I realize that many individuals have uniquely felt the impact of our current climate, and my heart remains heavy for those who have faced tragedy or loss. The powerful demonstration of passion, resilience, and courage by the Chicago Veterans community fosters great hope. I am thankful for each of you and acknowledge that the journey ahead may be unsettling, but even amid darkness, we can continue to lean on each other for support and encouragement.

In Unity,



**Karen Hernandez**  
Executive Director



# COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

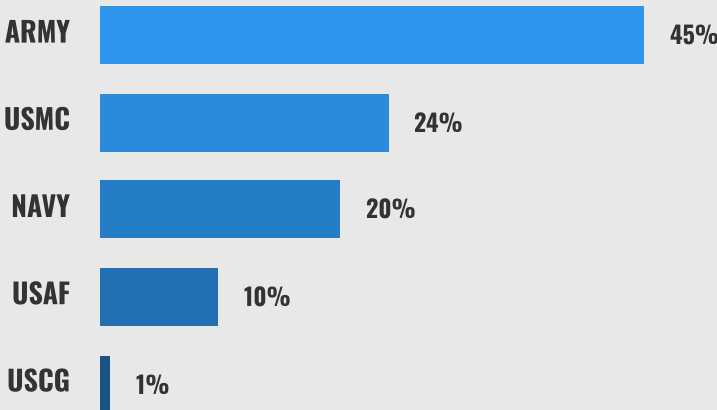


**60%**  
MALE

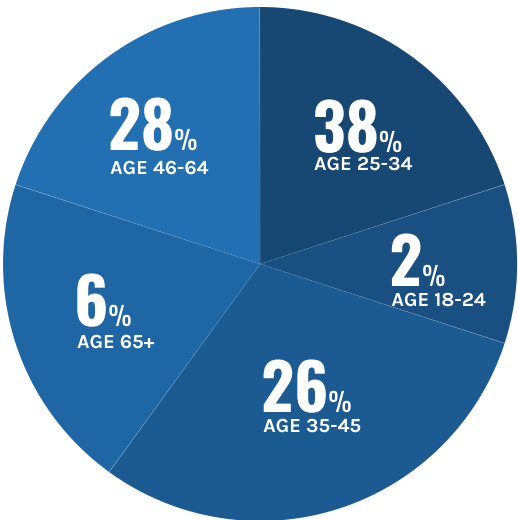


**40%**  
FEMALE

## MILITARY SERVICE POPULATION



## AGE DEMOGRAPHIC





## VETERANS GROUP EXERCISE

In February of 2020, before the stay-at-home order was in effect, ULTIFIT Chicago, Rush University and Chicago Veterans partnered on a study with the purpose of understanding the impact of group exercise on a veteran's quality of life during a eight-week exercise program.

Many veterans who return home find it difficult to resume civilian life which includes engaging in social, work and community environments. Social events, such as exercise groups, can provide an outlet to improve mental health and well-being of Veterans who experience difficulty with reacclimation to civilian life.

Although the program was cut down to 7 weeks due to the stay-at-home order, all four domains (Psychological Health, Environmental, Physical Health, Social Relations) the study focused on found an increase in scores from the start of the program to the post-program survey. Domain 2 (Psychological Health) and Domain 4 (Environmental) demonstrated statistically significant improvements from beginning to end.

As a result, the program's survey results conveyed vast improvement in the participants' well-being and quality of life. Chicago Veterans remains focused on continuing to provide more opportunities for veterans to connect and engage within their own communities and the Veteran community at-large.



# RESPONDING TO THE COMMUNITY

Due to COVID-19 and the stay-at-home order, many of our largest and most successful events that help veterans connect and become active in their communities were put on hold. We quickly shifted all our programs virtually and partnered with various veteran serving organizations to assess the needs of our community and work together to provide support.

## IMPLEMENTED SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING

Isolation is a known problem within the Veteran community. Isolation can lead to a rise in many health issues including depression and suicidal thoughts.

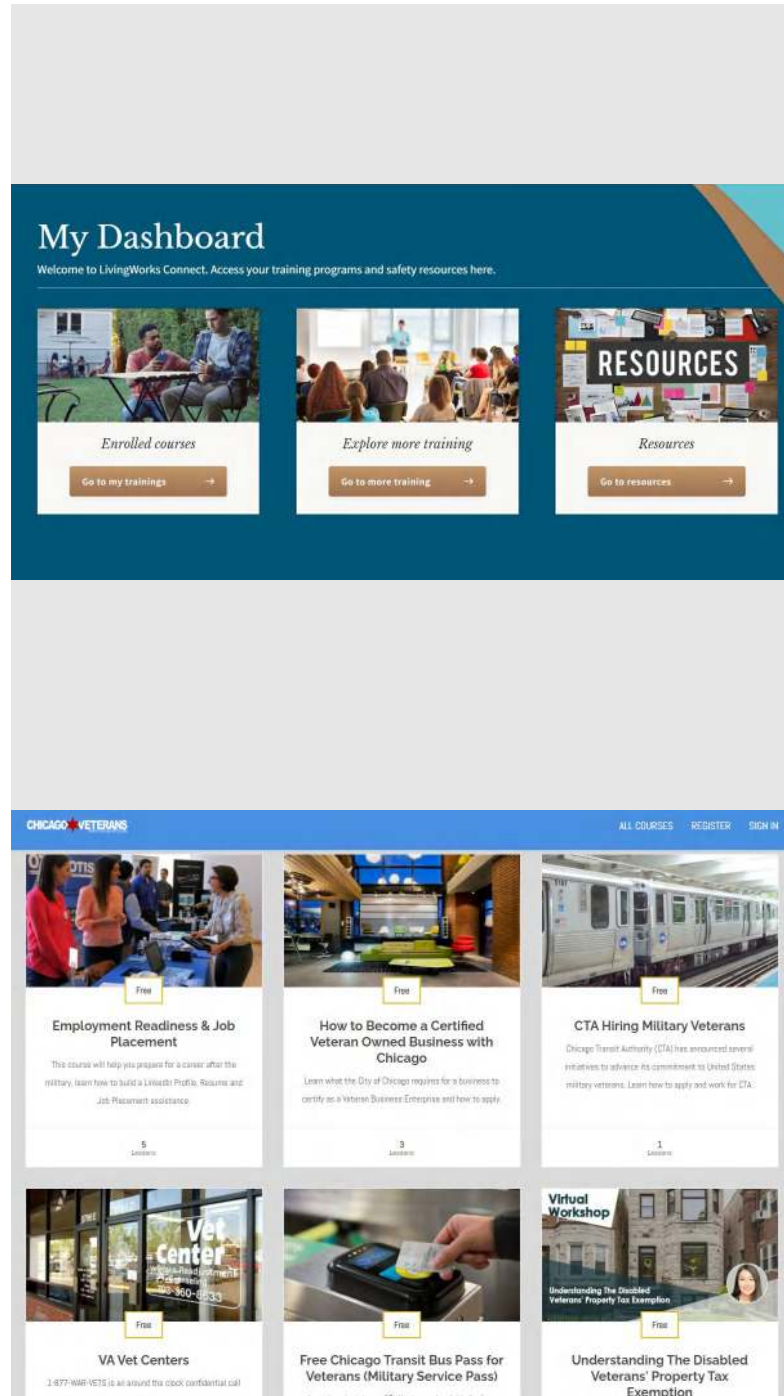
We partnered with LivingWorks, the world's leading suicide intervention training company to provide our Virtual Suicide Prevention Training to help educate our community to recognize signs of suicide and how to get them the help they need.

## LAUNCHED CHICAGO VETERANS ACADEMY

Our Chicago Veterans Academy features our entire library of workshops, webinars, courses, and virtual events featuring subject matter experts and industry partners.

Our Academy features a wide range of information to help veterans increase access to benefits and improve their transitional process. All our courses are self-paced and can be accessed any time 24-hours a day. **Course**

**highlights:** VA home loans, nutrition, financial budgeting, employment assistance, and resume workshops.





## PROVIDED DIRECT ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Chicago Veterans partnered with the McCormick Foundation, Leave No Veteran Behind, Illinois Joining Forces, and Thresholds to provide emergency financial assistance to veterans in need. Payments were sent directly to veterans to help cover the cost of bills, food, rent, and other basic needs.

## DISTRIBUTED OVER 8,000 POUNDS OF FOOD

In support of combined efforts with many organizations, including the Travis Manion Foundation, Combined Veterans of Berwyn, local food pantries, and various partners, we helped distribute over 8,000 pounds of food and canned goods to veterans and military-connected families all over the Chicagoland area.

## DISTRIBUTED 19 PALLETS OF CLOTHING AND SUPPLIES

We collected supplies, toiletries, and sanitizing items as well as a 19 pallet donation from a local clothing store with items such as shirts, jackets, and sweaters. Working with various organizations, we helped distribute the clothing and supplies to veterans all over the Chicagoland area.







## SERVED OVER 350 MEALS ON VETERANS DAY

BBQ'D Productions donated 350 meals on Veterans Day. We put a call out to the community and helped distribute meals across the city.

## DISTRIBUTED OVER 200 HOLIDAY GIFTS

Chicago Veteran volunteers helped wrap and distribute over 200 gifts to veteran families for the holidays. Gifts were for kids between the ages of 2 and 14 years old.

## DISTRIBUTED OVER 200 MEALS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

During the peak of Covid-19, many veterans working as essential workers weren't allowed to stay home and often worked long hours. We helped provide meals for over 200 first responders.

# OUR FINANCIALS

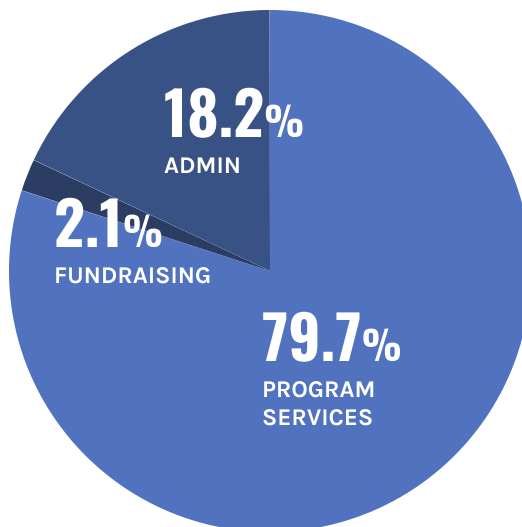
## TOTAL REVENUE

Grants	\$123,500
Special Events	\$25,987
Donations	\$60,353
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$209,840</b>

## TOTAL EXPENSES

Program	\$152,458
General & Admin	\$34,954
Fundraising	\$3,876
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$191,288</b>

## PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPENSES



This year brought many new challenges to our organization, but it also gave us new opportunities to continue to grow and reimagine our programs for the future.

We invested in new technology to be able to reach Veterans innovatively such as our Chicago Veterans Academy, virtual education, and workshops.

One of our major focus areas was to conduct Veteran community needs assessments on a continuous basis to be able to meet the demands of a year unlike any other.





## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Kevin Barszcz**  
Board President

**Donna Manella**  
Board Member

**Nestor Zavala**  
Board Member

**Jose Campos**  
Board Member

**Domonique Tatum**  
Board Member

**Karen Hernandez**  
Executive Director

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

606 Coffee Roasters  
American Legion  
BBQ'D Productions  
Bosch Tools  
Breakthrough  
Chicago Bears  
Chicago Bulls  
Chicago Taco Authority  
Combined Veterans of Berwyn  
Grunt Style

Hines VA  
Illinois Joining Forces  
Innervoice  
Jessie Brown VA  
Leave No Veteran Behind  
LivingWorks  
Operation HerStory  
Road Home Program  
Rush University  
Team RWB

The Mission Continues  
Thresholds  
Travis Manion Foundation  
Ultimate Ninjas Chicago  
Union League Club of Chicago  
USO  
VFW  
Veteran Roasters  
Wounded Warrior Project

## THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION DONORS



## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Attorney, Baltierres Law P.C.

**Jesus Cuevas**  
Mortgage Banker

**Mike Drevline**  
Business Advisory, Aerospace & Department of Defense

**Saul Marchan**  
Founder, and CEO, BLU Commercial Cleaning

**David S. Piatek**  
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**Michael A. Salim**  
Principal, Public Accountant

**CJ Seestadt**  
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