

Living Free Together

2023 Annual Report

Background

Since 2001, our country has trained and minted more than 4 million new military personnel. There are currently 168,000 service members serving overseas in various capacities and in various circumstances. 75% of the 4 million service members have deployed into “hot” combat zones one or more times in their careers. This is an increase from 58% of service members serving before 9/11. On average, soldiers and Marines (US Army and USMC) can expect to deploy every 24 months. Airmen (USAF) and sailors (US Navy) can expect to deploy every 18-20 months while National Guardsmen and Guardswomen can be deployed every 2-3 years for up to 15 months at a time. This constant coming and going into and out of harm's way is taking its toll on military families and overall quality of life. Warriors understand their obligations and sacrifice much as they stand ready and willing to give their lives for their country. Living beyond fulfilling that duty can prove to be tricky. Many warriors are coming home changed by their experiences and are unable to “pick up where they left off”. Spouses are finding themselves alone and exhausted by the constant instability of this reality while the children are often left to find their own way.



Living Free Together (LFT) is attempting to honestly address the unintended cost of military service and the value of healing. It is a unique and effective program that seeks to create a community in which genuine healing can take root and grow. Charlottesville has a large and growing veteran community; however, there is no base and very few veteran services are offered to these families. Living Free Together began as a nontraditional, nonreligious expression of support between the American Legion Post #74 and Chestnut Grove Church. With the support of the Charlottesville civilian and veteran community, LFT has grown into its own non profit and is now the largest active military family organization in the area.



Living Free Together is committed to providing active, non-active and retired patriot families with the life skills and support necessary to face their next BIG adventure in life together.

Vision & Mission

Vision:

All veterans and military families in the Charlottesville area feel equipped to manage relational, mental, and emotional challenges and **to thrive in their families and communities.**

Mission:

LFT **values and honors the service and sacrifice** of Charlottesville's military families by offering **skill-building workshops and opportunities for community** which help veterans and military families to **grow personally and together.**



Programs Overview



FEARLESS Family: A four-week **family enrichment workshop** combining creative and life strategy sessions for all ages designed to equip families with the relational tools necessary for a thriving future together. FEARLESS uses the vocabulary of military training to help participants understand that **unit cohesion and a shared purpose can happen within their own family unit**, not just in battle. FEARLESS helps participants understand the difference between parenting while under the influence of trauma and parenting outside of trauma. Our FEARLESS programs offer adult personal growth groups and mindfulness training for those who wish to continue attending sessions. Age appropriate life strategy sessions are available for children and teens weekly. Topics and activities vary.

FOCUS: A four-week **communication workshop for individuals, couples, kids and teens**. Sessions combine active skills, problem solving, and team building activities for all ages. Participants enjoy a meal together and attend their own life strategy groups. Adults are able to choose between new experiences like yoga, dance, building challenges, partner card games and life skills training before attending a workshop on **building stronger relationships through effective communication**, a **leadership group** or a **care group for caregivers**.



Children explore their creativity and expression by engaging in multi-media art projects. Teens explore their core values through participating in creative activities including Live Action Role Play games, mindfulness training and multi-media art experiences.

F.I.T. (Mentally Fit with the Intention to Thrive): The FIT program empowers veterans, first responders, and their loved ones to thrive outside of the military context. FIT addresses the specific goals and challenges of our veterans and first responders by equipping them to build mental fitness, achieve personal and relational goals and to

cultivate healthy patterns of engagement when facing future challenges. This is the first series of programs that are also offered to our First Responder community.

Reconnecting (“R&R”) Events: Casual, fun family gatherings for all past and present participants to reconnect and relax with a supportive community.

Stanardsville Stomp: The "Stanardsville Stomp!" is an evening of music, dancing and BBQ in support of military veteran families in our local communities. **We encourage whole families from the local community to come out and experience locally prepared barbecue, great live**

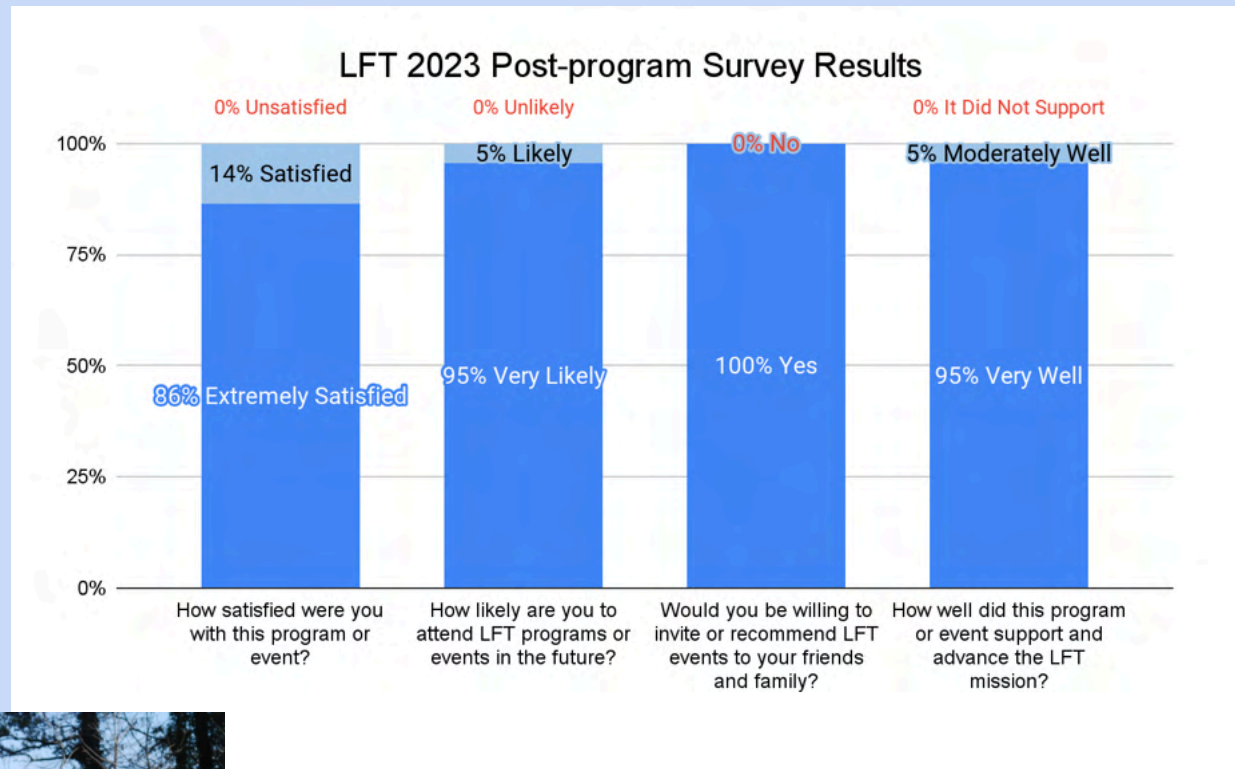


music, line dancing, square dancing, the Virginia Reel, and more. No experience is required - group dancing lessons are provided on-site during the event.



Ruck the Ridge: Rucks are long, weighted hikes intended to challenge the participant mentally and physically in order to maximize outcomes. The military's way of ruining a nice walk through the woods! **Ruck the Ridge is LFT’s way to bring C’ville’s veteran, active duty, first responder, and civilian communities together to build resilience & have a good time in honor of service and sacrifice.** **Ruck the Ridge** is a dual challenge event incorporating solo & team obstacle challenges along 4, 6 & 8 mile hiking routes on amazing hike/bike trails in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The **Ruck the Ridge** event also features **RuckFest** - a complete family fun experience with food trucks, bounce houses, a petting zoo and other activities for all ages.

LFT asks for honest feedback from the participants of all of our programs for veterans and military families and uses that feedback to update and improve our program offerings, content, scheduling, and focus areas.



Program & Event Activity

February: LFT hosted a Bingo Night at Jack's Shop Kitchen in Ruckersville and entertained a full house of attendees who wanted to support LFT.

February/March: LFT offered two "Date Nights" for committed couples. Couples enjoyed dinner together, participated in table activities, and enjoyed a presentation from the Relationship Foundation of Richmond, a relaxation activity and dance instruction.

March: LFT held our Spring 2023 FOCUS Communication Workshop, offering sessions on communication techniques and co-parenting.

April: LFT offered our Spring 2023 FEARLESS Family program, helping families to identify and understand their mission and purpose.

June: LFT benefited from "Burgers & Bingo", a fundraiser hosted by our community partner Riverside North.



June: LFT provided volunteer support to the Parade Rest "For Our Freedom" 5K race (40F5K).

July: LFT continued its annual tradition of hosting a Polo Picnic at King Family Vineyard.

August: LFT hosted a new family R&R event and 7 families enjoyed "Tubing the James" in Scottsville.

September: LFT conducted



its very first session in our new FIT (Mentally Fit with the Intent to Thrive) program. This was a combined effort with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to offer the VA's S.A.V.E. suicide prevention training program.

September: LFT hosted another first time event - the Stanardsville Stomp. Despite a stormy evening, turnout was strong for an evening of local BBQ, live music, and dancing.

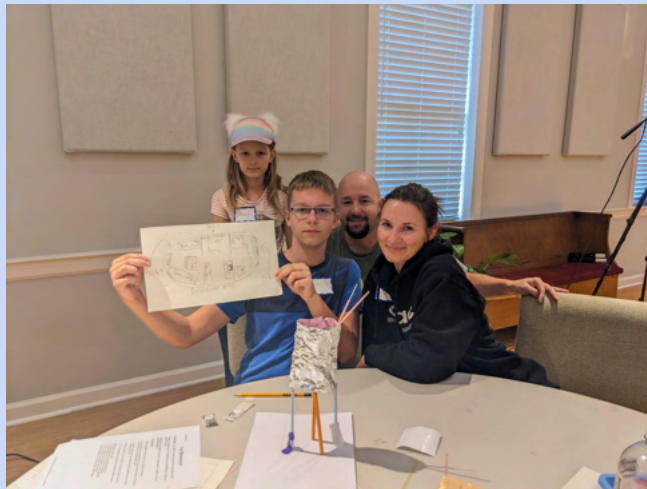
September: LFT offered a second Fall 2023 session of the FIT program, this session focusing on applying S.A.V.E. program skills in real-world situations through



practical application exercises.

October: LFT led a training event for the upcoming RUCK THE RIDGE event, where participants were shown how to properly load and wear a pack, and then conducted a short training hike.

October: LFT offered our Fall 2023 FEARLESS Family program, offering a family dynamics

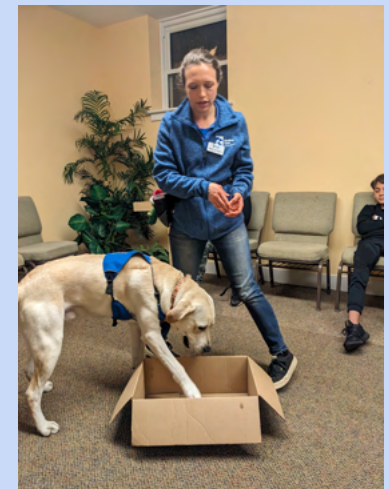


discussion group and cooking classes for all ages.

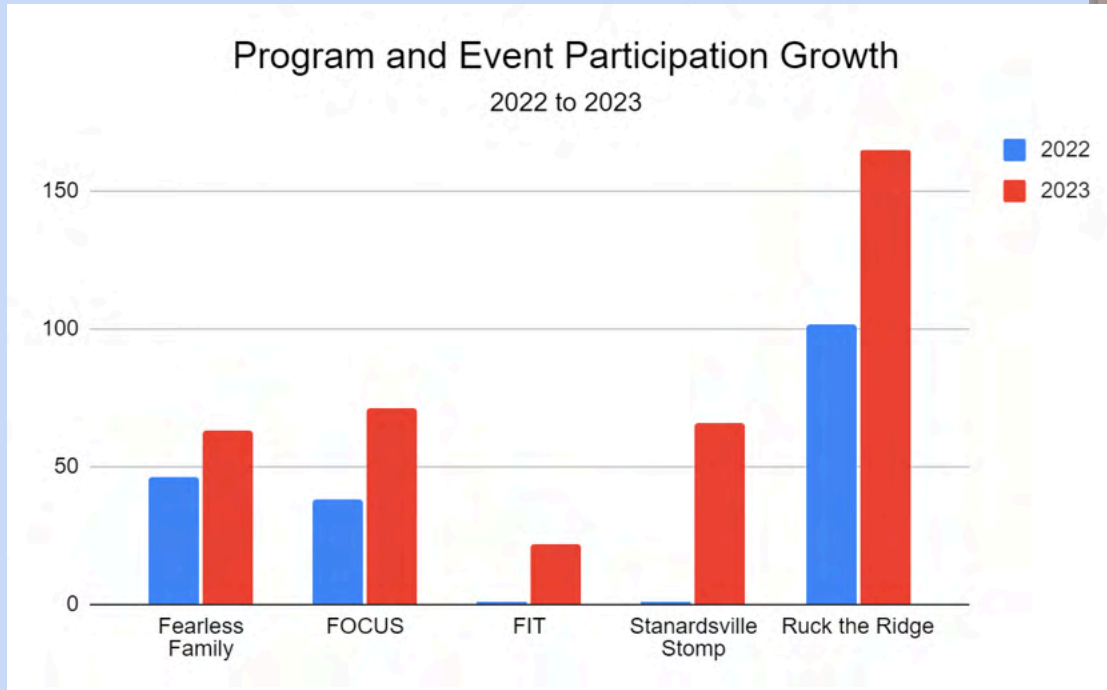
November: LFT hosted the second annual RUCK THE RIDGE event, nearly doubling the number of participants from the prior year.



November: LFT held our Fall 2022 FOCUS Communication Workshop, with a workshop on building stronger relationships through effective communication for adults, and kids experiencing the unique skills animals have with regard to sensing and supporting human emotions.



Programs & Event Participation



Even during the COVID challenges of 2020 and 2021, Living Free Together continued to support military families - many of whom were facing even more intense struggles as a result of the isolation of the pandemic. In 2022 and 2023, LFT has not only fully transitioned back to its original format for all programming, but **has now added two new programs and inaugurated two additional annual community events**. Through the **hard work of a small but dedicated staff, and with the support of a number of local businesses and a team of caring volunteers, LFT programs saw an overall increase in participation of more than 83% in 2023.**

Board of Directors & Staff

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Benny Clark: Board of Directors
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Mimi McCracken: Board of Directors
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Benny Clark: Meals Supervisor
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Rebecca Blackwell: Instructor
Madeline Bruggeman: Instructor
Ann Costane: Instructor
Fly Dog Yoga staff: Instructors
Mary Jo Hollis: Instructor
Celia Pfautz: Instructor
Adriayn & Dan Chan: Volunteer

Ella Claire Clark: Volunteer
Joe Compton: Volunteer
Rod Ferrier: Volunteer
Kim Gilmore: Volunteer
Michelle Gregory: Volunteer



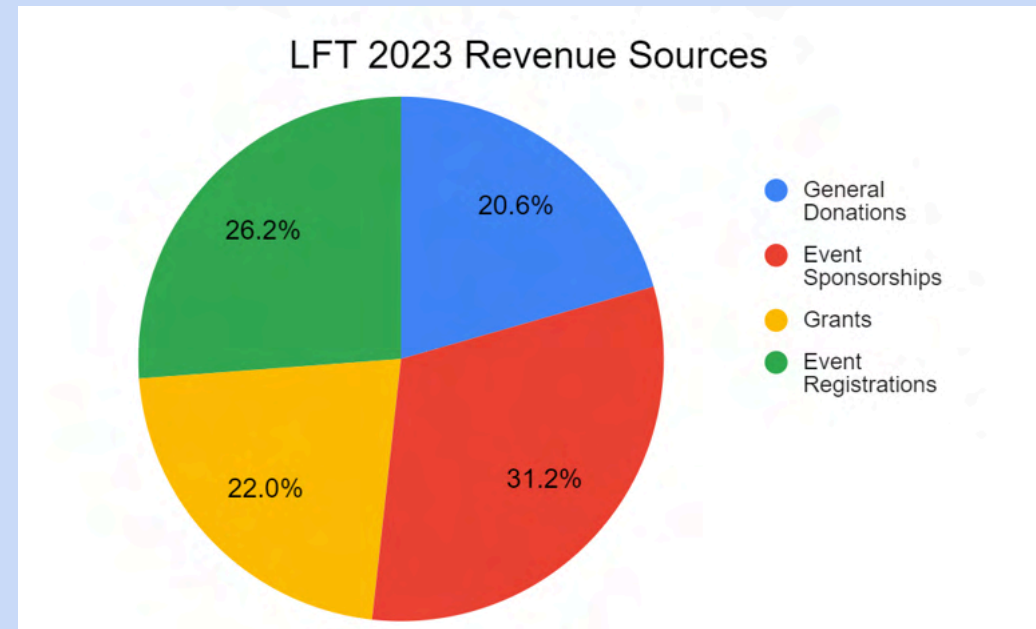
Financial Summary

Exceptional 2023 Corporate Donors and Sponsors:

- Parade Rest
- Charlottesville Area Community Foundation
- Phil's Concrete Services
- SKV Group
- Mission BBQ
- Earlysville VFW
- Greenwood Homes
- 9Round
- Anytime Fitness-Ruckersville
- Sentara Cares
- Earlysville Exchange
- Big Country Entertainment
- Towe Insurance Service Inc
- Pickle Meadows Farm
- Southern Development Homes
- Selvedge Brewing
- Public Lands
- Evolution Glamping

Exceptional 2023 Individual Donors:

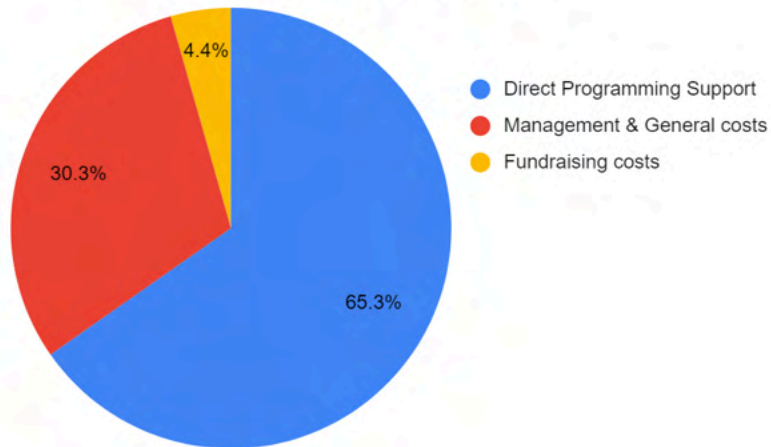
- Terry Minchow-Proffit
- Cynthia Hash
- Carol Paget-Brown
- Jack and Dianna Raymond
- Elizabeth Hollis
- Benny Clark
- Charles Davis
- Barbara Bozsik



Thank you to all of our donors and sponsors for your generosity and support - you make it possible for Living Free Together to care for our community's veterans and military families!

In 2023, Living Free Together met its budget and fundraising goals by operating efficiently and maximizing the support of a strong volunteer and support network. LFT is in a solid financial position to continue it's excellent work into 2024 and beyond.

LFT 2024 Budget Summary



LFT 2023 Financial Summary

