

Living Free Together

2022 Annual Report

Background

Since 2001, our country has deployed more than 2.7 million personnel. Over 50% of those have deployed twice and a large percentage of those have deployed three and more times. 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 new 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 war 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 six-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.

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

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 & 8 mile hiking loops 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.



Program & Event Activity

February: LFT benefitted from an Open House and fundraiser for LFT at community partner, 9Round Fitness, and participated in a kickboxing event for veterans and their families.

March: LFT hosted a Family Outing at the Wildrock Nature Play and Discovery Center - one of our longtime community partners.

March: LFT Executive Director, Tonya King, was recognized by the Charlottesville Red Cross for being their 2021 Veteran Hometown Hero.

April: LFT hosted REFOCUS - a COVID-modified version of our cornerstone FOCUS workshop for couples, families, and children.

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

June: LFT families participated in Music on the Lawn at Stonefield.

June: LFT provided volunteer support to the Parade Rest "For Our Freedom" 5K race (4OF5K).

July: LFT sponsored a family nature hike supported by our community partner, Opus Charlottesville.



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

August: After an overwhelmingly positive response in June and requests for a repeat, LFT and Riverside North hosted "Burgers & Bingo II".



September: LFT launched Neon One, a comprehensive event management and constituent contact online platform to improve our communication with participants and sponsors, make event registration easier, and support continued growth of the organization.

September: LFT hosted a movie night at the site of a new partner, Forest Lodge Farm.

September: LFT kicked off the first FEARLESS Family program, in its original, pre-COVID format, since the fall of 2019.

October: LFT enjoyed significant media coverage as we focused on RUCK THE RIDGE prep. We shared our story and the stories of our



participants with the Cville community through Facebook, radio, TV, Forest Lakes Magazine and the Daily Progress.

November: LFT hosted the first ever (and first annual) RUCK THE RIDGE event.

November: LFT held our Fall 2022 FOCUS Communication Workshop, back in its original format.

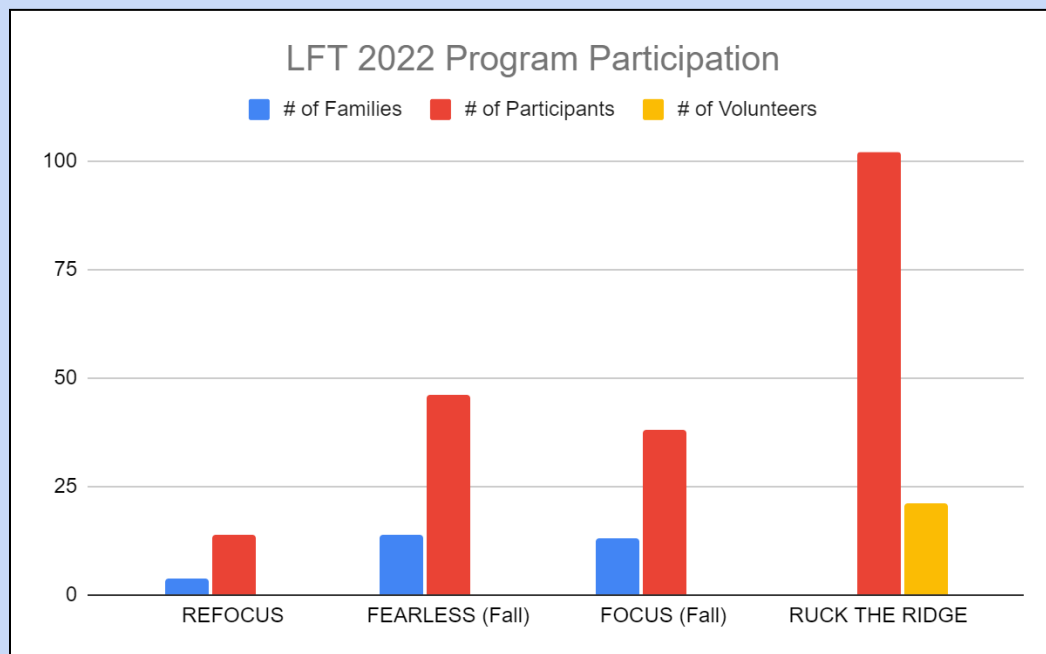
December: LFT families participated in the tree lighting at Stonefield Commons and benefitted from a fundraiser by Kendra Scott Jewelers.

December: LFT families attended the “Winter Wander” at the Boar’s Head Resort.

December: LFT facilitated Christmas care for two families in need.



Programs & Event Participation



Living Free Together began 2022 operating under COVID pandemic restrictions, which limited the organization to meeting in small groups, dependent upon vaccination status, and only out-of-doors. Despite these challenges, LFT continued to support military families - many of whom were facing even more intense struggles as a result of the isolation of the pandemic. The return to pre-pandemic programming brought an increase in participation and a greater positive impact on veteran families.

Board of Directors & Staff

Tonya King: Executive Director

Mary Jo Hollis: Program Assistant

John Bruggeman: Board of Directors

Benny Clark: Board of Directors

Emily Funk: Board of Directors

Mimi McCracken: Board of Directors

Shannon Myers: Board of Directors

Brad Whiteman: Board of Directors

Instructors & Support Team

Dr. Dan Elash Ph.D.: Support Supervisor

Benny Clark: Meals Supervisor



Financial Summary

Exceptional 2022 Donors:

- 9Round Fitness
- Benny Clark
- Central Virginia Mortgage Lenders Association
- Charles Davis
- Elizabeth Hollis
- Earlysville VFW
- Fidelity Charitable
- Greenwood Homes
- Heppner Chiropractic
- Ira Bellew
- Maple Grove Christian Church
- ParadeRest Virginia
- PJ Networks
- Public Lands
- SKV Group LLC/Gratitude Charlottesville
- Southern Property LLC
- Terry Minchow-Proffitt

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!

