



**ILLINOIS JOINING FORCES**

Supporting Service Members, Veterans and their Families

# **2023 Annual Report**





On behalf of Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), I am pleased to present our annual report for the fiscal year 2023. As the Executive Director, I am proud that we have made significant strides towards achieving our mission to *bring together public, private, and government stakeholders to collaboratively support Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) – to include caregivers and survivors – regardless of discharge status.*

Throughout the year, we have remained dedicated to serving those who have served our country. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and the hard work of our dedicated staff and Board of Directors, our services and initiatives have continued to expand to include Operation Connect Illinois and Operation Connect Illinois – CARES.

We have been able to offer support to hundreds of Service Members, Veterans, and their Families by facilitating access to resources along the social determinants of health spectrum including financial assistance, employment, food insecurity, housing, and mental health resources. We have connected and collaborated with over 300 service providers throughout the state to better serve the Illinois Veteran community.

In addition to our programmatic work, we have focused on strengthening our organization's infrastructure. We have worked to streamline our operations, improve our fundraising efforts, and enhance our communication with Veterans, donors, and partners. These efforts have allowed us to work more effectively and to maximize the impact of every donation.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing support of our partners and supporters. Your collaboration has enabled us to make a difference in the lives of Illinois Service Members, Veterans, and their Families. Thank you for your continued commitment to our mission.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Osuch". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Brenda Osuch  
Executive Director  
Illinois Joining Forces

**“No one organization can do it all. But together we can do anything.”**

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# Accomplishments

## Operation Connect Illinois continues to:

- **Connect, develop and support** Veteran Support Communities throughout the State of Illinois
- **Create national, state, local and community partnerships** that will assist in serving Illinois Veterans
- **Educate, connect, and collaborate** through convening statewide and regional summits.



## Operation Connect Illinois Accomplishments:



IJF utilized a total of **\$25,000** to support **7 community partners** impacting more than **500 veterans and their families.**



IJF attended more than **75 outreach events** connecting to over **400 Veteran service providers** throughout the state.

Through in-person summits,  
IJF brought together  
**250 representatives from  
Veteran-serving organizations**  
in FY 2023.



# Operation Connect Illinois – CARES

(Case Management, Assessment, Resource Referral, Education & Support)

## IJF Care Coordination Center (CCC)

The CCC is available 24/7/365 to connect Service Members, Veterans, and their Families to the critical assistance they need, where and when they need it. Our Veteran peers provide case management and high touch holistic resource navigation.

**Call 833-INFO IJF (463-6453)**



## The Staff Sergeant Gordon Parker Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (SSG Fox SPGP)

Awarded through the US Department of Veterans Affairs, IJF was the only Illinois statewide organization selected as a grant recipient. IJF provides a supportive upstream approach to suicide prevention through outreach, education, assessment, case management and resource referral.

## Illinois Warrior Assistance Program (IWAP)

Through a partnership with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, IWAP offers a support line for veterans facing emotional challenges. IWAP is not a crisis hotline, but a warm helpline that provides confidential assistance. Veterans and their families can reach out to IWAP 24/7/365 for support on a wide range of issues, from managing post-traumatic stress to coping with anxiety and depression.

**Call 877-455-IWAP (4927)**






## Operation Connect Illinois – CARES Accomplishments



IJF expanded the  
**Care Coordination Center**  
from 8am-5pm M-F to **24/7/365**.

IJF assisted **382 Service Members, Veterans and their families** to **660 services**– **80% were able to connect to the services** they were looking for.



 **56% increase in Service Members, Veterans and their Families**

 **77% increase in service requests received**

IJF is dedicated to doing its part to help end Veteran Suicide. In September of 2022, IJF was honored to be selected as the only statewide organization in Illinois to receive the **Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program**.



### Illinois Warrior Assistance Program

In May 2023, IJF partnered with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs to reinstate their **“warm helpline” available 24/7/365** to connect Veterans to behavioral health support.

# IJF's Impact

## Ross K., Navy Veteran

After struggling with alcohol abuse and conflict within his family situation, Ross connected with Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), and his journey took a positive turn.

Through IJF, Ross connected with the Veterans Path to Hope, which provided him with counseling services, access to a food pantry, and essential financial assistance. IJF was also able to connect Ross to a legal services and the Veterans Assistance Commission which secured him representation, financial assistance and employment. The impact of the support Ross received was immeasurable, enabling him to care and fight for his children, obtain a source of income, and work on his own mental well-being.



**“Don’t give up. There’s always someone there that can help you if you have the courage and willpower to ask for help.... Too many people climb into the bottle and end it. If you have the courage to keep fighting, there are people – like the ones at IJF – who will fight alongside you.”**

**Ross K.**

## Lloyd L., Vietnam Veteran

**“I’m so grateful that because of IJF’s help, I can finally use my house. I can live my life again.”**

**Lloyd L.**

At 75 years old, Lloyd carries with him the scars and memories of his service in Vietnam, where an explosion ravaged his legs, leaving him with severe nerve damage and a lifelong reliance on leg braces. Due to his service connected disability, Lloyd was having challenges navigating the stairs in his home. After numerous failed attempts to obtain a stairlift, Lloyd’s journey took a positive turn when he discovered Illinois Joining Forces

(IJF).’ The Semper Fi America Fund, working in conjunction with IJF, stepped in to provide Lloyd with the stairlift he needed. The restoration of mobility within his home brought a renewed sense of independence.



# Looking Forward

## Increased formalization of the Veterans Support Community (VSC) model

Thanks to the generous support of our donors, we now have funding to foster the development of local Veteran Support Community hubs throughout the state of Illinois. Veteran support communities bring together local Veteran resource providers and other community assets. The initiative will help more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of Illinois' Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF).



## IJF is committed to connecting service providers throughout the state.

IJF will increase the number of summits and diversify the locations to provide education and opportunities for collaboration throughout the state.

**IJF is committed to the development of a formalized partnership model** that will enhance individual provider relationships and streamline connections to reduce barriers to care.

**IJF is making strides to diversify funding streams to ensure future growth and sustainability.** IJF will continue to identify and secure funding from private, corporate, and governmental agencies that align with our mission and initiatives.



### OUR MISSION

**Bring together public, private, and government stakeholders to collaboratively support SMVF – to include caregivers and survivors – regardless of status.**



# Donor Spotlight

## ROBERT R. McCORMICK FOUNDATION

We have been honored by the longtime support of steadfast donors, including the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, which has been a pillar of support since IJF's founding over a decade ago. Established in 1955, the McCormick Foundation has a rich history of philanthropy and community engagement, making it a natural ally for IJF's mission. Over the years, the Foundation's consistent and generous contributions have not only provided vital financial resources but have also lent visibility to IJF's initiatives, helping us extend the organization's reach within Illinois.

In addition to financial support, the McCormick Foundation's advocacy has played a crucial role in attracting other influential donors to support IJF. The Dunham Foundation and the Duchossois Family Foundation were inspired by the McCormick Foundation's endorsement, further strengthening IJF's ability to serve Illinois' Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF).

**Thanks to the following donors whose support makes IJF's mission a reality.**



**Staff Sergeant Parker  
Gordon Fox Suicide  
Prevention Grant Program**



**DR. SCHOLL FOUNDATION**  
Innovation. Practicality. Hard Work. Compassion.

# Leadership

## Our Board of Directors



**Erica Borggren**

Board Chairwoman



**LTC (Ret.) John DeBlasio**

Board Vice Chairman



**Rep. Stephanie Kifowit**

Board Treasurer  
IL State Representative,  
84th District



**Matt Schachman**

Board Secretary  
Chamberlain Advisors,  
Founder



**Sen. Cristina Castro**

IL State Senator,  
22nd District



**Megan Everett**

Robert R McCormick  
Foundation,  
Director of Veterans Programs



**Nicholas Gross**

AAR,  
Senior VP of Integrated  
Solutions



**Maj. Gen Richard Neely**

Director,  
Illinois Department of Military  
Affairs



**Terry Prince**

Director,  
Illinois Department of  
Veterans Affairs



**John Schwan**

Investor



**Sen. Craig Wilcox**

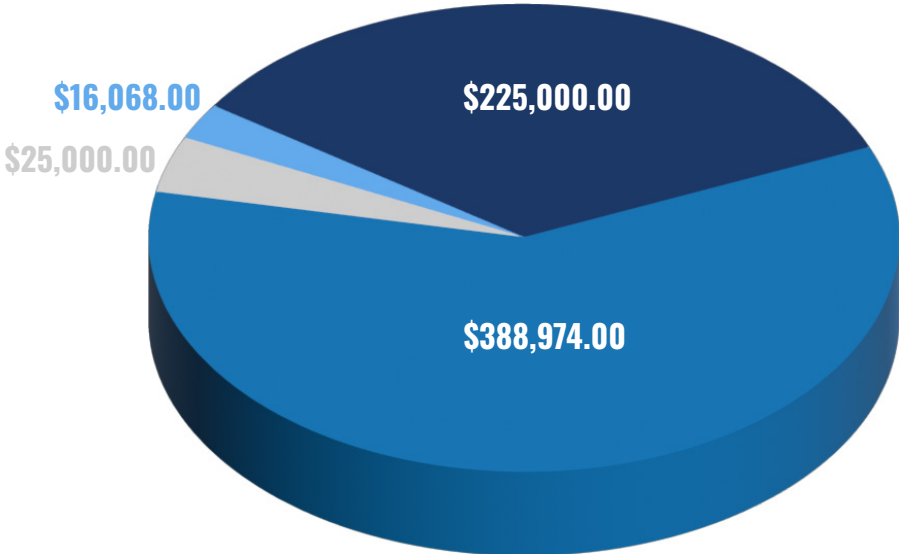
IL State Senator,  
32nd District



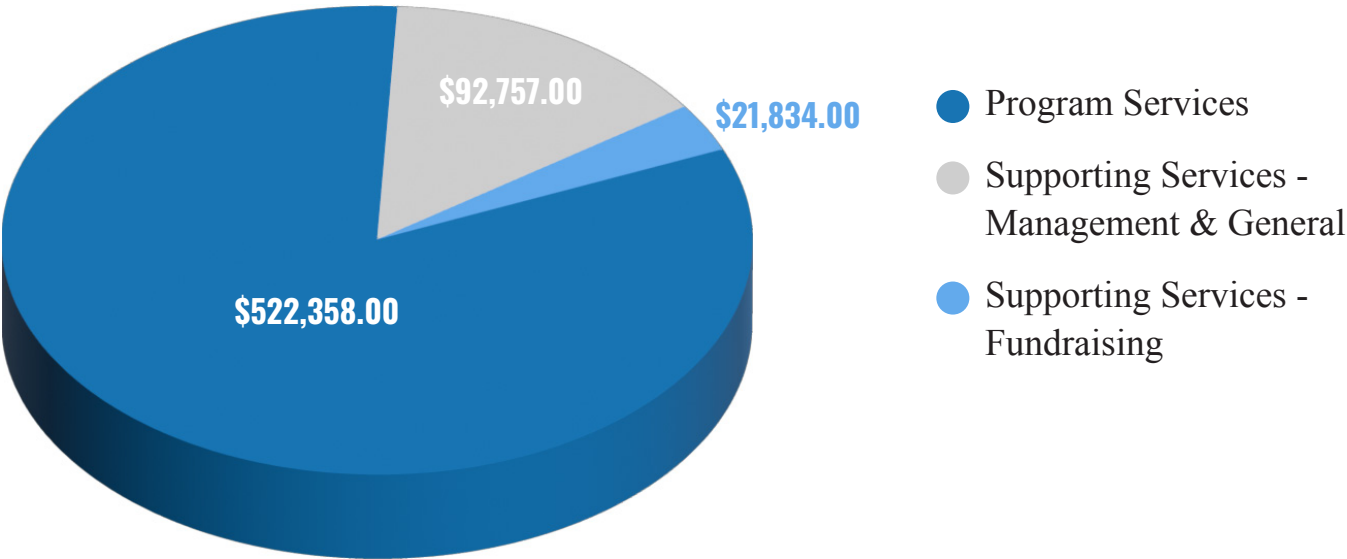
# Financials

## Revenue

- Grants
- Released from Restriction
- Contributions
- Fundraising



## Expenses



**“No one organization can do it all.  
But together we can do anything.”**



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**[www.illinoisjoiningforces.org](http://www.illinoisjoiningforces.org)**