

HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery

2024 Montana Opioid Abatement Trust Grants - 3rd Quarter

Veterans Navigation Network

Blake Fuhriman
2173 Overland Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

info@veteransnavigation.org
O: 406-698-5448
M: 406-698-5448

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2173 Overland Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

blake@veteransnavigation.org
O: 406-698-5448
M: 406-698-5448

Application Form

Region Selection

To collaborate with someone else on this request, click the blue "Collaborate" button in the top-right corner.

Project Name*

HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery

Select Abatement Region and/or Metro Region*

Select the Multi-County Abatement Region **and/or** the Metro Region you are requesting grant funds from. Select all regions that apply, for example if you are collaborating with multiple Counties **and/or** Abatement Regions select each region the program/project will serve. Click [HERE](#) for a detailed map of Multi-County Abatement Regions and Metro Abatement Regions

Yellowstone County

Application Overview

About the Organization/Program*

Give a brief description of the Organization/Program/Project. Include the mission statement and the services provided.

The mission of Veterans Navigation Network (VNN) is to meet the transition needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). VNN does this through one-on-one resource counseling, case management, peer mentorship, advocacy, social and informational events. Federal & state VA benefits, nonprofit, faith-based, & local government services improve quality of life, but only if the veteran is aware of the resources.

This is VNN's role: connecting SMVF with healthcare resources, behavioral health options, legal, employment, education, fitness, homeless & suicide prevention, referrals for equine therapy and canine service animal training, assistance with VA disability compensation, discharge upgrades, survivor benefits, and much more.

VNN has directly assisted over 1,000 SMVF since its inception in late October 2019. Additionally, VNN is the lead agency for the Eastern MT Veteran Service Provider Network, a member of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley, helped revitalize the Montana Governor's Challenge to End Veteran Suicide in February 2024, and stood up the MT Behavioral Health Advisory Council Veterans Subcommittee in June 2024.

What category does the program fit into*

Check the category/categories the program fits into. You may select more than one option.

Click [HERE](#) for a list of approved opioid remediation uses

Recovery

Exhibit E List of Opioid Remediation Uses

Schedule A - select all that apply

- C. PREGNANT & POSTPARTUM WOMEN
- E. EXPANSION OF WARM HAND-OFF PROGRAMS AND RECOVERY SERVICES

Exhibit E List of Opioid Remediation Uses

Schedule B - select all that apply

- B. SUPPORT PEOPLE IN TREATMENT & RECOVERY
- C. CONNECTIONS TO CARE
- D. ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE-INVOLVED PERSONS
- E. NEEDS OF PREGNANT/PARENTING WOMEN, BABIES W/ NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME
- J. LEADERSHIP, PLANNING, & COORDINATION

How does the program meet the Opioid Remediation Guidelines*

In detail, describe how the program fits into the approved Opioid Remediation Guidelines selected in the above question.

Please be specific

Support People in Treatment & Recovery:

Resource Navigation and Case Management: These services provide veterans with the necessary support to access and stay engaged in treatment programs, including those addressing opioid use disorder. VNN assists veterans in finding appropriate healthcare, behavioral health, suicide prevention, housing, employment, education, and peer mentorship, all crucial for opioid use prevention and supporting individuals in recovery.

Connections to Care:

Resource Navigation and Peer Mentorship: VNN's focus on connecting veterans with healthcare, mental health support, and social services ensures that individuals struggling with opioid addiction are linked to comprehensive care networks, especially in rural areas.

Address the Needs of Criminal Justice-Involved Persons:

Advocacy and Case Management: VNN assists veterans involved in the criminal justice system, including diversion programs (pre-plea), by navigating resources and advocating for treatment rather than incarceration where appropriate. This approach aligns with efforts to support veterans reentering society and recovering from opioid addiction.

Needs of Pregnant/Parenting Women and Babies with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS):

Female Veterans: VNN's case management and resource navigation can address the needs of pregnant or parenting female veterans. By connecting them to specialized care and support networks, VNN indirectly supports the well-being of babies with NAS.

Leadership, Planning, & Coordination:

Collaboration and Coordination: VNN's role in leading initiatives like the MT Behavioral Health Advisory Council Veterans Subcommittee and the Eastern MT Veteran Service Provider Network highlights its commitment to leadership and coordination in addressing veterans' needs, including those related to opioid addiction. VNN's approach ensures that veterans receive coordinated care across multiple sectors, enhancing the overall effectiveness of opioid remediation efforts.

New Program or Existing*

Is the funding intended for a new program or to expand an existing program?

A proposed supplement or expansion to a program.

Fiscal Information

Requested Amount*

\$423,632.00

Program Budget*

How will the funds be allocated? Attach a detailed line item budget breakdown for the program. If the funds are intended for a multi-year program please specify the amount budgeted for each year.

HeroPath Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery Budget 09.05.2024 1455 MM.pdf

Multi-Region funding

If funding is being requested from multiple abatement regions attach a detailed breakdown of amount requested from each region.

Multi-Region approval/denial

Does the application need to be approved by all regions to effectively accomplish it's goals?

No

Source of Funding*

Does the program currently receive funding from another source? If yes, please explain in detail. (i.e. amount, funding source, etc.)

Grant funding is intended for the creation or expansion of opioid prevention, treatment, and recovery projects. The money is **NOT** meant to replace or supplant existing funding.

No

Do you have a Fiscal Agent*

No

Multi-Region request funding additional information

Regional Funding

Please explain in detail the effectiveness of the program, for each region, if not every region approves the application.

N/A. The program will only serve one region, the Yellowstone County/Billings metro area/Region 3.

Program Abstract

Program Description*

Describe the objectives of this project. Provide a detailed overview of the program, including its purpose, priorities & objectives, and intended results.

VNN's HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery is designed to address the challenges faced by veterans struggling with opioid use disorder (OUD). The program aims to enhance the quality of life for veterans by providing critical support and resources, suicide prevention, facilitating access to treatment and recovery services, and ensuring veterans have the tools they need to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

The primary purpose of the program is to mitigate the impact of opioid use disorder among veterans, via prevention and recovery efforts. By offering a combination of direct support services, resource navigation, and strategic partnerships, the program seeks to reduce opioid-related harm and improve overall outcomes for veterans. This initiative is rooted in the belief that every veteran deserves access to quality care and the opportunity to lead a healthy, productive life.

Key priorities and objectives:

Objective: Connect veterans to comprehensive OUD treatment options, including detoxification services, medication-assisted treatment (MAT), and recovery support.

Priority: Ensure that all veterans, particularly those in underserved or rural areas, have access to high-quality, evidence-based treatment options.

Objective: Provide personalized navigation and case management services to help veterans access essential resources such as healthcare, housing, legal assistance, and employment opportunities.

Priority: Empower veterans to overcome barriers to prevent opioid use and ensure recovery of those with OUD by connecting them with resources and support systems.

Objective: Offer financial assistance to veterans for critical needs such as rent deposits, application fees, and first and last month's rent.

Priority: Address the social determinants of health by ensuring that veterans have stable housing and other basic necessities, which are crucial for successful recovery.

Objective: Utilize peer mentors to leverage the experiences of fellow veterans to provide emotional and practical support throughout the recovery process.

Priority: Foster a sense of community and mutual support among veterans, which is essential for long-term recovery and reintegration.

Intended Results

The program aims to prevent opioid use and opioid-related overdoses, hospitalizations, and fatalities among veterans.

Veterans will experience enhanced access to healthcare, housing, and employment, resulting in improved overall well-being and quality of life.

Through financial assistance for basic needs, the program will help veterans achieve housing stability and reduce the risk of homelessness, which is a significant barrier to recovery.

The peer mentoring component will create strong, supportive networks that encourage sustained recovery and reintegration into the community.

The program will build VNN's capacity to continue offering high-quality, veteran-centered care, ensuring that the needs of veterans are met both now and in the future.

Program Reach

If you are requesting funds from multiple Abatement Regions please specify how your program serves each region.

Be specific.

N/A The program will only serve one region, the Yellowstone County/Billings metro area/Region 3.

Specific Goals*

What are the specific goals of the program? List several goals the program hopes to accomplish and how the program intends to meet these goals.

Goal: Provide veterans with financial support to cover essential living expenses, such as rent deposits, application fees, and first and last month's rent, to prevent homelessness and promote stability.

- Allocate a portion of the program's budget specifically for assisting veterans with housing-related expenses, reducing the risk of homelessness during the recovery process.

Goal: Build a robust peer mentoring program that connects veterans in recovery with trained peers who have successfully navigated similar challenges.

- Provide specialized training for peer mentors, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to effectively support others in recovery.

Goal: Ensure that veterans receive coordinated, holistic care that addresses not only their OUD but also other physical, mental, and social health needs.

- Implement comprehensive case management services that coordinate care across multiple providers and services, ensuring that veterans receive the full spectrum of support they need.

Goal: Establish a sustainable program model that can continue to serve veterans in the long term and adapt to emerging needs.

- Invest in ongoing training for VNN staff to stay updated on the latest evidence-based practices for treating OUD and supporting veterans.

Goal: Address the co-occurring mental health conditions that often accompany opioid use disorder, such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

- Provide integrated behavioral health services that treat both OUD and co-occurring mental health disorders simultaneously, ensuring a comprehensive approach to recovery.

Goal: Support veterans in achieving economic stability and self-sufficiency by helping them access education and employment opportunities.

- Partner with local employers, vocational training programs, MT Job Service, and nonprofits to connect veterans with job opportunities that match their skills and interests.

Goal: Involve family members in the recovery process to create a strong support system that enhances the veteran's chances of successful long-term recovery.

- Provide educational resources and workshops for family members on topics such as coping strategies, communication skills, and understanding addiction.

Goal: Combat the social isolation that many veterans experience by fostering connections and community engagement.

- Organize community events, volunteer opportunities, and recreational activities that encourage veterans to engage with their community and build social networks.

Evaluation Method*

Describe how you plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and what the method for evaluation will be.

The program will be evaluated through a comprehensive, multi-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation will be designed to measure the program's impact on veterans' health, well-being, and overall quality of life, as well as the program's efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its stated goals.

The primary objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the program's impact on reducing opioid use and related harms among veterans.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of resource navigation and support services in improving veterans' access to treatment, housing, and employment.
- Determine the program's success in enhancing veterans' mental health, social support networks, and overall stability.
- Measure the satisfaction of program participants and identify areas for improvement.
- Provide actionable insights for continuous program improvement and sustainability.

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis:

- Pre- and Post-Program Surveys
- Tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), like: number of veterans successfully connected to treatment services and number of veterans obtaining or retaining employment.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis:

- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Stakeholder Feedback

Outcome and Impact Evaluation:

- Participants will be tracked over time to assess long-term outcomes, such as sustained recovery, stable housing, and ongoing employment. This will involve follow-up surveys and check-ins at 6-month and 12-month intervals after program completion.

Program Efficiency Evaluation:

- The program will assess the timeliness, accessibility, and responsiveness of its services. This will include evaluating how quickly veterans are connected to needed resources, the adequacy of service coverage in rural areas, and participant satisfaction with the ease of accessing services.

Evaluation Reporting and Continuous Improvement:

- The program will produce regular evaluation reports (quarterly and annually) that summarize findings, track progress toward goals, and identify emerging trends. These reports will be shared with program staff, participants, stakeholders, and funders to maintain transparency and accountability.

Data Source*

What information are you going to collect or use to demonstrate you have accomplished your goals?

To demonstrate the accomplishment of VNN's HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery goals, a variety of data and information will be collected. This data will provide evidence of the program's effectiveness and allow for a thorough evaluation of its impact on the veteran population it serves. Below is a detailed list of the information that will be collected or used to demonstrate goal achievement:

- Participant Demographic and Background Information
- Substance Use Data
 - History of substance use treatment (e.g., prior treatment attempts, types of treatment)
- Access to and Utilization of Treatment Services
 - Type of treatment services accessed (e.g., medication-assisted treatment, counseling, detoxification)
- Housing Stability Data
 - Duration of stable housing achieved (tracked at 3-month, 6-month, and 12-month intervals)
- Employment and Economic Stability Data
 - Employment status at program entry, mid-point, and exit
- Mental Health and Well-Being Data
 - Self-reported mental health status (e.g., levels of depression, anxiety, PTSD symptoms) at program entry, mid-point, and exit
 - Number of participants connected to mental health services (e.g., counseling, therapy)
 - Use of mental health services (frequency and type of services utilized)
- Social Support and Community Engagement Data
 - Participation in peer mentoring programs
- Recidivism and Legal Outcomes Data
 - Recidivism rates among participants (tracked at 6-month and 12-month intervals)
- Participant Satisfaction and Feedback
 - Participant satisfaction surveys (administered at mid-point and exit)
 - Qualitative feedback from focus groups and one-on-one interviews
- Longitudinal Outcome Tracking
 - Follow-up surveys and check-ins at 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month intervals after program exit
 - Long-term outcomes in areas such as sustained recovery, housing stability, and employment

Awareness*

How do you plan to create awareness of this program? Briefly describe what action the program plans to take to create awareness in the community.

To ensure the success of the Program, creating broad awareness within the community is essential. The program will employ a multi-faceted outreach strategy to inform veterans, their families, local service providers, and the broader community about the resources and support available through the program. Below is a brief description of the actions the program plans to take to create awareness:

- Forge partnerships with local VA facilities, community health centers, veteran service organizations, the Yellowstone County Detention Center, Veterans Treatment Court/CAMO, and non-profits. By collaborating

with these organizations, VNN will leverage existing networks to reach veterans in need of opioid remediation services.

- Launch targeted outreach campaigns specifically designed to reach veterans and their families. This will include distributing informational materials at VA clinics, VA Vet Centers, tribal offices, college veteran resource centers, veteran service organizations, and community centers frequented by veterans.
- Utilize digital marketing strategies, including the creation of a dedicated program page on the VNN website, as well as social media campaigns across platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. These platforms will be used to share success stories, informational videos, and updates about the program.
- Host community events, workshops, and informational sessions in collaboration with local organizations. These events will provide an opportunity to educate veterans and their families about upstream prevention, opioid use disorder, and the support available.
- Share testimonials and success stories from veterans who have benefited from the program. These stories will be featured on the program's website, social media channels, and in printed materials.
- Establish and maintain a strong referral network with local hospitals, mental health clinics, shelters, veteran support services, the Eastern MT Veteran Service Provider Network, the Governor's Challenge team, and the Behavioral Health Advisory Council Veterans Subcommittee. Provide these organizations with informational brochures and contact details to refer veterans to the program.
- Engage local leaders, veteran advocates, and community influencers, to endorse and promote the program. Participate in community advisory boards and coalitions focused on veteran issues and substance use, e.g. Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley and Substance Abuse Connect.

Additional Documents

Use this section to upload or explain any additional information regarding the program/organization. ie. a detailed budget projection, program/organization history, etc.

Upload #1

VNN Annual Report 2023 (2).pdf

Upload #2

Upload #3

Additional Information

Sustainability of HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery is addressed in the attached budget.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- HeroPath Veterans Opioid Use Prevention and Recovery Budget 09.05.2024 1455 MM.pdf
- VNN Annual Report 2023 (2).pdf



VETERANS NAVIGATION NETWORK

Facilitating Veteran Success in our Community

Veterans Navigation Network's HeroPath:

Veterans Opioid Use Prevention Recovery Budget for 2025-2027

1. Personnel Costs:

- Full-Time Resource Navigator (\$22/hour, 40 hours per week, 52 weeks, w/ 25% benefits)
- Salary: $\$22 \times 40 \text{ hours/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$45,760$
- Fringe Benefits (25%): $\$45,760 \times 0.25 = \$11,440$
- Total Personnel Costs: $\$45,760 + \$11,440 + \$20,000 = \$57,200$.

2. Contracted Mental Health Professional*:

- Licensed Addiction Counselor (LAC): 20 hours/week at \$100/hour
- Total Cost: $\$100/\text{hour} \times 20 \text{ hours/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$104,000$
- Grant year one only. *

3. Transportation Costs:

- Uber Rides: 12 rides per week, \$20 per ride, 52 weeks
- $\$20 \times 12 \text{ rides/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$12,480$
- Gas Cards: 4 cards per week, \$35 per card, 52 weeks
- $\$35 \times 4 \text{ cards/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$7,280$
- Employee Local Travel:
 - Mileage Reimbursement: Assuming 50 miles per week at \$0.655 per mile for 52 weeks
 - $50 \text{ miles/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} \times \$0.655/\text{mile} = \$1,702.00$
- Total Transportation Costs: $\$12,480 + \$7,280 + \$1,702 = \$21,462$

4. Conference Attendance Costs:

- Registration Fees: $\$1,000 \text{ per conference} \times 2 \text{ conferences} = \$2,000$
- Travel (Airfare): $\$750 \text{ per conference} \times 2 \text{ conferences} = \$1,500$
- Lodging: $\$300 \text{ per night} \times 3 \text{ nights per conference} \times 2 \text{ conferences} = \$1,800$
- Meals: $\$60 \text{ per day} \times 3 \text{ days} \times 2 \text{ conferences} = \360

501(C)(3) 84-3207666

<https://www.veteransnavigation.org>

info@veteransnavigation.org

<https://www.facebook.com/VetNavNet/>

1-406-435-9308



- Miscellaneous Expenses: \$100 per conference × 2 conferences = \$200
- Total Conference Costs: \$5,860

5. Program Supplies & Materials:

- Educational Materials: \$1,500
- Laptop and accessories: \$1,500
- Printing Materials: \$500
- Office Supplies: \$500
- Total Supplies, Equipment & Materials: \$4,000

6. Mentoring Training Costs:

- Facilitator Fees: Estimated at \$1,000 for a 1-day training session.
- Training Materials: \$200
- Venue Costs: \$300 (if not held at an in-house location)
- Total Mentoring Training Costs: \$1,500

7. Assistance with Basic Needs:

- Rent Deposits, Application Fees, First and Last Month Rent: \$35,000

- VNN does partner with local agencies (Veterans Inc., Volunteers of America) that can provide some of these services, however, Veterans Inc. and Volunteers of America (VOA) are currently facing challenges that limit their ability to take on new veteran clients. One major reason is funding constraints. Both organizations receive funding from federal programs, such as the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. However, funding for these programs fluctuates based on federal budgets, grant renewals, and increased demand for services.

In recent months, high demand for services, combined with delays in funding (running out of funds a couple months before the end of the federal FY (September 30) meaning they can take on no new veterans until after the start of the new FY and then usually not until a couple of months after that) has put pressure on their capacity to serve new clients.

Additionally, VNN provides one-on-one resource counseling and case management that is highly tailored to the individual needs of the veteran. By focusing on specific barriers to housing, such as legal challenges or unique health issues, VNN offers more personalized support than larger organizations with system-wide standardized procedures.

VNN may be able to assist veterans who do not meet the stringent criteria of federal housing programs, such as SSVF. Because VNN they may have more flexibility in serving veterans who are excluded from traditional VA-funded programs.

Furthermore, VNN offers peer mentorship and advocacy services, which can be crucial for veterans facing complex challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, or substance use. This peer-based approach may help veterans navigate bureaucratic systems more effectively and find housing through non-traditional avenues, where national organizations may be limited to specific funding guidelines.

8. Administrative Costs:

- Program Management & Overhead: 10% of total program costs
- Total non-personnel costs: \$16,470 (Transportation) + \$5,860 (Conference) + \$2,000 (Supplies) + \$1,500 (Mentoring Training) + \$35,000 (Basic Needs) = \$60,830
- Contract Monitoring: \$8,000
- Contract Monitoring/Administrative Costs: $\$60,830 \times 0.10 + \$8,000 = \$14,830$.

Total Program Budget:

1. Personnel Costs: \$77,200
2. Contracted Mental Health Professional: \$104,000 *
3. Transportation Costs: \$21,462
4. Conference Costs: \$5,860
5. Program Supplies, Equipment & Materials: \$4,000
6. Mentoring Training Costs: \$1,500
7. Assistance with Basic Needs: \$35,000
8. Administrative Costs: \$14,830.

Total Budget: \$263,816 for 2025 *

Total Budget: \$159,816 for 2026 *

The projected number of veterans VNN's HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Use Prevention Recovery program could assist annually is 75 veterans. This estimate is based on one VNN Resource Navigator (with LAC involvement) providing intensive, one-on-one support across various locations, including jails, addiction treatment centers, and VA residential treatment centers. The actual number will depend on factors like case complexity, geographic area, and additional services provided.

The annual cost per veteran served would be approximately \$3,413 (\$2,131 after year one *). Our VNN Resource Navigator (with LAC involvement) will provide one-on-one services focused on opioid addiction prevention and recovery, including resource navigation, peer



mentorship, and assistance with housing, employment, on-going treatment, etc., Similar programs that involve comprehensive care (including mental health support, addiction recovery, and housing assistance) often range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 per participant annually. Given this, a cost of \$3,413 per veteran is reasonable and cost-effective, especially if the program yields positive long-term outcomes, such as preventing homelessness, reducing recidivism, and supporting recovery.

***Sustainability:** Our initial approach of contracting the LAC is to begin services as soon as possible. The strategy to sustain HeroPath: Veterans Opioid Prevention and Recovery beyond the first-year grant period will include the following:

- Leverage the VA's Community Care Program, which allows veterans to receive care from community providers, including mental health services, when the VA cannot provide timely access. By enrolling in this program, the provider can bill the VA for services provided to veterans referred through this pathway. The process of registering the LAC with the third-party administrator (currently Triwest) to receive referrals from the VA and thus, reimbursement, will take a minimum of 90 days. Having the LAC services funded via the grant during the first year will ensure our veterans receive high quality, timely care from the start of the program.
- Work with private insurance companies to ensure the mental health provider is an in-network provider. Many veterans have private health insurance through employers or spouses, and by billing these insurers, the program can offset some of the costs associated with providing care.
- Enroll the mental health provider as a Medicaid and Medicare provider. Many veterans, especially those who are disabled or older, qualify for these programs. Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates can help cover the costs of mental health services provided to eligible veterans.
- VNN will pursue grants from government agencies, private foundations, and corporations to fund mental health and other services for veterans.
- Examine partnering with the 13th Judicial District Yellowstone County Veterans Treatment Court, CAMO/Courts Assisting Military Offenders for a VNN MHP to provide services.
- Second year funding (\$159,816) from the Montana Opioid Abatement Trust.
- Third year funding will not include funding from the Trust.



**SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS,
EMPOWERING THEIR FUTURE**

**2023
ANNUAL REPORT**

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What Veterans Have to Say About Us:

“VNN went above and beyond to help me.”

“Got me on the right path after 20 years of not knowing where to start.”

“They care.”

“They were awesome to work with.”

“I was confused and had some questions regarding veteran health care. VNN helped me out and pointed me in the right direction.”

“Great resource. Very knowledgeable.”

ABOUT VNN



Veteran's Navigation Network (VNN) mission is to facilitate a smooth transition for our Nation's Service Members, from military service to civilian life.

To do this, VNN creates a network that strives to allow Veterans to succeed through job placement, physical and mental health, and linking the other services available, by creating a network of support throughout the community. Peer to peer mentorship among our Veterans, along with help and guidance from non-military members of the community will be other tools used to help navigate.

This is VNN's role: connecting veterans/families with healthcare resources, behavioral health options, legal, employment, education, fitness, homeless & suicide prevention, referrals for equine therapy and canine service animal training, assistance with VA disability compensation, discharge upgrades, survivor benefits, and more.

The successful transition of our Nation's Heroes will create success within our communities through the years of leadership and life experience that they gained while serving. As our community provides for us, so too will VNN provide for the community through volunteer work that is beneficial to our veterans as well. This will help not only our community, but our Country as the Veterans Navigation Network continues to spread Nationwide.

VNN's peer mentor program has proven veterans are better served by a support system that includes someone who understands the military experience and culture.

In addition to the core work that we carry out daily to improve the lives of our fellow veterans, we have had a few of our other major accomplishments to date:



- VNN launched a community-based TV show that highlights veterans, service providers, and benefits available to veterans.



- VNN participated in standing up the Behavioral Health Advisory Council's Veterans Sub Committee, ensuring that veterans and their families have a voice in Behavioral Health needs in Montana. The subcommittee will enable SMFV to benefit from policy improvements and mental health block grant funding.



- VNN is working with (not so) Average Jane to create a Female Combat Veteran Retreat, which includes resource navigation and follow-up from VNN post retreat.



- VNN partnered with Rocky Mountain College Occupational Therapy to establish a community advisory board and to assess issues and determine solutions. One issue identified was the impact of unhealthy sleep which has led to continuing sleep studies and interventions to improve veteran quality of life, which was supported by funding from the Billings Community Foundation.

- VNN partnered with the Breakfast Exchange Club (BEC) of Billings to coordinate service providers during the 2023 Food Truck Battle, which saw 30 veteran service providers, 53 food trucks and over 6,400 attendees. Funds raised benefit veteran services providers.

- VNN holds our own events, including VetConnect social events attended by over 350 SMFV and community resource fairs attended by nearly 2,000 SMFV since 2022.



- VNN is the lead agency for the Eastern MT Veteran Service Provider Network. This network consists of government agencies, non-profits & faith-based organizations assisting veterans/families.
- VNN is a member of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley and helped revitalize the Montana Governor’s Challenge to End Veteran Suicide. Both the coalition and the challenge are looking for innovative and effective ways to lower veteran suicide.
- An initiative, supported by a grant from the MT Healthcare Foundation, has begun strengthening VNN’s relationships with the twelve Native American Tribes/ Nations and the five Urban Indian Organizations across Montana to better support Native American veterans through collaboration.

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER



BLAKE FUHRIMAN
Founder & Executive Director

Dear Supporters and Friends,

As the Founder and Executive Director of Veterans Navigation Network (VNN), I am honored to share the remarkable progress and impact we have achieved over the past year. Our mission to meet the transition needs of veterans through one-on-one resource counseling, case management, peer mentorship, advocacy, and community events continues to drive our efforts every day.

Since our inception in October 2019, VNN has directly assisted over 1000 veterans. This past fiscal year has been particularly significant. We have expanded our outreach and services, establishing new programs and partnerships that enhance the support we offer to veterans and their families.

Our peer mentor program, which began formally in 2022, now includes 11 volunteer mentors who support 61 veterans. These relationships have proven that **veterans are best served by a support system that includes someone who understands the military experience and culture.** As a fellow veteran, I can tell you that through our peer mentor program, you'll find a lifeline in someone who truly understands your journey—someone who stands by your side and in some cases even helps save lives. Our mentors and staff have worked tirelessly to provide a supportive relationship, leading to increased goal accomplishment and better lives for the veterans that we serve.



VNN Founder/Executive Director Blake Fuhriman received the 2022 Governor's Veterans Commendation & in February 2024 he was named to Billings 40 Under 40 because of his positive contributions to the veteran community.

We have also focused on addressing specific issues such as unhealthy sleep among veterans. Through our partnership with Rocky Mountain College Occupational Therapy, we participated on a community advisory board to assess and find solutions, as well as getting veterans referred to the care they need. These interventions significantly improved the quality of life for many veterans.

VNN's collaboration with the Breakfast Exchange Club (BEC) of Billings during the 2023 Food Truck Battle was a resounding success, with 30 veteran service providers attending to connect with over 6,400 attendees. This event not only raised funds for veteran service providers but also fostered a sense of community and support.

We also provided opportunities for connection, comradery and purpose for veterans and their families, including VetConnect social gatherings and resource fairs, which have seen substantial attendance, with over 350 service members, veterans, and and their families (SMVF) participating in VetConnect events and nearly 2,000 attending our resource fairs since 2022. These events are crucial in connecting veterans with the resources and support they need as well as helping us to find the purpose and comradery that so many miss when leaving the military.

Looking ahead, we are committed to furthering our mission and expanding our reach. With three full-time employees and a dedicated team of volunteers, we continue to strive for excellence in serving our veteran community. I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support of our partners, donors, and volunteers who make our work possible.

Thank you for your continued dedication to Veterans Navigation Network. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of those who have served our country.

With gratitude,
Blake Fuhriman

Founder and Executive Director
Veterans Navigation Network



Watch our video on VNN by the founder.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



JIM SWAIN
President of VNN

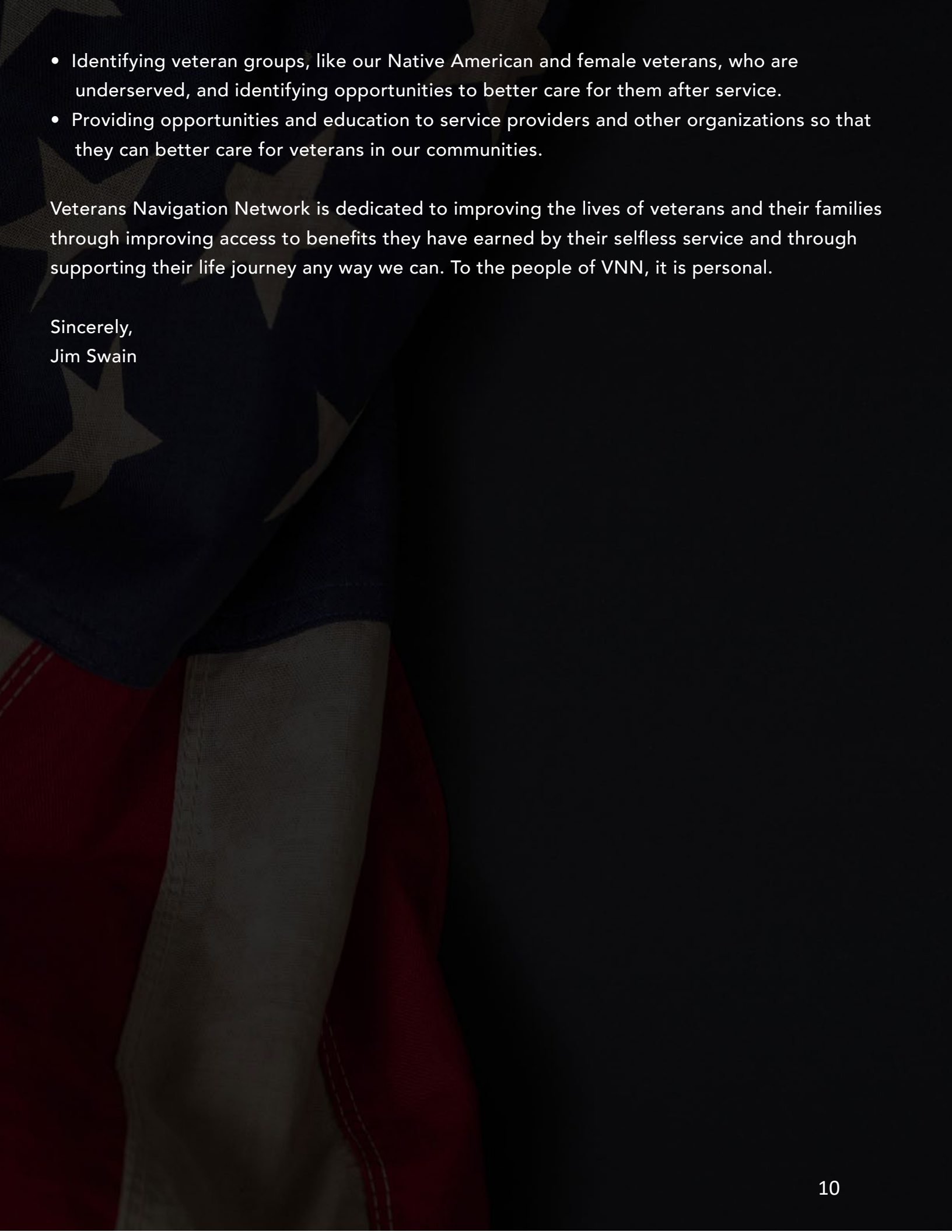
The past year has been a breakthrough for Veterans Navigation Network. We have grown from a fledgling organization with super committed volunteers and part time employees accomplishing more for the veteran community than ever thought possible to a stable provider of meaningful assistance and life changing support to hundreds of hero veterans and their families. We are proud of our accomplishments but never lose sight of the reality that we can never do enough to help the men and women who have sacrificed so much for each and every one of us.

A few of the highlights from the past year for VNN are worth celebrating!

- Worked with nearly 500 Veterans directly, connecting them and their families to resources to improve their lives.
- Served over 60 veterans through our Peer Mentor Program, pairing them with fellow veterans on their road to success.
- Participated in over 40 different events across Montana and beyond, connecting veterans and their families to the resources and benefits they have earned through service.

And we are just getting warmed up. VNN has ambitious plans for the coming year to improve the lives of those who have given so much to us all. They include:

- Expanding our physical presence beyond Billings, and into those communities that need us most.
- Reaching Veterans in rural areas to ensure they are connected to care and benefits.

- 
- Identifying veteran groups, like our Native American and female veterans, who are underserved, and identifying opportunities to better care for them after service.
 - Providing opportunities and education to service providers and other organizations so that they can better care for veterans in our communities.

Veterans Navigation Network is dedicated to improving the lives of veterans and their families through improving access to benefits they have earned by their selfless service and through supporting their life journey any way we can. To the people of VNN, it is personal.

Sincerely,
Jim Swain

STORIES OF IMPACT FROM 2023

READ SOME OF THE IMPACT THAT VETERANS NAVIGATION NETWORK AND OUR SUPPORTERS HAD IN CHANGING LIVES IN FISCAL YEAR 2024.

Note: Names have been changed to protect the privacy of our veterans.



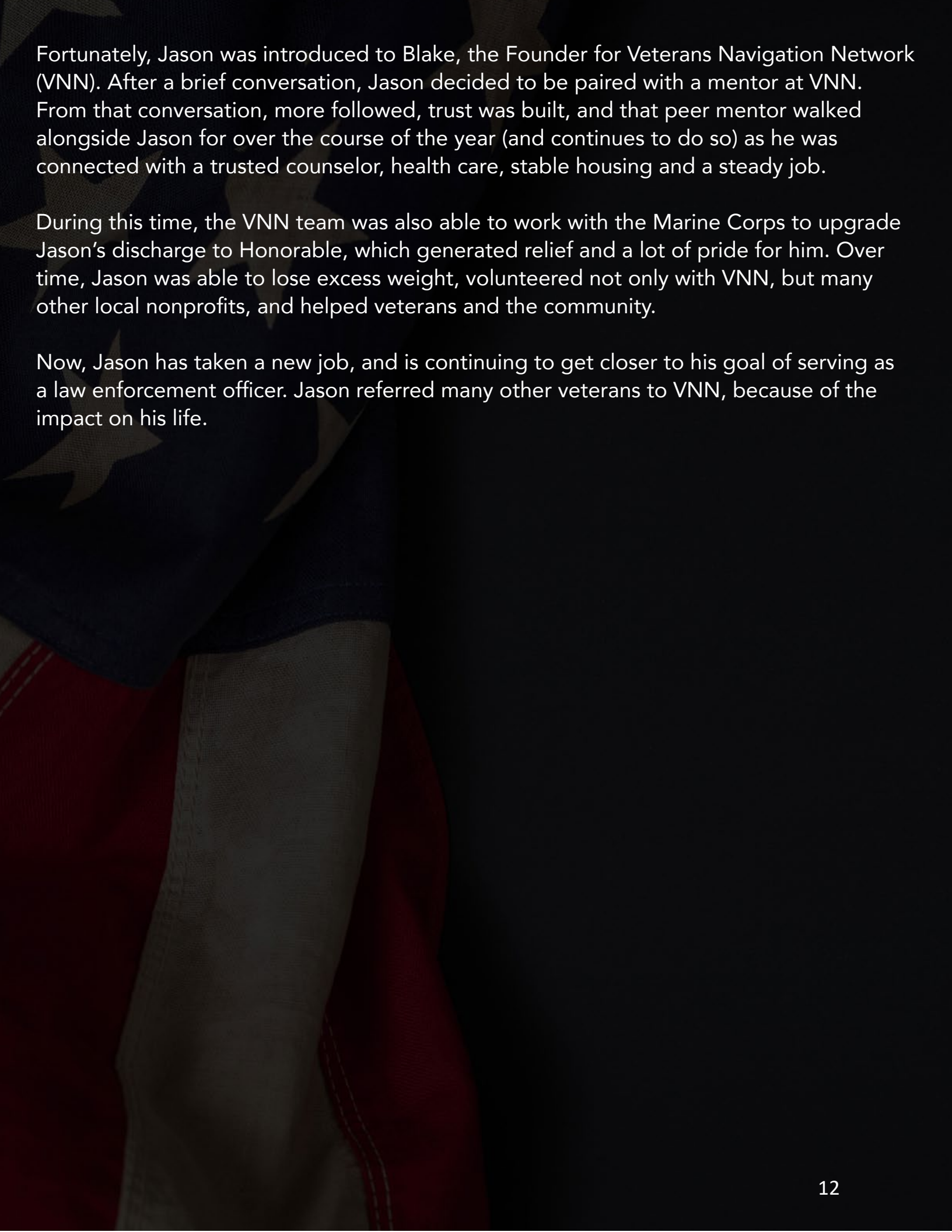
JASON

“VNN doesn’t just help, it gives veterans a reason to live.”

— Jason

Jason, a Marine veteran, had depression stemming from the suicide of another Marine during his time in service. That coupled with the unfortunately slow death of his mother due to cancer, led to him receiving a discharge that was less than honorable, instead of the treatment he desperately needed for his severe depression. Jason then moved to Montana to be with family, which should have been a support system for him. Instead, he ended up supporting them as they battled addiction and their own mental health.

Jason was upset over the type of discharge he received, lost interest in most things, had feelings of worthlessness, trouble concentrating and sleeping, with truly little hope for change. Because of that hopelessness, he began to think suicide was the way to end his pain, and even had a date circled on his calendar of when he would make that decision, if nothing changed in his life.



Fortunately, Jason was introduced to Blake, the Founder for Veterans Navigation Network (VNN). After a brief conversation, Jason decided to be paired with a mentor at VNN. From that conversation, more followed, trust was built, and that peer mentor walked alongside Jason for over the course of the year (and continues to do so) as he was connected with a trusted counselor, health care, stable housing and a steady job.

During this time, the VNN team was also able to work with the Marine Corps to upgrade Jason's discharge to Honorable, which generated relief and a lot of pride for him. Over time, Jason was able to lose excess weight, volunteered not only with VNN, but many other local nonprofits, and helped veterans and the community.

Now, Jason has taken a new job, and is continuing to get closer to his goal of serving as a law enforcement officer. Jason referred many other veterans to VNN, because of the impact on his life.



RYAN

Ryan, an Army veteran we've worked with was referred to VNN by a family member concerned about the vet's isolation and struggles with PTS and untreated TBI. VNN met with the veteran and discussed his mental health struggles, anger, suicidal ideation, how he copes, some constructive ways of addressing his PTS and his frustration and anger with the VA for denying his TBI was related to combat in Afghanistan.

By simply listening to the vet, it was quite apparent he suffered from TBI. VNN worked with the VA TBI coordinator to have him evaluated, which led to his TBI diagnosis and treatment. Having the VA finally acknowledge his TBI was combat related was a major relief.

Over time and treatment his ability to cope with both the PTS and TBI greatly improved. Work remains, but he's in a much better place.

He has volunteered for several VNN events and was interviewed by a local news station on the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.



MONICA

Separating service members, veterans and their families can face many daunting challenges due to military service. Far too often those challenges can lead to suicide. VNN recently assisted a 31-year-old surviving spouse, Monica and her daughter following the death by suicide of her Army husband who had two deployments.

The sudden, unexpected, and violent manner of death and the shock and trauma it caused will remain with our young widow for a lifetime. Emotional reactions are often complex and result in a bewildering range of feelings including guilt, anger, shame, rejection, sadness, and fear. People who have been bereaved by suicide may become vulnerable to thoughts of suicide themselves.

VNN was able to connect her with a support group, financial assistance for childcare, and eventually with VA benefits, including a monthly tax-free benefit payment, medical and education benefits.

VNN can never take away the pain of her loss, but VNN has been able to provide a safe place she can come to when needing help and at other times, simply a compassionate ear.


 Concerned Veterans of America Foundation
 and Veterans Navigation Network (VNN)
will be hosting a


COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR

February 10, 2024 • 10 am - 4 pm

Billings Hotel & Convention Center
 1223 Mallowney Lane
 Billings, MT

Doors Open at 9:30 am

Opening ceremony: 10 am with Colors presentation by Apsáalooke Women Warriors and Lockwood HS Jr ROTC.
Guest speaker: Randy Couture, Actor, MMA Champion, Entrepreneur, and Army veteran.
50 Service providers: tables open following the ceremony.
Professional headshots: for Job applications, LinkedIn social media profiles, company websites, etc.
3 breakout sessions: VA Overview, info the PACT Act, and how to prepare for college or a trade.

Find more info at: <https://fb.me/c/1C4wkj9RN>










ERIC

An Air Force veteran, Eric, who attended one of VNN’s annual community resource fairs had recently moved to Billings, was looking for work and trying to cope with anxiety, depression, and some “dark thoughts”.

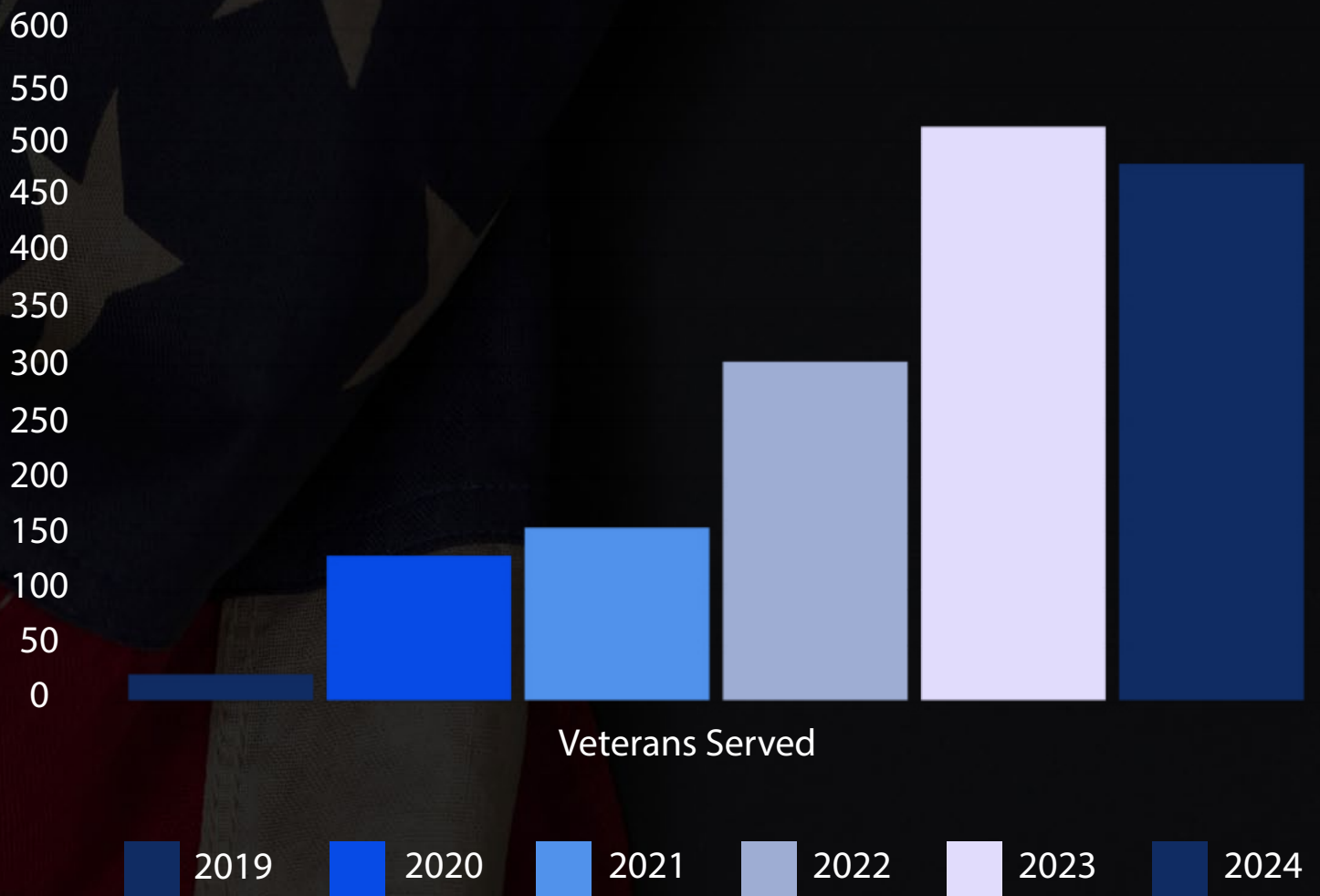
VNN worked to get the vet enrolled in VA healthcare and connected to behavioral health. He was able to find employment through a partner and what thrilled him the most was when VNN connected him to an excellent equine therapy non-profit just north of Billings.

Through his involvement with VNN, he said he was, “able to find joy in life” once again.

OTHER KEY AREAS OF IMPACT OVER THE LAST YEAR

-  **1000 Veterans**
Directly assisted since its inception in late October 2019
-  **582 Total Individuals Served**
One-On-One Resource Navigation And/Or Peer Mentorship
-  **33 Community Events**
Total Community Outreach Events Attended
-  **564 Service And Family Members**
Service And Family Members Reached at Mt. Yellow Ribbon Events
-  **Reaching Over 6400 Attendees**
Collaboration With Breakfast Exchange Club Of Billings: Coordinated Service Providers For Food Truck Battle Events
-  **14 Mentors | 56 Mentor/Mentee Matches**
Peer Mentor/Mentee Program
-  **34 Service Providers, 63 Attendees**
VNN Community Resource Fair (02/07/2023)
-  **75 Attendees**
Vet Connect Barbecue
-  **110 Attendees**

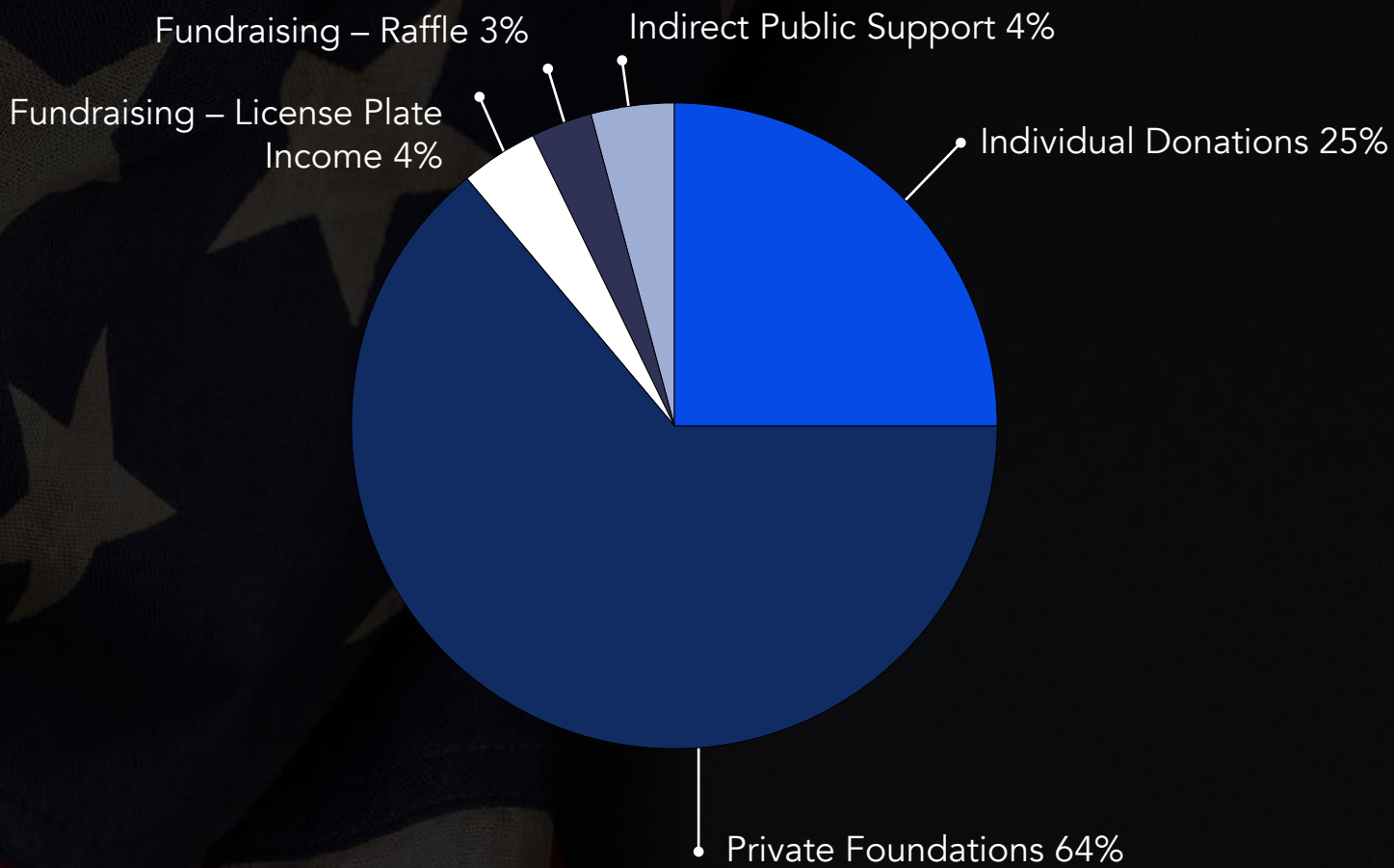
VETERANS NAVIGATION NETWORK'S IMPACT BY YEAR



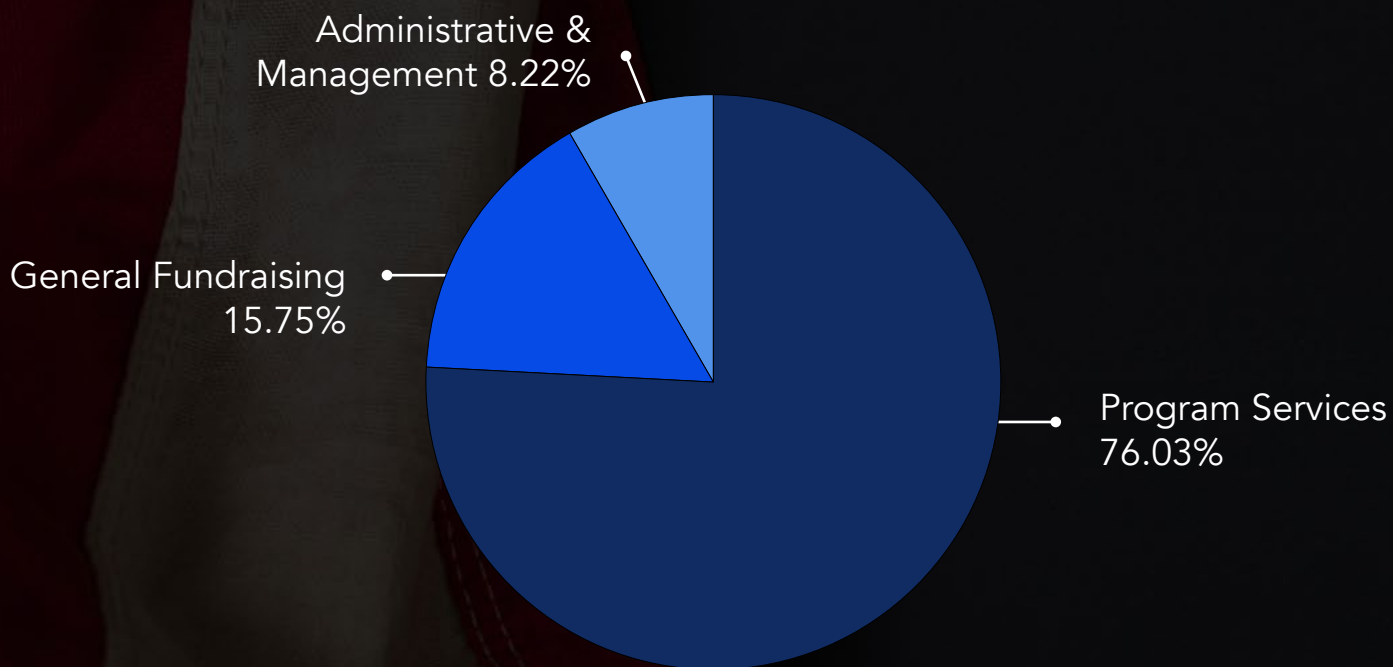
All numbers are based off of one on one Veteran Resource Navigation and does not include any numbers or Veterans served during events and Resource Fairs. *2024 Current is data as of July 1, 2024.

FINANCIALS BY THE NUMBERS

2023 INCOME



2023 EXPENSES



How You Can Support Us



Make A Donation

Whether it is a one-time gift or a monthly contribution, giving to our organization ensures our ability to continue to provide resources to the Veterans in our community and beyond.



Make A Purchase

We have merchandise promoting VNN, funny military t-shirts, and often times Raffle Tickets for sale. The proceeds from all of these events go directly to supporting veterans.



Get A License Plate

If you live in Montana you can purchase a sponsored license plate for your vehicle designed by local artist Elyssa Leininger (www.elyssaleiningerart.com).

"My wife and I chose to work with and give to Veteran's Navigation Network because of their unique approach and desire to meet veterans needs. While we haven't served in the military, we have friends and family who have and who have suffered the affects. We have a deep appreciation for the work VNN does. The organization seeks to meet any and all needs that may arise during the transition to civilian lives."

— Stephen & Sarah R., Donors

How You Can Get Involved



Volunteer

Volunteer with Veterans Navigation Network. Even if you don't see an opportunity that you are interested in, please contact us so that we can get to know you, and find the volunteer opportunity that is right for you. Your time is extremely valuable to us, and we appreciate any of it that you are willing to give to support our Nation's veterans.

PEER MENTOR VOLUNTEER POSITION

A key component of Veterans Navigation Network (VNN) is our peer mentor program where veteran mentors provide peer-to-peer support to veteran participants (mentees). Veterans are better served by having a support system that includes someone who understands military experience and the different aspects of military culture. Mentors provide a supportive relationship and encourage, guide, and motivate mentees with entry and timely completion of a variety of tasks with the goal being successful readjust to civilian life.



501(C)(3) 84-3207666

www.veteransnavigation.org
info@veteransnavigation.org
www.facebook.com/VetNavNet/
1-406-435-9308