



# **Valhalla Veterans Services**

Annual Report 2021

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# Valhalla Veterans Services

Dear Friends,

Thankful. That is the word that comes to mind when I think about all the wonderful things that have happened over the last year. I am blessed to serve as the Executive Director in an organization which definitively and positively affects the ability of Veterans, Law Enforcement, Fire Fighters, and EMS to not only survive, but to thrive in a world that is, at times difficult to navigate.

I am so honored to be a part of what we accomplished this year. With your support, we:

- Provided 327 hours of intervention and follow-up counseling to Warriors in our community
- Conducted 4 Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Workshops, despite the COVID environment
- Conducted 2 Warriors Path to Peace groups
- Housed and Supported a Warrior-oriented, face-to-face recovery group
- Hired another full-time counselor

As you examine our report, we hope you'll join us in our fight to end Warrior Suicide by giving financially, volunteering, or participating in events. We can't win this fight without you.

Thank you for fighting for one more day.

Thankfully,

Eric Darling, Executive Director

# Mission

Valhalla Veterans Services is committed to ending suicide in the Warrior Community.

## Board and Staff

### Board Officers

**Robert Kerecman**, President

**John Wharton**, Vice-President

**Valarie Riggi**, Treasurer

**Lori Lavelle**, Secretary



### Board Members

**James Ashman**

**James Dixon**

**James Noone**

**Patrick Scarfo**



### Staff

Executive Director/Counselor:

**Eric Darling**

Clinical Supervisor:

**Dave Ulkoski**

Counselor:

**Jenny Johnson**

Insurance Billing:

**Dee Faatz**



# PROVIDING SERVICES AT NO COST TO WARRIORS

2021 continued to show an increase in the need for mental health services related to living in the new COVID world. One of the most significant drivers of suicide for Veterans is feelings of isolation and alienation. Unique groups for Veterans are an effective way to provide camaraderie and defeat feelings of isolation.

**Warrior's Path to Peace** Veterans, Law Enforcement, and Emergency management workers struggle with addiction, suicide, and other issues more than our citizen counterparts. The WP2P helps these men and women understand "why?" and learn the skills to find peace in a chaotic world.

**Permission to Speak Freely** This monthly meeting began as a need developed with the unrest that resulted from the US pulling out of Afghanistan. Veterans who served in OIF or OEF were feeling angry, resentful, and a heightened sense of purposelessness. This group provided a safe place to vent, tell "war stories," laugh, cry, and simply relate to our brothers-in-arms.

**ASIST** Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is a two-day interactive workshop in suicide first-aid which teaches participants to recognize people at risk of suicide and how to work with them to create a safety plan.

## THE REAL IMPACT

### A Soldier's Story.

"I was introduced to Valhalla Veterans Services at a presentation called, "The Deadly Recipe of Veteran Suicide." The presentation was engaging and kept my attention. It gave me a better understanding of why we, as heroes, are so prone to suicide. At the end of the briefing, we were required to make the pledge, "I will never kill myself" to the other members of the unit. I took the VVS business card and stuck the card on my refrigerator. I had no idea that I was about to be the one who needed that card.

Time passed, I lost my job, and was facing divorce. I felt like I had no hope. It seemed that there was no point in going on. I went to the bedroom, loaded my shotgun, and started walking outside. As I walked past the refrigerator, the VVS card caught my eye, and I remembered the promise I had made. I paused for a moment. I was confused. I couldn't believe that I was going to kill myself. It had all happened so fast. I called the number on the card. The counselor talked to me and was able to help me get to a point of safety. He made an appointment for me for the very next day and told me that even if my insurance didn't cover the sessions, I would never be charged because VVS had grants specifically to cover it. Every week I went to the appointment, and I never paid a dime. Valhalla Veterans Services saved my life because they took the time to educate me and then engage me at the lowest point of my life."

# FOUNDING STORY

The bitter tears rolled down my cheeks dripping on to my phone as I re-read the text over and over again in disbelief. "He killed himself..." the words didn't make sense. The words had to be wrong. The words could not be true. These words were becoming way too familiar. Between 2006 and 2012, I had lost three of my brothers-in-arms to suicide and the Department of Veterans Affairs was reporting that 22 Veterans were dying by suicide every day. In 2012 the Pennsylvania Army National Guard (PANG) suffered eleven losses due to suicide and they also began to pursue solutions. The solutions the PANG decided upon were the Master Resilience Trainer (MRT) Program and the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) program. I volunteered to be a part of both programs. The programs reduced the number of suicides by half in the first year and reduced it by half again the next year.

As I performed the duties of the MRT and ASIST Coordinator, I also pursued a master's degree in counseling with a specific focus on Veteran suicide. My studies revealed a commonality between suicide, isolation, and purposelessness. It seemed that in all cases of suicide (civilian and veteran) the themes of isolation and purposelessness were present, but this did not explain why veterans kill themselves at a rate four times greater than civilians. After years of study and interaction with soldiers who were contemplating suicide, I realized that the real problem of veteran suicide had more to do with culture than with mental problems and developed a theory we now call "The Deadly Recipe of Veteran Suicide." Veterans exist in a



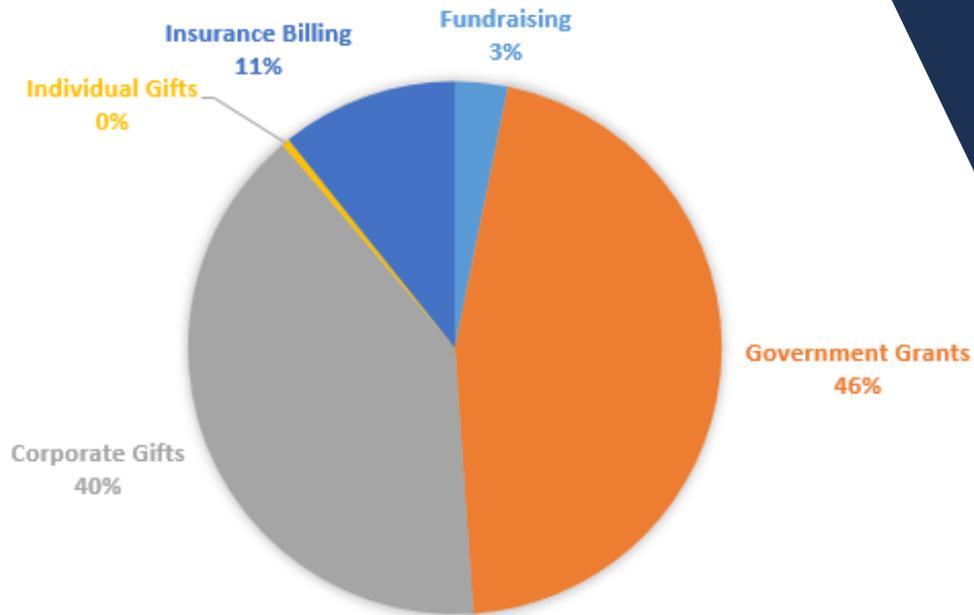
a culture which values decisiveness, self-sacrifice, honor, and duty above all else. The "death before dishonor" ethos and spontaneous decision-making tendency combined with isolation and purposelessness, are a lethal recipe for suicide.

Now that I understood the "real issues" surrounding veteran suicide, I decided to look for solutions. After researching various organizations and groups, I realized that there were several organizations which attempt to create awareness about veteran suicide, or talk about suicide, but very few directly attacked the problem of suicide. Valhalla Veterans Services exists to defeat the issues that cause veteran suicide.

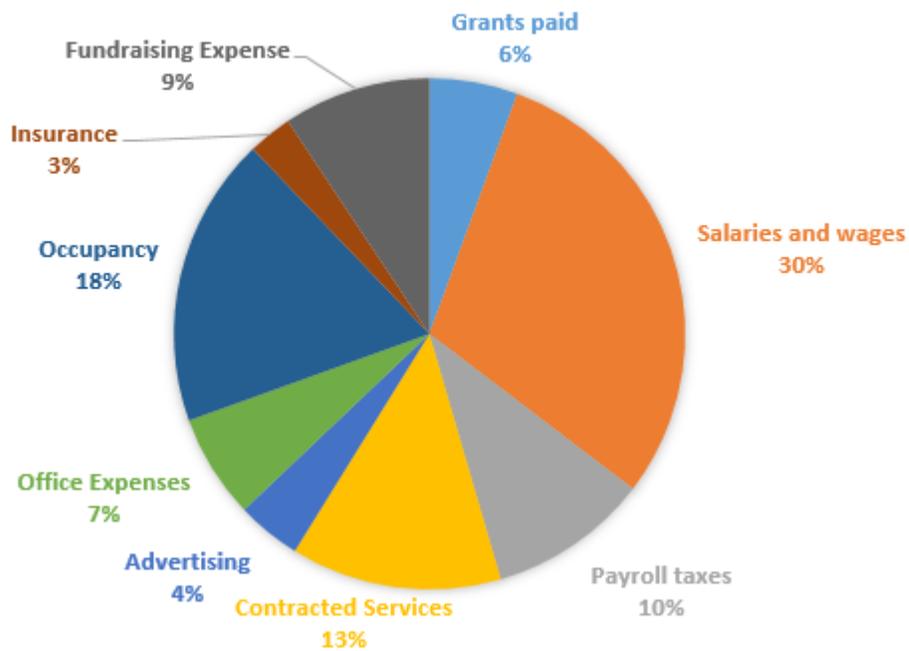
# FINANCIAL REPORT

2021 INCOME AND EXPENSES

## REVENUE - \$164,778



## EXPENSES - \$87,109



# PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

We are so thankful for the individuals and organizations who have joined us in our fight to end Warrior suicide.

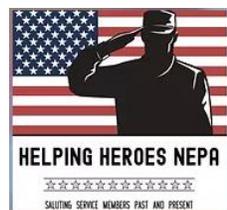


Robert H. Spitz Foundation is a great example of an organization which supports the effort. In 2021 VVS received a grant of \$55,000 from The Robert H. Spitz Foundation, administered by the Scranton Area Community Foundation to hire another full-time counselor and furnish another counseling office. Hiring our new counselor (Jenny Johnson) has allowed us to better serve spouses, family members, female veterans, and EMS.



The PA Veterans' Trust Fund supported VVS with a \$50,000 grant. The VTA strives to build partnerships with charitable organizations, veterans service organizations, and county directors of Veterans Affairs to fund improved assistance and support for Pennsylvania veterans and their families.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded VVS with the State Opioid Response grant of \$25,000. The program aims to address the opioid crisis by increasing access to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery support services to address stimulant misuse and use disorders.



Helping Heroes NEPA has a mission to support veterans, first responders, and their families. They supported VVS in 2021 with a donation of \$5,000.

Walmart seeks to create value in the communities around the world where they operate, strengthening them through local grants supporting programs that help the communities thrive. In 2021, Walmart supported VVS through a donation of \$4,000.



North Penn Charitable Foundation gave \$2,000 in order to provide needed counseling to those without insurance.



Union Lodge 291, a constituted lodge of the grand lodge of Pennsylvania free and accepted masons gave \$1442.50 to support VVS in 2021. In total, Masons contribute more than two million dollars every day to charitable causes, which represent their humanitarian commitment.



The Network for Good gave \$698.66 through online donors and those who wish to use a benefit of some type to benefit veterans and first responders.

# Volunteers

As always, the incredible support of our volunteers was a critical part of everything we accomplished in 2021. Throughout a year of changing guidelines and restrictions, our dedicated volunteers adapted and remained focused on caring for the veterans we serve.

Numerous volunteers have contributed their time to support our life-saving mission.

**To each of them we say: Thank You!**

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



In his volunteer pursuits, **Edward Faatz** has served as an officer in numerous organizations. He co-founded the Veterans of Vietnam War, Parker-Wescott Memorial Post #40. Ed was instrumental in completing the 'All Veterans Memorial' that stands outside the Abington Community Library, and the naming of the Parker-Wescott Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge of Clarks Summit, Pa. Most recently, Ed served as the President of the Board of Directors for Valhalla Veterans Services.

While assigned to Aerospace Wing Systems Command at Patrick AFB, Florida, Ed worked with N.A.S.A. on Gemini VIII, IX, X, XI, and XII and Apollo I, He received an honorable discharge in November 1968, holding the rank of Sergeant.

## Valhalla Fall Ball

A Formal Dining Out Fundraiser



## Penn State – Scranton Volunteers

One of the highlights of the Valhalla Fall Ball is the basket auction. Many businesses and individuals donated cash, gift cards, and items for the baskets. Students from Penn State, Scranton not only compiled and displayed the baskets for auction, but they attended the ball and ran the auction which brought in several thousand dollars in donations to benefit veterans, first responders, and their families. The basket auction was organized and implemented entirely under the direction of Kim Flanders, PhD.

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Our generous supporters make an impact every day in the lives of Veterans.  
We cannot continue this work without you.



**Valhalla Veterans Services**

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Valhalla Veterans Services is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

