

*Honoring Our Nation's Heroes*

# 2023 IMPACT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 1, 2022 - AUGUST 31, 2023



WHO ARE YOU CARRYING?®



MILITARY, VETERANS, FIRST RESPONDERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES





# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Carry The Load has been honoring our military, veterans, first responders, and their families since 2011 and we continually welcome new people, programs, and partners.

But growth is not just higher numbers.

Growth is uniting as a nation to honor those who sacrifice for our freedoms.

Growth means more connections.

More survivors are sharing their stories and grief. More organizations are donating time and money. More families are joining us at events. More groups are serving. More support services are benefiting our warriors and their families. More children are learning about service and sacrifice. The list goes on.

We hit exciting milestones in our fiscal year of September 2022 thru August 2023, thanks to the dedication and contributions of many.

**We surpassed \$38 million in funds raised and 234,000 participants since our inception in 2011.**

Our Memorial May awareness campaign continues to make a powerful impact nationwide. In 2023, 47,000 people participated, raising \$1.8 million and traveling 20,000 miles across 48 states on five relay routes and our Dallas Memorial March. The positive response demonstrates that people care about the mission and, in turn, nurtures interest to engage beyond Memorial Day.

**Our Continuum of Care program expanded with the launch of our new Carry The Load scholarship.**

We kicked off the Carry The Load scholarship program, awarding our first \$5,000 scholarship to a high school graduate during the 2023 Dallas Memorial March, in honor of his fallen father.



**We linked arms with new partner organizations.**

We're proud of our new corporate partners like Wiley X, Henry Schein, and Builders FirstSource who care about this important cause, and new non-profit partners like Sierra Delta, MVP-Merging Vets & Players, and Warrior Wellness Program who helped further our reach into Wisconsin, Nevada, and Florida.

Supporting our military, veterans, first responders, and their families has never been more important.

Thank you for taking the time to read highlights and stories of how we have carried the load together this year.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature of Debbie Wright in black ink.

Debbie Wright

The top of the slide features a horizontal banner with the American flag design: red and white stripes on the left and right, and a blue field with white stars in the center.

# ABOUT US

MISSION, VISION, PROGRAMS, GOALS



**Carry The Load is a non-profit organization that provides active ways to connect Americans to the sacrifices made daily by our military, veterans, first responders, and their families.**

What started in 2011 as a grassroots effort by two Veteran U.S. Navy SEALs to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day has now grown into a nationwide movement with people volunteering throughout the year to honor and remember our nation's heroes.

Our programs fall into three pillars: Awareness, Continuum of Care, and Education.



### OUR MISSION

To provide active ways to honor and remember our nation's heroes by connecting Americans to the sacrifices made by our military, veterans, first responders, and their families.



### OUR VISION

For all Americans to unite in honoring the sacrifices made by our nation's heroes.



### OUR PROGRAMS

Awareness  
Continuum of Care  
Education



### OUR GOALS

To increase awareness and educate Americans of the daily sacrifices made by those who protect our freedom and liberties.

To provide opportunities for Americans to actively honor those in the military and first responder community.

To raise funds that provide healing to the mind, body, and soul of our nation's service members and their families.



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# OUR PROGRAMS

AWARENESS, CONTINUUM OF CARE, EDUCATION



# AWARENESS

Our Awareness program includes Memorial May, Patriot Day, and Veterans Day campaigns, along with special events and fundraising that take place in communities nationwide.

## MEMORIAL MAY

Memorial May is a month-long national movement that strengthens our mission to provide active ways to connect Americans to the sacrifices of our military, veterans, first responders, and their families. What started in 2011 as one Memorial Day march has grown to include our National Relay, Community Events, and a Dallas Memorial March.

## NATIONAL RELAY & COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Carry The Load National Relay travels 20,000 miles covering all continental 48 states, ending with the Dallas Memorial March. The Relay consists of five routes where the public is invited to join us by walking with the relay team throughout the month-long campaign. In 2023, we hosted events throughout the U.S. and Hawaii, including 88 Community Events along the relay routes and additional standalone events.



\$1,800,000  
Funds  
Raised



47,000  
Participants



20,000  
Miles



88  
Community  
Events



5  
Relay  
Routes



1.8M  
Social Media  
Impressions



2.1B  
Media  
Impressions



1  
Mission



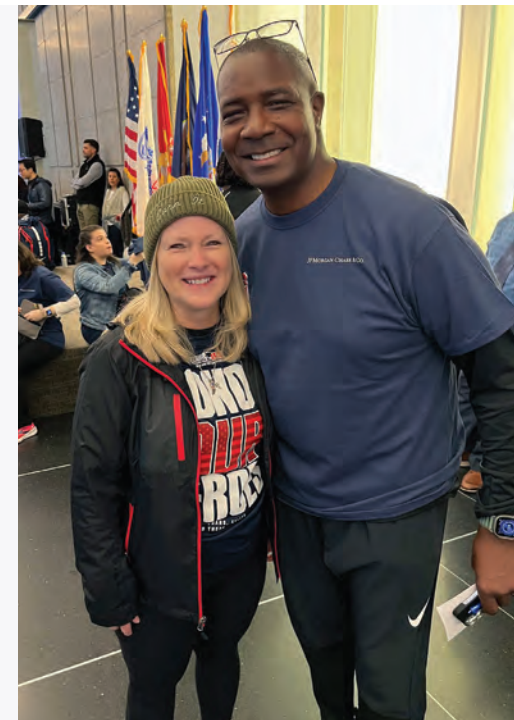
## DALLAS MEMORIAL MARCH

The Dallas Memorial March, hosted in our hometown, is the flagship event and culmination of the National Relay. The March is a two-day Memorial Day weekend event honoring and remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.



**Carry The Load is about carrying the memories of those individuals - and the joy and pain that accompany those memories.**

Mark Elliott, Managing Director and Global Head of Military and Veterans Affairs at JPMorgan Chase & Co.





## PATRIOT DAY

Carry The Load hosts volunteer opportunities for the public to observe Patriot Day on September 11. In partnership with the VA National Cemetery Administration, Carry The Load invites people to sign up and serve as they beautify sacred grounds at more than 60 national cemeteries across the U.S.

More than 2,600 people took part in Carry The Load's 2022 Patriot Day activities to honor and remember the lives lost due to the tragic events of September 11, 2001.



## CARRY THE LOAD PODCAST

The Carry The Load Podcast showcases 80+ episodes of a fresh perspective of the 1% who have served America in uniform.

Host Todd Boeding, a Veteran Marine, takes us into the lives and harrowing experiences of Navy SEALs, Green Berets, Army Rangers, first responders, family members, and more.

Sponsored by:



## Carry The Load Ambassador Shares A Personal Story About 9/11 Then And Now

Many people remember exactly where they were on September 11, 2001, when the world changed.

Brian Larson was a freshman at West Point waiting to take a chemistry quiz when he found out a plane hit one of the Twin Towers and soon learned that another plane crashed only 50 miles away.

This tragedy marked the rest of Brian's West Point experience. Virtually all of his class deployed. He started losing friends and hearing first-hand stories from professors who had been deployed overseas even before graduation. Brian was commissioned into a different military than the peace time Army he signed up for.

After returning from Iraq in 2008, Brian spent his last two years of active duty in the honor guard at Arlington National Cemetery doing funerals for fallen service members and presenting the American flag to their next of kin. He saw how meaningful the cemetery was for loved ones left behind, from funerals to weekly Friday picnics at a loved one's headstone.

It's a big task to keep the cemetery grounds in a condition that shows how highly we respect and honor the sacrifice of their loved ones. Brian describes it as hallowed ground where there's a sense of gravity, peace, and significance.



**It's hard to convey the weight of our VA National Cemeteries. They are a place where you can see and touch so it's easier to share that feeling - the load with one another. It's a chance to invite people in. There's no other way to convey the 'you had to be there' kind of emotion.**

Brian Larson  
Army Veteran and Carry The Load Ambassador





## VETERANS DAY

Each year, Carry The Load finds creative ways to help Americans honor our veterans on November 11. In 2022, Carry The Load engaged our youth by providing education materials on social media and Carry The Flag activities for youth groups. For example, Carry The Flag was an integral part of a Grapevine High School event in Grapevine, Texas.

### Carry The Flag and Grapevine High School Organize Veterans Day - Red Carpet Thank You

Grapevine High School in Texas is known for its commitment to the community, particularly to its veteran population. For over 20 years, the school has hosted an annual Veterans Day celebration to honor and thank local veterans for their service. In 2022, Grapevine High School organized a “Red Carpet Thank You” event for Veterans Day, where they transformed the school’s main hallway into a red-carpet event complete with music, decorations, and student volunteers dressed in formal attire. Veterans were invited to walk down the red carpet while students and staff applauded and thanked them for their service.



**This is amazing. My first time here, I’m blown away that the high school goes to this level and does this for us.**

Vietnam Veteran  
Dan Decker



**It reaffirms my belief in the future of America. When I see these kids and their exuberance, that pulls me back up and helps me realize we’re not in such a bad situation.**

Korean War Veteran  
Randy Dellis



Carry The Load’s Stephen Holley spoke at the event, praising the students for honoring those who have gone before them. At the end of the event, the student council members hosted a breakfast with the veterans, which provided a chance for both groups to connect and share experiences. The meal was a heartfelt gesture of appreciation to honor their service and sacrifice.



# CONTINUUM OF CARE

Since 2011, Carry The Load has partnered with and supported dozens of veteran and first responder service organizations nationwide. The partnership and collaboration cultivated by this community setting has formed deep relationships and life-long friendships while making a significant impact on the lives of those who we collectively serve.

While funds are necessary to provide the services offered by each organization, the bond and creation of a family or tribe where many of these families now thrive far exceeds the monetary gifts alone.

Our partners provide powerful healing services like counseling, adaptive training, suicide prevention, equine therapy, service dogs, job placement, and more. We were thrilled to add a Carry The Load scholarship program in 2023.



59  
Non-Profit  
Partners



\$1.6M  
Healing Services  
Funded



120K  
Warriors and  
Families Served







## Carry The Load Co-Founder Shares How Non-Profit Helped Carry Him Too During His Struggle With Mental Health

Stephen Holley knows from personal experience how veteran and first responder support services are so vital.

“It’s a very lonely place,” Holley admitted of his own struggles that took place even as Carry The Load was positively impacting so many lives. “And candidly, I’d tell you it’s really been in the last 10 years where I have struggled with depression, anxiety, and some mental health issues that I didn’t see coming,” he said.

Carry The Load’s fundraising helps dozens of nonprofits who help active and veteran military and first responders deal with post-traumatic stress and other issues: a brotherhood and sisterhood to help see each other through. As Holley watched that success, he said he was fighting his own demons too. “Veterans will tell you that the memories of the fellow service members they lost, the horrors of war they witnessed, and the return to a civilian world without the structure of a military life can lead them down a dark and dangerous path.”

Holley said he understands that even more intimately now after getting the help he needed. And that’s where he sees a living benefit of Carry The Load and all that it has become.

Holley said he absolutely embraces the reality that the group he helped found, designed to carry and keep memories of service and sacrifice alive, continues to help carry him.



**I am very thankful for the perspective that it’s given me and the lessons that I’ve learned. Most people will understand that you learn more when you’re getting your teeth kicked in, proverbially, than you do when things are going your way.**

Stephen Holley, President & CEO, Carry The Load

## Carry The Load Scholarship Program Launches in 2023

U.S. Marine Veteran and Carry The Load Ambassador Michael Flowers established the Carry The Load scholarship in May 2023. The scholarship is meant to ease the financial burden of students as well as recognize the valor and dedication of those who’ve lost a parent in the line of duty.

Mark Rule was the recipient of the 2023 Carry The Load scholarship for \$5,000. Mark is the son of Deputy Constable Caleb Rule, who was killed in the line of duty on May 29, 2020. Mark’s commitment to his future is a testament to his father’s legacy.

The Carry The Load scholarship is backed by The Jackson Shaw Foundation, CBRE, TradeLane Properties, Prologis, and Stelos Alliance.



# EDUCATION

As Carry The Load continues to grow so, does the opportunity to educate the next generation about those who serve our country.

## CARRY THE FLAG

By providing resources and activities, Carry The Flag teaches the next generation about sacrifices made by our military, veterans, first responders, and their families. It also helps kids apply teamwork, responsibility, respect, decision making, communication, and leadership into their daily lives.

The program is free and flexible, making it ideal for any youth group to implement. It provides guidance on activities that help kids learn more about our nation's heroes and how they can serve in their community.

- Develop storyboards to honor and remember a hero
- Give a presentation on patriotism
- Learn the history of the American flag
- Meet local heroes and hear their stories
- Earn community service hours
- Raise and lower the flag and so much more!

### How It Works

Organize your group

Download our free resources

Inspire patriotism in your community

**To get started, email [carrytheflag@carrytheload.org](mailto:carrytheflag@carrytheload.org)  
or call 214-723-6068.**



236  
Youth Groups  
Participating  
in the Program



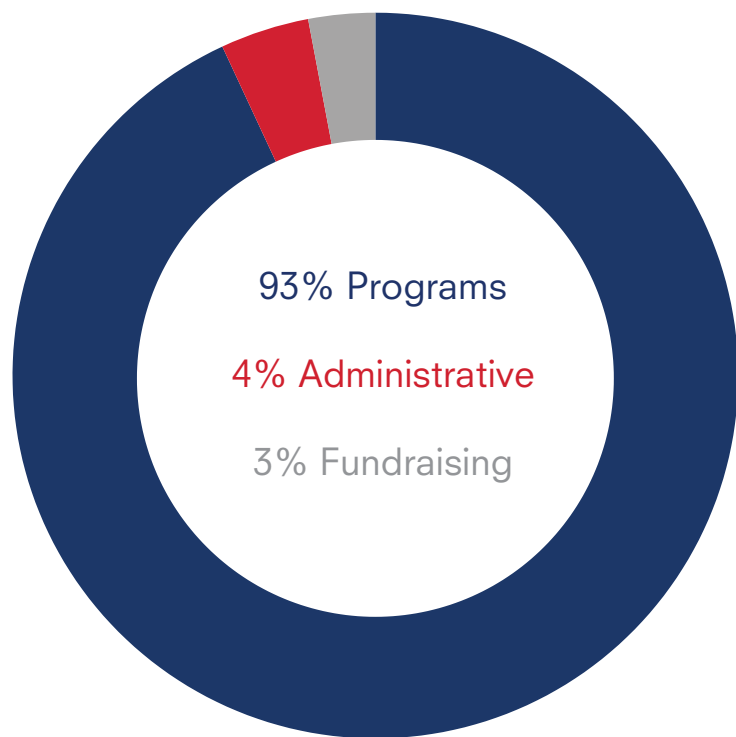
5,950  
Students  
in the Program



37  
States  
Represented



# WHERE THE MONEY GOES



## Breakdown of program spending

Awareness 56%

Continuum of Care 39%

Education 5%



Total Funds Raised  
Since 2011

**\$42,412,839**



# OUR PEOPLE

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Carry The Load's all volunteer Board of Directors consists of a diverse group of veterans and patriots. Each member donates his or her time and expertise to further the organization's mission.

### STEPHEN HOLLEY

President & CEO, U.S. Navy SEAL Veteran

### CRAIG COUCH

Treasurer, Patriot

### TODD BOEDING

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

### MIKE DEVLIN

Patriot

### HALLIE JOHNSTON

U.S. Army Veteran

### JOHN MCCAA

Patriot

### ISMAEL "JUNIOR" ORTIZ

Ret. Lt. Col., U.S. Marine Corps

### AARON RIGBY

U.S. Navy Veteran



## FOUNDERS BRIGADE

The Founders Brigade is an exclusive group that each pledge \$5,000 per year for two years to provide the working capital to advance Carry The Load's mission. Our goal is to secure 100 members, resulting in \$1,000,000 of combined commitments.

We thank these individuals who have already made the commitment:

Jack Furst  
Dill Driscoll  
Craig Couch  
Pryor Blackwell  
Brent Owens  
Sean Magee  
Steve Holley  
Dr. Terry Gemas  
Flat Top Ranch  
Buffalo Harms

Brad Whitnell  
Don Clark  
The Nikoh Foundation  
Scott Rohrman  
Bracari  
Debbie & John Ahmed  
Joe Barrett  
Kirk Woodall  
Stephanie Wilcox  
Todd Platt





## AMBASSADOR NETWORK

Carry The Load has grown into a nationwide non-profit through the continued support and service of our more than 50 Ambassadors who volunteer their time and talents to raise awareness for the mission. Ambassadors come from diverse backgrounds and have a variety of experiences to share. Each one has a powerful story to tell and continues to serve by conducting media interviews, engaging youth groups, speaking at corporate and community events, and more to further the cause.



## TOP TEAM CAPTAINS

These individuals work tirelessly during our Memorial May campaign to share our mission and raise funds to provide much needed services for our warriors and their families.

The following raised more than \$10,000 through their fundraising teams during 2023 Memorial May.

Bradford Adatto  
Brian Larson  
Bryan Bledsoe  
Burson Holman  
Carla Huseman  
Chris Kilburn  
Cody Bandars  
Connie Thompson  
Debbie Wright  
Delia Clayton  
Elena Blake  
JJ Leonard

John Muschalek  
Kory Ryan  
LaTisha Brandon  
Michael Luchsinger  
Rod Gregg  
Sean Slone  
Stephen Holley  
Stetson Langwell  
Terry Gemas  
Timothy Allen  
Yvonne Freeman



# JOINING FORCES

## NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Together, we can go further. Carry The Load works with non-profit and corporate partners who share our vision and commitment to honoring our military and first responders. We combine efforts and channel resources to meet more needs.





## CORPORATE PARTNERS

There are many amazing companies that have supported Carry The Load through employee engagement, volunteer activities, and fundraising throughout the years. We're thankful to our long-term supporters and new corporate partners who share our vision.







We are grateful for our community that got us to where we are today.

And are looking forward to the impact we can make together in 2024.

