

# STACK UP

VETERANS ARE OUR MISSION.  
GAMING IS OUR PASSION.



2023 Annual Report

# Bringing Veteran Mental Health Support Out of the 8-bit Era



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# About Stack Up



## Vision

To eliminate extreme symptoms of trauma, stress, and isolation in Military service members past and present.

## Mission

Stack Up supports US and Allied veterans by promoting positive mental health and combating veteran suicide through gaming and geek culture with our four pillar programs: The Stacks, Supply Crates, Air Assaults, and the Overwatch Program.

*Founded in 2015 by combat veteran Stephen Machuga, Stack Up brings both veterans and civilian supporters together through a shared love of video and tabletop gaming and geek culture. Stack Up serves US, NATO, and Allied veterans and active duty service members.*



# Message from our Executive Director



Well, that was a year.

With the national economy in shambles and the cost of living going up with no relief in sight, organizations to our left and right were laying people off while reporting record profits; things were not looking great. Pair that with two unpopular wars that the U.S. has managed to get embroiled in between the Gaza Strip and Ukraine; the population is not exactly our Military's biggest fan right now. As much as we try to position ourselves as championing individual Veterans with support, many people see the Military before individuals, and therefore, they would rather support other causes right now. Despite our Influencer Relations Team signing up a record 1800+ people to raise donations for Stack Up, the average amount brought in per streamer was down across the board to where we still managed to miss our extremely sensible fundraising goal for the year.

Despite raising a million dollars for the third straight year in a row, the staff had to sit down and go over the numbers for the 2024 budget to make sure we were living within our means. With the inclusion of Stack Up's Phalanx House expenses with no financial support from Los Angeles County as promised, we suddenly had a fifth program that required feeding that we did not get the funding for.

# Message from our Executive Director

And so, for the first time in our nine-year history, we had to lay off people and restructure Stack Up to ensure we survived in these toughest of times. The biggest hit is having to scale back our Overwatch program. For Overwatch being such a huge innovation of a program, everyone loved talking about it, but no one would fund it. Why fund our program when they could simply give money to the VA's Veterans Suicide Hotline? Organizations keep throwing money into the fire-burning pit that are the known programs and organizations out there and are unwilling to give "innovative" programs a shot. So now we have to suspend our crisis intervention services and focus on crisis mitigation, which doesn't require a dedicated 24/7 team to manage.

I am upset about this: our Overwatch program has saved lives over the years of operation by just being on-call when someone needed it. Now that said, we have seen a large amount of success with our crisis mitigation initiatives, such as our non-crisis mental health discussions and our new mental health game nights. Stack Up is going to continue saving lives through the Overwatch program, but boy does it suck to lose that "emergency response" component.

There's really not much more to say: the United States economy is a dumpster fire, and charity is something you do when you have plenty of extra money to spare. And who has that right now? We are now prepared for the economy to continue to freefall hard in 2025, but Stack Up has made the proper disaster preparations to make sure that we as an organization will be able to continue to weather the storm for the foreseeable future.



# Game on for Mental Health

## How does gaming help?

Veterans struggle with feelings of isolation and a lack of belonging post-service. Through gaming, Veterans can find community while playing with their peers, whether Active Military, Veterans or Civilian.



The Power of Play Global Report 2023 surveyed gamers around the world about gaming and its social and emotional benefits. Among the 1,545 U.S. gamers surveyed, they found:

- 68% play for stress relief.
- 53% play to deal with feelings of isolation and to connect with others.
- 59% play games to help them cope with difficult times in their lives.
- More than half are playing with other people online.
- One report in 2017 found that playing a game like Tetris for 20 minutes after experiencing a traumatic event can help lower intrusive memories of the trauma.

More stats can be found in the [Power of Play Global Report](#).

[Click here to learn more about why Stack Up chooses gaming](#)

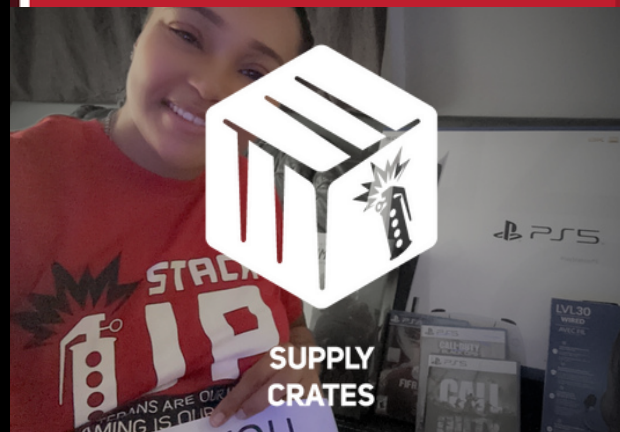
# Programs

Supporting Veterans through Gaming



Video game care packages sent to Veterans and Military units around the world to boost morale and help cope with PTSD and other mental and physical health struggles.

All-expense-paid trips for disabled and deserving Veterans providing them with a gaming and geek culture adventure with our experienced staff ready to cater to their needs.



Local volunteer pods consisting of Veterans, Active Military, and civilians with a shared love of gaming serving their home areas with in-person game nights and good deeds via volunteering.

# Programs

Supporting Veterans through Gaming



Our haven for LA area Veterans providing a space to work on mental health and build community through gaming activities and other adventures.

A note about the Overwatch Program:

The Overwatch Program has undergone changes, pivoting from mental health crisis intervention to crisis prevention. The stats in this report will include the previous year's efforts in crisis prevention even as Stack Up pivots focus to prevention through game nights and community discussions.



Peer-to-peer mental health support for veterans and civilians alike, provided through mental health game nights and community discussions.

[Click here to learn more about Stack Up's Programs](#)



# Program Stats

Providing Veterans, Active Military & Civilians Relief

4

AIR  
ASSAULTS

10

VETERANS  
SERVED

245  
SUPPLY  
CRATES  
SHIPPED

187  
CRISIS  
INTERACTIONS  
412  
NON-CRISIS  
INTERACTIONS

# Program Stats

Providing Veterans, Active Military & Supportive Relief

**204**  
**GAME**  
**NIGHTS**

**153**  
**STACKS**  
**EVENTS**  
**28**  
**ACTIVE**  
**STACKS**

**88**  
**PHALANX**  
**HOUSE**  
**EVENTS**

[Click here to learn more about Stack Up's Programs](#)



# Support Stories

## Air Assaults

The Stack Up Phalanx House is perfectly equipped to host Veterans for a weekend out in Los Angeles, CA. We've set it up with rooms for our Veterans to stay in, with plenty to do at the house and on tour.

We brought out Veterans Dustin and Bryce, both of whom have been active members of the Stack Up community, to Phalanx House for a weekend of fun and out to Universal Studios Hollywood. Plenty more can be read in the [June Air Assault recap](#).



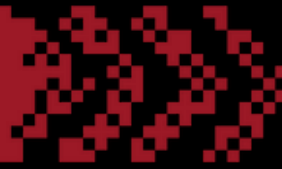
*The Air Assault trip was life-changing. Being 100% PTSD, it's difficult to break out of my shell and experience new things, let alone meet new people. I truly believe that I have joined a family with Stack Up, and the Air Assault has fueled a fire to help my fellow vets in the same way.*

*- Dustin P. (Perkinator) | Coast Guard Veteran | [June Phalanx Air Assault](#)*



# Support Stories

## Supply Crates



The Supply Crates program allows Stack Up to support Veterans' mental health by providing gaming consoles and games that Vets can use to boost their morale and cope with physical and mental health struggles.

Army Veteran Aaron was nominated by his wife, who noticed his PTSD was bothering him. She told us Aaron sold his PlayStation to buy gifts for his children on Christmas. We provided him with the comfort he needed.

*People don't realize the therapeutic value that gaming can have on people, especially prior service individuals. I'm looking forward to reaching out to my old service pals and re-joining KSI Gaming to compete in COD again. I closed off a lot lately, and this has opened me up to being able to reach out to other vets that I haven't been able to talk with in a while. I couldn't be more grateful. Thank you so much!*

*- Aaron B. | Army Veteran | [Supply Crate Recipient](#)*



# Support Stories

## Air Assaults

Isolation is one of the major struggles Veterans have post-service. Losing the camaraderie of being around other service members has a hard impact on a Vet's mental health. Supply Crates allow us to connect Veterans through online gaming. Air Assaults allow Stack Up to connect Veterans offline and see there's plenty out there to enjoy.

Joe and Aaron joined us for an Air Assault trip. Both hung around the Stack Up community online and got to put a face to the username on their trip.



*It was an amazing experience. Got to link up with another Veteran streamer I met online and happened to attend the same Air Assault as me. I made new friends and got to know the local Stack Up team. I really enjoyed touring LA, such as Venice Beach, Hollywood, local restaurants, Universal Studios, and the Star Wars-themed bar scum and villainy. The Phalanx House was great. I played some arcade games such as Metal Slug, jumped on some PCs, and played Marauders. I made sure to unwind in the hot tub. I also played my first TTRPG board game of Fallout as Marvin, the robot who spoke with a Borat accent.*

*-- Joe D. (Obiwoncanolii) | Army National Guard Veteran | [May Phalanx Air Assault](#)*

# A Community of Support

Civilians, Veterans & Active Military Together for a Cause



*Repping the Stack Up red shirt lets Veterans know they have battle buddies on standby.*

Stack Up's community is ever-evolving, with our community of Veterans, civilians, and Active Military coming together to support one another's mental health journeys. Whether it's participating in game nights in our Discord, engaging in online community discussions, or volunteering, our community of support is what holds Stack Up together.

In 2023, our community hosted 204 game nights in the Stack Up Discord. Thanks to codes generously donated by Blizzard, we spent the summer playing Diablo IV. Then, in November, the community came together for a huge 30-person Starship Troopers event thanks to codes donated by the developers at Offworld Industries.

[Click here to learn more about How to Help Stack Up](#)



# Phalanx House

Our Home for Veteran Gamers

2023 was an action-packed year for Phalanx House, with Stack Up hosting 88 events. California-based Active Military units visited Phalanx to engage in camaraderie and morale-boosting activities and training. On Sundays, we held Tabletop games in the Tavern, with LA-area Veterans joining us for some curated fun.

Riot Games hosted some of our Phalanx regulars on a tour of their facilities and donated a hefty number of workstation PCs and gaming chairs, which we gave out from Phalanx to Veterans and Veteran organizations in the local area. Stack Up also hosted the Six Days in Fallujah game launch at Phalanx.



*Game launches, PC giveaways, TTRPG playdays and plenty more to do at Phalanx House!*



# The Overwatch Program

Online Community Support



*In 2023 The Overwatch Program had 187 crisis interactions and 412 non-crisis interactions.*

The idea for the Overwatch Program arose from Stack Up's efforts to provide support to Veterans looking for people to play games with. It has evolved much over the years as staff have worked to hone its purpose. With the introduction of the #non-crisis-mental-health-discussion channel in the Stack Up Discord, we saw crisis channel interactions drop by half and realized maybe we were onto something.

As a result of that and funding, we took a closer look and pivoted the program's focus to crisis mitigation through the new non-crisis-mental-health forum and regularly scheduled mental health game nights.

[Click here to learn more about the Overwatch Program](#)





# The Stacks

Local Volunteers Gaming for Good

Joining the Stacks is one way for Stack Up's community members to take their support one step further. These in-person volunteer pods of Veterans, Active Military personnel, and civilians work toward making the world a better place by participating in local volunteer events while representing Stack Up.

28 active Stacks hosted a total of 153 Stacks events, from local cleanups to food drives, participating in Wreaths Across America, hosting in-person gaming events, and more.



# Bringing Esports to the Base

## Bob Woodruff Foundation & the JBLM Event

In 2023, Stack Up applied for a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to host an Esports event for Veterans and Active-Duty Military members through their Got Your 6 Network Event Contest.

We won and were granted \$50,000 to do so. In partnership with Regiment, we hosted a Call of Duty and Madden tournament at Joint Base Lewis McChord with cash and console prizes for the 75+ participants who showed up.



Through this event, we showed the power of competition in gaming to bring Veterans and Active Military together for fun and camaraderie.

Stack Up is now part of the Bob Woodruff Foundation's Got Your Six Network.

[Click here to learn more about the Bob Woodruff Foundation](#)

# 2023 Financials

Toughing it through for Veteran Mental Health Support

Stack Up's priority continues to be service to Veterans and their mental health through the power of gaming even as our normal expenses increase. Streamers raised \$656,878 of the total revenue of \$1,607,022, making up more than a third of funding and showing the power of gaming communities in supporting the well-being of others.

**Expenses**  
**\$1,646,542**

**Revenue**  
**\$1,607,022**



# Streamer Fundraising

Stats & Top Streamers Who Answered the Call

STACK UP



CALL TO ARMS

Total Participants  
1815

Streamers Fundraised  
\$656,878

Call to Arms LIVE  
\$44,620

Sponsored Supply  
Crates  
187

Sponsored Air Assault  
Trips  
3

Streamers who made  
the Wall of Heroes  
187

Gold Heroes: \$10,000+ Raised

Regiment  
Gaming

EMP1241

THE LOYAL  
PATRIOT  
PATRIOT

Team Be  
a Better  
Human

Stack Up  
Stream  
Team

Part Time  
Stackers  
Gaming

A  
Durable  
Llama

[Click here to check out our Wall of Heroes 2023](#)

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# Streamer Fundraising

The Stack Up Stream Team



The Stack Up Stream Team set new standards for supporting and representing our mission in 2023, hosting 7 events to fundraise and interact with the community with fun and creative incentives. The Stream Team currently streams an average of 14 hours a day on Stack Up's Twitch channel.

Stream Team Members  
31

Team Fundraised  
\$10,466

Call to Arms Events  
7

Number of Streams  
929

Hours Watched  
20.5k

New Followers  
1.4k



**JonsAtWar**  
Stream Team  
Lead

*Army Veteran Jonathan Delacy, a.k.a. JonsAtWar, has led the Stack Up Stream Team since 2019. He joined Stack Up's mission after he was taken on an Air Assault trip in 2018.*

[Click here to check out our Twitch Channel](#)



# 2023's Notable Sponsors & Partners

Thank You for Supporting Stack Up

2023 was a bit tough on Stack Up as expenses have all around increased, stretching funds even further. However, plenty of sponsors, partners, and businesses supported Stack Up through grants, direct donations, and in-kind donations we used to help Veterans and Veteran organizations.

Thank you for supporting Stack Up through 2023!

## **Grants:**

Twitch  
Palmer Luckey  
FunFund  
Bob Woodruff Foundation  
Cohen Family Foundation  
American Legion Post 283  
Lendistry  
Mariyln Lichtman Foundation  
First Nation Group  
Disabled American Veterans  
Tee It Up For the Troops

## **Donations:**

Gfuel  
Pochocha  
CTRL  
Riot  
Palo Alto Community Fund  
Dave's Hot Chicken

## **In-Kind Donations:**

MSI  
Riot  
Comcast  
Gunnar Optiks  
Fisher House



# Stack Up's Team

Pushing Stack Up to the Next Level



**Stephen  
Machuga**

*Executive  
Director*



**Brian  
Snyder**

*Communications  
Director*



**Dave  
Crouse**

*Program  
Director*



**Samantha  
Seegraves**

*Administrative  
Director*



**Alesha  
Smith**

*Influencer  
Relations  
Manager*



**Christy  
Bowman**

*Influencer  
Relations  
Manager*



**Sahara  
McGirt**

*Social Media  
Manager*



**Zachary  
Kenny**

*Overwatch  
Program  
Manager*



**Ian  
Kelley**

*Assistant  
Supply Crate  
Manager*

[Click here to learn more about our Team](#)

# Stack Up's Board

Guiding Stack Up through the Tough Decisions



**Jimmy Whisenhunt**  
*Board of Directors Member*



**Evan Uselton**  
*Board of Directors Member*



**Sean Casey**  
*Board of Directors Member*



**Amanda Solomon**  
*Board of Directors Member*



**Cherie Kislak**  
*Advisory Board*





It's all hands on deck to complete our vision of serving veterans struggling with stress, trauma, and isolation through the power of gaming.

DONATE

FUNDRAISE

VOLUNTEER



Visit us online at [StackUp.org](https://StackUp.org)