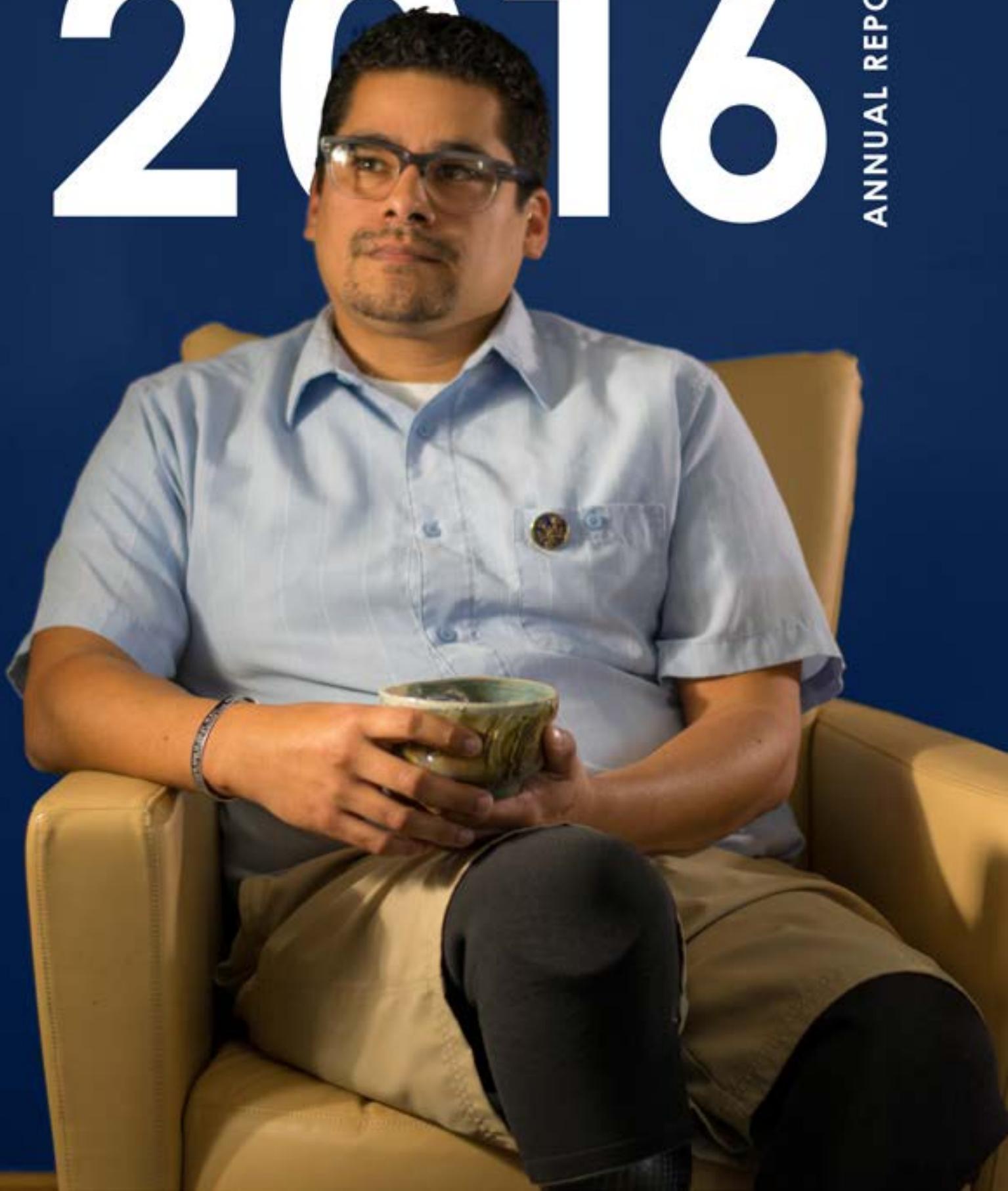


2016

ANNUAL REPORT





Judas working at his studio

“The situation that I’m in, it’s part of me...it’s not who I am. And I still have a job to do.”

- Sergeant Judas Recendez,
US Army

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Sentinel Marlene Rodriguez

Sentinel David Crouse



HEALING THROUGH ART

A SENTINEL’S JOURNEY

Sentinel Judas Recendez (pictured above and on cover), who was injured by an improvised explosive device (IED) and suffered double below-the-knee amputations while serving in Iraq, has found his healing and calling in pottery and mixed media artwork. Determined and full of enthusiasm for life, Judas is working towards becoming a teacher to share his passion and help others through art. “It took me a while to find a new purpose...art helped me transition,” he says. “Once [Veterans] understand that their injury is not going to define who they are...it’s not going to be all rainbows and sunshine - there’s going to be some clouds. It’s like a long ruck march. But there is an end to that. And that’s my advice; just push forward. It’s only temporary.”



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MISSION

Assist severely wounded post-9/11 Veterans in their efforts to become productive and self-sufficient.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Sentinels of Freedom (SOF) is a national nonprofit organization that helps severely wounded post-9/11 Veterans successfully transition to civilian life by providing comprehensive personal support and removing financial obstacles. Our support ranges from housing and living subsidies to financial coaching to mentoring and career transition assistance. We help fill the gaps so these brave individuals can begin their post-military journey.

ESTABLISHED

SOF was established in 2007 in San Ramon, California.

PROGRAM ROOTS

The father of three Army Rangers, Mike Conklin was inspired to reach out to severely wounded Veterans after one of his sons was wounded in Iraq. Wanting to do something tangible to support US troops and their families, Mike created Sentinels of Freedom to provide comprehensive assistance to Veterans with severe service-related wounds who have the aptitude, attitude, and drive to become independent and successful members of society. Now, more than 150 Sentinels have graduated from the SOF Scholarship Program.



DEAR FRIENDS,



At Sentinels of Freedom, what we do is not a handout but a hand up and an investment that has immeasurable returns to our communities. We invest in the futures of those who have served in the military and sacrificed for our nation. Our return on investment is their success in education, careers, and quality of life.

As you can imagine, the hurdles of getting through post-secondary education or trade school and securing meaningful employment will be much higher for these wounded Veterans. With your help, we walk at their side and provide mentoring, financial support, introductions through our network to internships and career opportunities, and –

probably the most important – our support and belief that they will succeed.

The time and effort involved in getting just one severely wounded Veteran from the point of impact through medical rehabilitation, reintegration, the transition to home, through education, and onto career placement is intense. This is where Sentinels of Freedom shines and differs from most other programs through comprehensive, multifaceted support that is focused on long-term success.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about and support what we do at Sentinels of Freedom.

MIKE CONKLIN
CHAIRMAN & CEO

“ The best part is that SOF isn’t merely a grant or scholarship: they’ve taken a truly personal approach in transitioning me from military to civilian life. SOF has been there every step of the way. ”



- Technical Sergeant Erin McLoughlin, US Air Force



Brian with his Purple Heart Medal Certificate

A SENTINEL'S NEW MISSION

LANCE CORPORAL BRIAN VARGAS,
US MARINE CORPS

Bleeding uncontrollably, Sentinel Brian Vargas thought he was going to die. “My corpsman’s voice drifted off, resembling a fading echo. Everything went black,” says Brian, thinking back to January 17th, 2007, when he got shot by an enemy sniper in Iraq’s Triangle of Death. A bullet had hit him through his left hand and face, rendering him unconscious.

“I had this feeling of being comfortable and warm, euphoric even... and I remember seeing three images come into my view: my mother and my father both with a smile on their faces...then my girlfriend – and now wife – Monica came into view...and then it was like going through a wormhole.” Brian knew then that it was not his time to go yet, and, suddenly, he was back in his body.

Now, more than ten years after that day, even though he can no longer have a career in the military due to his injuries, Brian is still committed to helping others and keeping his fellow Veterans safe from harm. A current social welfare graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, Brian is working on a product, WarriorCode, that he hopes will help prevent Veteran suicide. “My best friend killed himself...suicide is something that is real,” he explains. “My end game, my end goal, is to help Vets see a different light in themselves – to keep them from hurting [their families] or taking themselves out of the picture voluntarily and committing suicide.”

Brian’s own road to recovery has not been a simple one. Shortly after his medical evacuation, his PTSD began to spiral out of control. “With persistent nightmares, anger, aggression, and rage clouding my mind, I was making life-threatening decisions,” he says. However, while participating in a trauma program, Brian not only began to learn how to deal with his combat experiences but also discovered his passion for helping others. “Working with other Veterans through similar issues is where I learned I can make a connection with these individuals,” he explains. “I took this as my mission, chiefly due to the impact that losing my best friend had left on me.”

Armed with his new mission, Brian enrolled at community college but, despite his best efforts, faced a tough transition. “To sit here and tell you that I was confident or not scared would be a lie....going to school was difficult because I had no foundation,” he admits. After having spent a few years at school and “learned to learn,” Brian started to realize how

much he actually enjoyed learning – and he was good at it. He knew that he wanted to transfer to UC Berkeley but was unsure of what his next steps should be. Brian’s friend introduced him to Sentinels of Freedom, and shortly after, he applied and got accepted into the program. Acceptance to UC Berkeley followed soon after.

With the help of SOF, Brian gained confidence in himself and his goals. “[At SOF], they show you, teach you, and give you that direction that you need,” he explains. “They really set you up with so many people that understand you, your story, and they help you grow.” Even now, nearly two years after he graduated from the program, Brian continues to be an avid ambassador for SOF, regularly participating in various community events and sharing his experiences of the program with other wounded Veterans. “Seeing where I’m at today...I would never have pictured it...this is a dream come true,” he says. “I couldn’t have done this without the support and network that we got from SOF.”

Brian’s passion for helping other Veterans, combined with his love for and unwavering support from his wife who has been at his side throughout his journey, are what keep him going and focused on his mission. “I’m not going to say that I’m going to be able to stop every single Veteran from committing suicide,” he says. “But if I can make some sort of difference – If I can stop at least one Veteran – I would call myself a success.”

To keep up to date on what our Sentinels like Brian are doing, visit www.sentinelsoffreedom.org/sentinels/stories

“My end game, my end goal, is to help Vets see a different light in themselves.”



A look inside Brian's closet



Brian's Purple Heart Medal and tattoo



Brian after he got injured in Iraq in 2007



Brian and his wife, Monica

SERVICE ABOVE SELF

STAFF SERGEANT VENOL RAYMOND,
US ARMY

Despite the injuries he suffered during his military service, Sentinel Venol Raymond possesses an incredible warmth and joy for life.

Born in Haiti, Venol immigrated to the United States in 2003 and, shortly thereafter, joined the Army to give back to his newly adopted country. He served eight years before being medically discharged due to severe back and knee injuries caused by a vehicular accident during his service in Afghanistan. Instead of letting the pain and disappointment of what he lost derail his future when his military career ended, Venol looked at what his new options were and moved forward with determination and drive.

Since being accepted to our program in August 2015, Venol has completed a large amount of volunteer work, graduated college as an international studies major, and studied abroad in Taiwan. Currently, he is in Ghana, West Africa, completing a prestigious two-part internship with the US State Department. “[It has been] a great opportunity to practice people-to-people diplomacy and proudly represent America,” he says. The internship offers wonderful experience for Venol whose goal is to work for the agency full-time and continue to give back and help those in need. Truly invested in his quest to serve others, Venol is a great reminder of what the human spirit can accomplish with hard work and a purposeful mission.

To learn more about our inspiring Sentinels like Venol, visit www.sentinelsoffreedom.org/sentinels/stories



Venol meeting locals at the Whuti Community Library



Hard at work



Venol at the Whuti Community Library

“ I am a testimony of how Sentinels of Freedom can help you achieve your dream if you are committed to it. ”



Venol at St. Thomas Aquinas Senior High School in Ghana, visiting students as part of his State Department internship

OUR IMPACT

FINANCIALS - FISCAL YEAR 2016 EXPENSES

For 2016, we are proud to report that 83% of every dollar raised was applied directly to our scholarship recipients, our Sentinels.

(Data compiled from FY 2016 IRS form 990)



PROGRAM: 83%

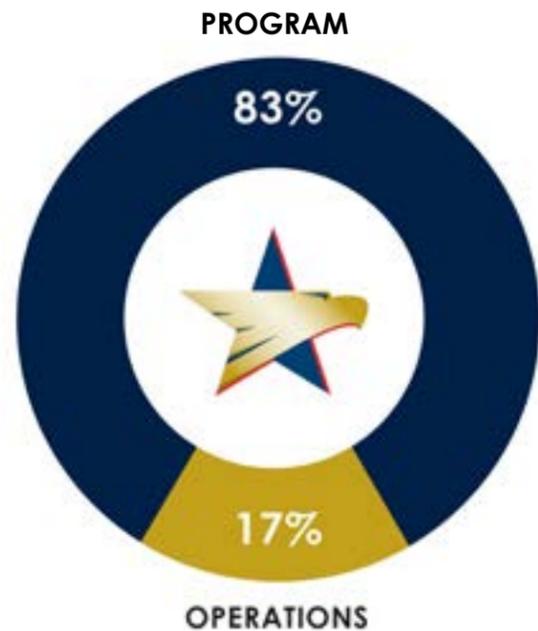


FUNDRAISING: 12%



ADMINISTRATIVE: 5%

You can view our full financial documents online:
www.sentinelsoffreedom.org/about/financials



SENTINEL STATS - THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Our comprehensive, multifaceted program's focus is on assisting our Sentinels find long-term success on their new, post-military path.

90%

HAVE EMPLOYMENT LINED UP WITHIN 6 MONTHS OF GRADUATION

97%

STATE THAT SOF'S ASSISTANCE INCREASES THEIR EMPLOYMENT & EARNING POTENTIAL

100%

OF ALUMNI WOULD RECOMMEND SOF TO OTHER WOUNDED VETERANS

100%

BELIEVE THAT SOF HAS INCREASED THEIR CONFIDENCE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR FAMILY & COMMUNITY IN A PRODUCTIVE WAY

90%

BELIEVE THAT SOF'S ASSISTANCE HAS HELPED THEM ACHIEVE FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Only 53% considered themselves financially independent prior to SOF

97%

SAY THAT BEING A SENTINEL HAS HELPED WITH THEIR RECOVERY FROM PHYSICAL AND/OR EMOTIONAL INJURIES & THEIR TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

(Based on most recent data)

“
Sentinels of Freedom has given me the opportunity to seamlessly transition to civilian life after my injury. Without your support, I would not be where I am today.”



- Sentinel Wayne Waldon,
US Army





“
Sentinels of Freedom has been an invaluable part of my life since my injury. In a time of uncertainty, SOF was there to assure me that all would be well.
 ”

— ★ —
 - Sentinel Gabe Garcia,
 US Army

OUR IMPACT

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

A lot of great things happened in 2016! Visit www.sentinelsoffreedom.org/news to learn more.

23

SENTINELS GRADUATED OUR PROGRAM

These Veterans finished their education and entered the next step on their post-military journey.



61

NEW SENTINELS JOINED OUR PROGRAM

55 full scholarship and 6 merit grant Sentinels with varied goals and aspirations were accepted.



18

COMMUNITY EVENTS WERE HELD TO BENEFIT SOF

The events ranged from golf tournaments and bike rides to a fashion show - and raised a total of \$328,564!



FROM SENTINELS TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBERS

2016 saw the addition of three new members to the SOF Board of Directors. Interesting fact? All three of these inspiring individuals are Sentinel graduates. With their deep, personal knowledge of our program, Sentinels and now Board Members Jason, Garrett, and HT will be able to bring invaluable insights and knowledge to further our mission.

Our vision is to add more Sentinels to our BOD in the upcoming years.



JASON CHURCH
 Captain, US Army



GARRETT JONES
 Corporal, US Marine Corps



HT TRAN
 Sergeant, US Army

A young man with dark hair, wearing a white pinstriped shirt and a grey striped tie, stands in front of a large, multi-story brick building with arched windows. The scene is set outdoors during the day, with a clear blue sky and some greenery visible. The man is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

“Sentinels of Freedom has given me hope about my future and provided me an immeasurable amount of security and mentorship.”

- Sentinel Daniel Sterling, US Army Ranger

THANK YOU

to all of our donors, ambassadors, volunteers, and supporters. It is because of people like you that we are able to carry out our mission.

The funds, time, and dedication that you have provided to SOF are helping change the lives of our nation's brave men and women.

Thank you.

**“ Without Sentinels’ support
and guidance, I would not
be where I am at today. ”**



- Sentinel Matt White, US Army

**LEARN HOW TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE AT:**

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