

# ANNUAL REPORT

2021





With your support in 2021, not only were we able to continue our pioneering work in supporting, resourcing, and advocating for permanently sidelined student-athletes, but also to deepen and strengthen our work. We do not take for granted the challenges of the days we live in and we recognize whole heartedly that this progress is entirely made possible by the generous support of our allies in the athletic community.

We continued our work with the COVID Wellness Initiative to support the mental wellness of student-athletes impacted by the pandemic’s impact on life and sport. We created 40 original resources over the course of 9 months, received over 5,500 views on our podcasts and videos, and trained over 1,250 athletic trainers and coaches in mental wellness support. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide resources to support the mental health of student-athletes, athletic trainers, and coaches alike.

This year we also strategically advanced our programming to support student-athletes facing a medically-forced exit from sport. Your support is what made it possible for us to: hire additional staff to enhance outreach and engagement; continue to build our resource library; design our Campus Liaison program (to partner with athletic trainers for improved after-care support for medically disqualified athletes); develop meaningful athlete care packages with original gifts and support resources; update our client relationship management system to help us keep up with increased demand for one-one-one support; educate athletic trainers, physicians, and coaches on helping athletes adapt and thrive following medically-forced exit from sport; plan for the launch of our athlete connection groups in January 2022; and reach our goal for participants in our research study on the psychological impact of medically-forced exit from support and available support offered.

Together, we are doing something that has never been done before. Sidelined USA is changing the narrative for permanently-sidelined athletes by making specialized coping resources and social support freely accessible for the first time nationwide. On behalf of our clients, staff, and board, thank you for partnership with us in this ambitious endeavor.

Christine Pinalto / Executive Director



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# About Sidelined USA

*A first-of-its-kind 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supporting, resourcing, & advocating for permanently sidelined student-athletes nationwide*

## MISSION

To reunite permanently-sidelined student-athletes with their passions and inspire them to find a meaningful way forward

## VISION

To see athletes create a positive mindset within themselves, requiring their personal best, in order to confidently face and overcome their challenges, both on and off the field/court

## PURPOSE

To make specialized support resources available to all sidelined student-athletes nationwide at no cost and to elevate the standard of care for medically disqualified athletes through research, education, and advocacy

# Our Why

At Sidelined USA, we recognize that a medical exit from sport caused by career-ending injury, health condition, or concussions can be a devastating, life-altering event with significant and long-lasting psychological impact. The research indicates that permanently-sidelined athletes are at high risk for depression, isolation, anxiety, identity loss, alcohol and drug abuse, disordered eating, suicidal ideation, and diminished life satisfaction even years later.

These athletes are in a vulnerable position and frequently do not feel empowered to advocate for themselves, choosing instead to struggle in silence. Sidelined USA bridges the gap to be that advocate for improved after-care support while also empowering sidelined athletes to “find their voice” and seek the help they need.



# What We Do

## PROGRAM



### *RESOURCES*

We publish research-based articles, interviews, podcasts and informational files to assist permanently sidelined athletes in a healthy adjustment and psychological recovery.



### *CONNECTION*

We connect sidelined athletes with "mentor" sidelined athletes through one-on-one introductions, online connection groups and our Sidelined Stories podcast interviews.



### *NEW PURSUITS*

We inspire and equip permanently-sidelined athletes to adapt to their new reality by re-engaging with the sports world through alternate avenues.

## AWARENESS

We build awareness about the psychological impact and mental health considerations of athletes experiencing a medically-forced exit from sport.

## EDUCATION

We provide research-based educational resources, trainings, and speakerships which promote best practices for the after-care of permanently-sidelined athletes.

## RESEARCH

We create data on medically disqualified athletes and the psychological impact of a medically-forced exit from sport.

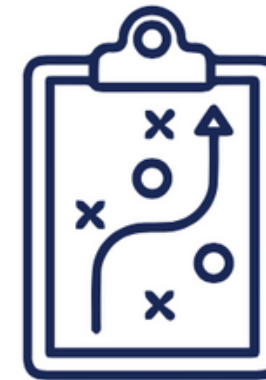
# Sidelined USA By the Numbers

*Leading a national movement to better serve, resource, and inspire permanently-sidelined athletes to cope with their tremendous loss and find a meaningful way forward following medical exit from sport*



OVER **4,000**

ATHLETIC TRAINERS, COACHES & PHYSICIANS TRAINED



EDUCATIONAL SPEAKERSHIPS AND TRAININGS

**24**



**82,000**

WEBPAGE VIEWS



**110+**



**40,500**

WEBSITE VISITORS

OVER **46,400**



ORIGINAL RESOURCES CREATED

TIMES OUR RESOURCES HAVE BEEN ACCESSED



# 2021 Athlete Impact



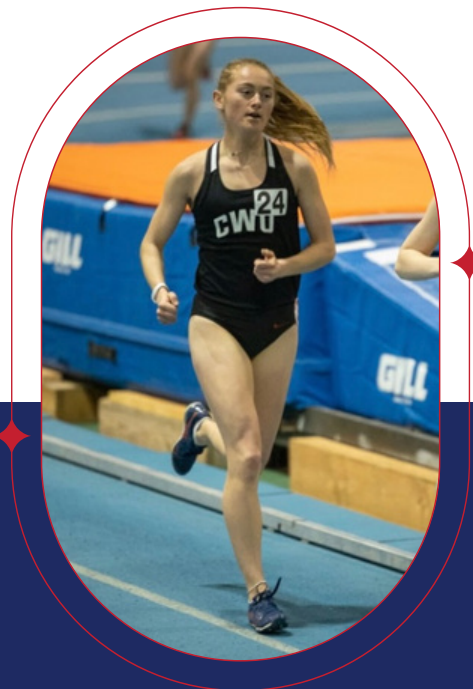
*Kendra Bullard*

"At first I was hesitant to reach out to Sidelined USA. As athletes, it isn't often our first instinct to talk to people about our mental health or our feelings, especially in regard to injury. However, after reaching out, I wish I would have done it sooner. Being vulnerable with someone and allowing them to hear my experiences and emotions throughout this process helped me get through it. [The Sidelined team] helped me in my identity shift by assuring me the experiences I went through didn't define me. I cannot thank Sidelined enough for the impact they have had on me."



*Tyler Visser*

"It felt uplifting to know that there was a support team that understands what this major life transition is like and has worked to bring as many going through it together. Bottom line is it reinforced to me that there are people out there that care. Knowing that I am not alone and that Sidelined is a group I can always look to for relief or guidance has helped this process tremendously."



*Molly Mattson*

"Being paired with my amazing mentor helped me discover a new sense of belonging, community and understanding. Being able to talk to someone who has been through this battle gave me hope. She experienced many of the highs and the lows that I am experiencing and has a deep sense of empathy and first-hand wisdom on how to traverse this unknown. This helped me realize that my feelings and emotions were valid and that with faith, I could conquer this battle and rise stronger."



*Victoria Morgan*

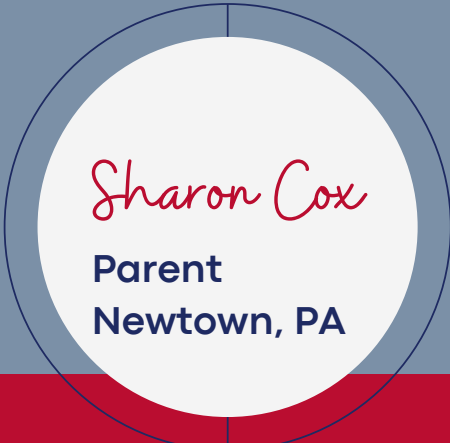
"I actually stumbled upon Sidelined USA while researching for a blog post on lost identity almost a year or two into my journey. I was searching for answers, support, and truly just others who might be able to understand what it was that I was going through. I reached out on the webpage and was soon contacted by someone from the organization who felt like a long lost friend. I remember wishing that I had found the organization earlier, as I had already been struggling to cope with my treatment and loss for a few years."

# 2021 Program Testimonials

"I reached out to Sidelined USA after searching online for resources when my daughter, Lauren first got injured because I didn't know how to help her with all that she was going through physically and mentally. We knew that the physical part was out of our control and in the hands of the healthcare system. But I felt lost helping her to navigate the emotional part.

I have to say that my daughter - who does not show a lot of emotion - was VERY touched by the care package Sidelined USA sent. I wasn't sure if she would be receptive, but as she started opening the package, she got quiet and more interested. She loved the shirt and the band and she's worn them already (the band, every day now). She also read through every resource sheet which are now on her bedside table.

Sidelined has provided her with the tools necessary to tackle any mental obstacles in the weeks/months ahead. I can't tell you how grateful I am for your advice and for being lucky enough to find Sidelined . . . Honestly, between the emails with Sidelined staff, the Sidelined website and resources, and the super awesome care package, I feel very prepared to deal with the next part of Lauren's recovery."



"As an athletic trainer of 23 years, I have unfortunately seen (and worked with) my share of sidelined athletes. One of the hardest things to do is look a student-athlete in the eyes when they realize their athletic career has just come to an end. Athletes' identities are often driven by the sport they play and when they can no longer do that, it can feel like a significant part of their identity has been stripped away. Because we know these student-athletes so well, it is hard for the athletic trainer to find the right words.

This year I was introduced to Sidelined USA through a training and was provided tools to help with that difficult situation. When one of my athletes was diagnosed with a medically disqualifying heart condition this Fall, I was able to utilize the materials Sidelined USA gave to guide our team in having that immediate conversation as well as finding ways to keep him involved in other ways.

The Sidelined team provided direct support to the student athlete as well. Our athlete was really touched by the care package Sidelined sent. It's been a difficult time but it's really great to know that now there are resources available to offer my athlete to help him in coping with this complicated transition."





# 2021 Program Spotlights

## COVID Wellness Initiative

*Specialized resources to support the mental wellness of student-athletes through pandemic impact on life & sport*  
Oct. 2020 - June 2021

**40 RESOURCES CREATED**  
**5,500 PODCAST & WEBINAR LISTENS**  
**1,250 ATHLETIC TRAINERS AND COACHES TRAINED**



Coping with Loss & Loneliness  
Dealing with Chronic Stress  
Managing Negative Thoughts  
Depression & Anxiety  
End of Athletic Career  
Mental Health Triggers  
Cultivating Resilience  
Suicidal Thoughts  
Healthy Athletic Identity  
Transformative Thinking



## Educational Trainings

*Trainings on best practices of sidelined athlete after-care and corresponding mental health considerations*

### 7 TRAININGS & SPEAKERSHIPS

Pandemic Parenting Webinar  
Northwestern Sports Medicine Team  
Southern Illinois Healthcare Clinic  
Great Lakes Trainers Association  
American College of Sports Medicine  
Tackle What's Next Summit  
Chicago Sports Injury & Psychology Symposium



## Athlete Care Packages

*In-hand meaningful support for newly medically disqualified student-athletes designed and informed by Sidelined's network of mentor sidelined athletes*

**Launched October 21st**  
**56 CARE PACKAGES SENT**  
**in first 10 weeks of program**

Two-fold purpose:  
1) helping medically-disqualified athletes feel seen and understood  
2) providing them with tangible resources from those who have been there themselves



# Volunteer Spotlight



**MIKA BUSSEY**

I first started playing soccer at age 5, and quickly began playing travel soccer for one of the best clubs in Michigan. It wasn't long before I was part of the Olympic Developmental Program's youngest age group in Michigan (when I was still a year too young to even try out). Early on, I found my identity in sports. It was what I loved to do, and what I was best at. Growing up, I can't remember a time where I didn't answer the classic, "What do you want to be when you grow up" question with "a professional soccer player." I was my happiest when I was competing; it was when I felt most like myself.

My future in soccer was looking very bright until I tore my ACL while playing in a soccer game at 12 years old. Nowadays where there is no off-season for athletes, sustaining this injury means missing a significant amount of time playing and training, which feels devastating especially when your sport is your life. Unfortunately, after someone tears their ACL for the first time, they are significantly more likely to re-tear it in the future, which is exactly what happened to me. I eventually tapered down my dream of playing professional soccer to playing Division I College Soccer. Even though it was an uphill battle with my health, I was able to achieve it. I played soccer at the University of Connecticut, until I tore my ACL for the fourth time. After this, I finally listened to the pleas of my orthopaedic doctor to give up "cutting and pivoting" sports. Having to stop playing soccer threw me into a spiral of identity loss and grief. When you're praised your entire life for your athletic accomplishments and defined as an "athlete" by others, it is not far-fetched to find yourself questioning what else you have to offer beyond these abilities.



I decided to get involved with Sidelined USA because of my own experience and struggles of searching for identity and purpose beyond sport. Losing a defining aspect of who you are will always be challenging, but losing it suddenly for reasons beyond your control can only amplify the emotions you are feeling at that time. Athletes are warriors by nature and are encouraged to hide or "shake off" their emotions and even their physical injuries. While this may allow us to perform through an injury or mental block, it is only a temporary solution and burying what you're feeling is eventually going to bubble to the surface and blow up.

While I was blessed enough to have a network of support around me, there are athletes that do not, and can end up feeling a loss of identity, while also being isolated (as their previous support system was also entangled in their sport.) Sidelined USA offers the opportunity to connect athletes with not only a network of support, but the RIGHT network of support. While I did have people around me, these people couldn't completely understand what I was going through because they had never been through it personally. I think connecting a network of people who have shared similar experiences helps to expedite the healing process. It makes people feel more "heard" through shared empathy, while also providing hope for the future through mentors who have successfully navigated those dark places before you.

**Being involved as a mentor with Sidelined has been an amazing experience. It allows me the opportunity to flip my own narrative.**

I felt called to make a difference and be a sounding board for someone who I can genuinely support through our shared experiences. It's also allowed me to see how much I have been able to grow personally from the trials I have had and it's encouraging to see how it has unfolded and ultimately made me a better person. Being able to share that perspective with my mentee provides hope and light for their future.

My wish for Sidelined USA in the future is that we can continue to grow and touch the lives of as many medically disqualified athletes as possible. I want every medically disqualified athlete to feel supported and seen. Every former athlete should know that while being an athlete is something to be proud of, it goes beyond sports. It is a mentality and a mindset - we can truly be successful in any arena because we have developed the tools and skills that competing has given us. Even though the "loss of self" an athlete experiences when going through a medical disqualification is devastating, I know that every former athlete is an athlete for life, and given the right team (like the network of other medically disqualified athletes at Sidelined) and the right coach (like the mentors of medically disqualified athletes at Sidelined), we will be able to lead and win gracefully in life - because THAT is who we are.

# 2022 Program Insights

## **ATHLETE CONNECTION GROUPS**

Online support groups for permanently sidelined athletes led by Sidelined's network of "mentor" athletes who also experienced a medically-forced exit from sport.

Our virtual groups meet once monthly to discuss issues directly and indirectly relevant to medical exit from sport with the purpose of supporting one another through the transition process.

Designed to alleviate one of the most difficult aspects of becoming permanently sidelined, feeling like nobody really "gets it" and that there's not a natural place to talk about the internal struggle past those first few months.

Learn more by visiting our [Connection Group Page](#).

## **RESEARCH UPDATE**

To help address a significant gap in research on the psychological impact of medical exit from sport and available support resources, the goal of our research study has been to create the largest published study of its kind with 100+ respondents and provide the sports medicine community with valuable information to help inform their after-care policies.

We are happy to report we recently exceeded our goal with 104 full survey participants and closed our study for interpretation. We look forward to reporting our findings later this year to provide valuable insights into this non-normative exit from sport.



## **CAMPUS LIAISON PROGRAM**

Are you an athletic trainer who would like to utilize the Sidelined USA resources in your athletic program? Contact us about becoming a Sidelined USA Campus Liaison!

Campus Liaisons will be equipped with a host of research-based tools and resources to support the highest quality after-care for athletes facing a medically-forced exit from sport. Free resources offered include webinar training, educational online resources for your fellow staff, customizable after-care spreadsheet, parent/guardian resources, athlete care packages and connection group invitations, individual consultations with Sidelined staff, and our Sidelined USA Resource Index with links to over 50 Sidelined USA-created support resources organized by topics common to the medically disqualified athlete experience (grief, loss, depression, suicidal thoughts, coping strategies, rebuilding strategies, etc.)

Contact us through our [Contact Form](#) for more information.



## **ATHLETE CARE PACKAGES**

Do you know an athlete who has experienced a medically-forced exit from sport in the past year? Request a Sidelined USA care package free of charge through our [Care Package Form](#).

Qualifying athletes are those: between the ages of 13-23 who have experienced a medically-forced exit from their primary sport within the past 12 months. (Note: \*Exclusively for the athlete for whom "return to play" is NOT a viable option)

Our care packages acknowledge the unique challenges medically disqualified athletes face and provide specialized support those who understand this transition first hand.

# 2021 Financial Report

REVENUE AND EXPENSES				
<b>Revenue</b>				
Individual Contributions				\$12,932
Foundations				\$5,000
Corporations				\$84,071
PPP Loan Forgiveness				\$10,445
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>				<b>\$112,448</b>
<b>Revenue by Quarter</b>				
<b>Qu. 1</b>	<b>Qu. 2</b>	<b>Qu. 3</b>	<b>Qu. 4</b>	
\$32,665	\$30,107	\$30,000	\$19,676	
<b>Expenses</b>				
Program Services				\$78,530
General Operations				\$15,228
Fundraising				\$7,642
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>				<b>\$101,400</b>
BALANCE SHEET				
<b>Assets</b>				
Bank Accounts				\$57,891
<b>Liabilities</b>				
None				0
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>				<b>\$57,891</b>

*Reflects finances January 1- December 31, 2021*

# Special Thanks

## FOUNDING STRATEGIC SPONSOR



## DONOR MATCHING GRANT PROVIDED BY

Gideon Charitable Foundation

## TOP FUNDRAISERS

Mika Bussey	Emily Allard
Jordan Anderson	Garrett Ponder
Chrissy Papetti	Val Jones
Kris Maday	Jessica Ballard

**OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE  
TO ALL OF OUR  
SUPPORTERS AND DONORS  
WHO MAKE THIS WORK POSSIBLE.**

If you would like to support our mission, please  
visit: [www.SIDELINEDUSA.org/donate](http://www.SIDELINEDUSA.org/donate)



## A MEANINGFUL WAY FORWARD

[WWW.SIDELINEDUSA.ORG](http://WWW.SIDELINEDUSA.ORG)

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