



**BIRTH TO THREE**

**EMPLOYMENT**

**RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT**

**SPORTS BUDDIES**

**SENIORS PROGRAM**

**DAY SERVICES**

**TRANSPORTATION**

**FAMILY SUPPORT**

**RECREATION**



# 2016-2017 Annual Report

*Celebrating our 65<sup>th</sup> Year and Cultivating Opportunities to Grow!*

*Providing services to people impacted with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families in Fairfield County.*



# Little STARS: Birth to Three.



Kimberly, and her husband Jason, experienced an easy pregnancy and delivery of their daughter, Parker. In the hospital Parker failed the infant hearing test. Later, when she was almost 14 months old, vision experts and neurologists helped uncover that Parker has an extremely rare genetic disorder with few case studies from which to learn. At five months, Kimberly was introduced to STAR's Birth-to-Three Program. Suddenly, Parker's world overflowed with *"delightful therapists who were so easy to be around."* Working as a team, speech, physical, occupational therapists, educators and coordinators rotate their visits to help Parker reach for her age-appropriate milestones. Kimberly and Jason are *"encouraged and comforted by the way STAR's staff work with the other providers to coordinate strategies and keep everyone on the same page."* Her parents are thrilled to celebrate even the smallest milestones that *"some parents with typical children may miss like sitting up or coming out of a sitting position."* Parker is starting to form some of her own words, crawling and walking with a therapy walker. *"Once a child who only ate pureed foods, Parker now eats anything and everything!"* recounts her proud mother. Parker loves to laugh, hug her baby doll, and even sometimes appreciate the affectionate licks from the family's energetic golden doodle, Galley.

As they are called upon with over 280 local children each year, STAR's caring team helps Parker by giving her essential tools and strategies for success and sharing those with her parents and other caregivers to

carry through her transition to pre-school. STAR's professional and passionate staff create an individualized family service plan (IFSP) for each child. A plan that, in STAR's case, delivers results that exceed the state reported averages. Most recent state reports indicate 100% of children who were part of STAR's program *"reduced the gap"* in their development when compared to same-aged peers (exceeding the 67% state average) and 93% of the children supported by STAR *"caught up"* to same-aged peers (well exceeding the 59% state average).

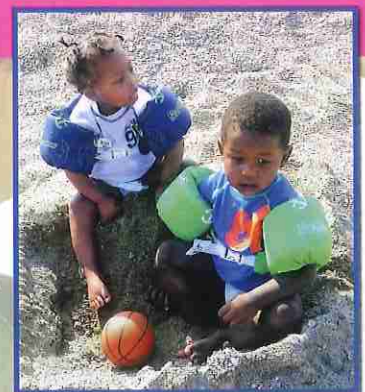
STAR bridges the gap in state funding (which covers less than 70% of the program costs) by soliciting donations, hosting annual fundraising events, and through impactful grants from foundations like The Community Fund of Darien, The New Canaan Community Fund, The John and Ethel Noble Charitable Trust, First County Bank Foundation and others.



Maritza and her husband Luis were awaiting their *"miracle baby"* for years. Finally, two months into the pregnancy, they were told the baby had Down syndrome and it was likely she would not survive full term. Doctors advised her to terminate the pregnancy; but Maritza refused, saying *"I prayed and I prayed. When I saw my perfect baby with her beautiful black eyes, I knew I had my miracle. She is energetic, playful, smiling and learns so much that every week she amazes me! The STAR team teaches me how to teach Belen, they are so special."* And, when Belen had a visit from Molly Cloffi, a New Canaan High School senior who was part of STAR's Birth to Three Program, Maritza's voice cracked as she related, *"Molly was so polite and caring to Belen."* When my husband and I saw Molly, *"We saw our daughter through her--we said she's going to be just like her! We saw our future, and it was bright."*



Caleb is a loving and social little boy. Working with a coordinated team of STAR professionals, Caleb's routine of physical, speech, occupational and behavioral therapy is helping him advance towards his developmental milestones. After having two heart surgeries and being surrounded by specialized doctors for his medical needs since birth, Caleb will soon be blowing out three candles with his twin brother Christian and celebrating with older brother Kari. Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director of STAR Rubino Family Center, applauds Caleb's mother, Kai, asserting, *"She is so devoted to her sons and miraculously balances her time to follow through on all appointments and hospitalizations while being an excellent student for the skill-building and coaching from STAR therapists."*



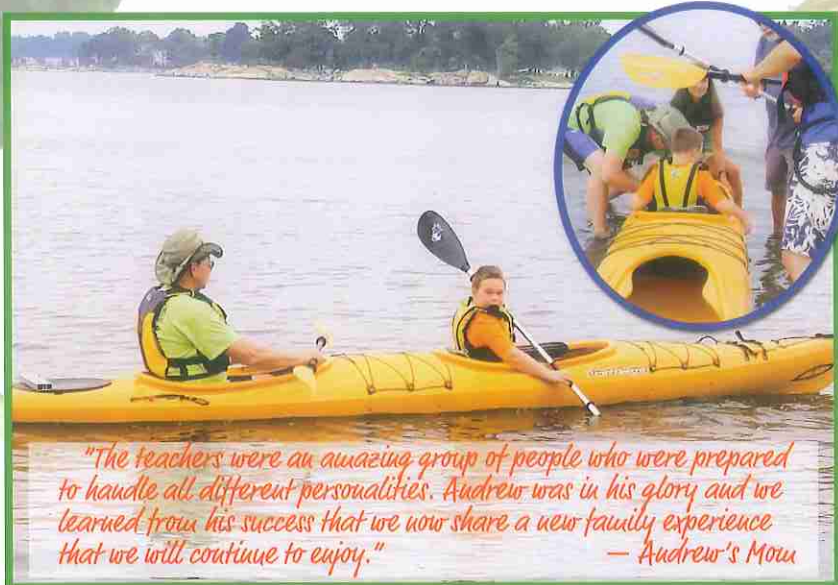
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# Sports STARS: Let's get physical!



*"The teachers were an amazing group of people who were prepared to handle all different personalities. Andrew was in his glory and we learned from his success that we now share a new family experience that we will continue to enjoy."*  
 — Andrew's Mom

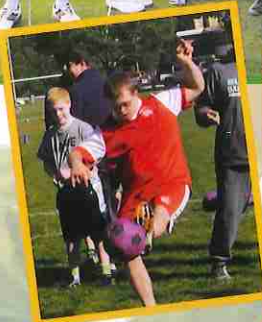
STAR continues to build community connections that promote opportunities for safe, healthy physical activities in inclusive locations such as local YMCA's, sports complexes, trampoline parks, golf ranges, bowling alleys, and more. STAR's Sports Buddies Program continues to grow with four seasons of practices on Saturday mornings in New Canaan. Sports Buddies attracts two dozen participants each week who partner with their buddies and coaches to learn basic sport skills, improve physical condition and build self-confidence.

New in 2017, STAR collaborated with Waypoint Adventure from MA to offer kayaking for all abilities in Darien. Waypoint Adventure challenges people with disabilities to discover their purpose, talents and strengths through the transforming power of adventure. The program was a popular success, with participants and their families amazed at the overall preparedness and sensitivity to make customized adjustments so individuals with all types of challenges could fully participate. One mother, Rhonda Blackwell, could not be happier with the experience enjoyed by her 11-year-old son Andrew. A fifth grader at Saxe Middle School in New Canaan and regular Sports Buddy participant, Andrew is a STAR Birth to Three alumni. He plays golf with Special Olympics, hockey with CT Storm Hockey, and a host of other activities.

"This was his first time kayaking," says his mother who was initially apprehensive on how well he would do. STAR plans to expand this program for the coming year.

STAR has also hit the links this year, with a successful family golf outing at Silvermine Golf Course in New Canaan and the addition of a series of golf classes for interested participants. Inspired by STAR's friend, Greg "Jake" Jacobson, former professional golfer and a spokesman for Stand Up and Play, an organization that promotes a paramobile that

enables people with disabilities to enjoy the game, STAR participants are learning how to grip the club, set up their stance and swing under Jake's tutelage.



## STAR CONNECTIONS A New Branch on STAR's Tree of Services



In winter 2017, STAR was awarded the contract from the State of CT Department of Developmental Services to assume supervision of a Norwalk-based program serving 22 adults with significant disabilities that was formerly operated by St. Vincent's Special Needs Center. The center at 21 Cross Street, renamed STAR Connections on March 1, serves as a meeting place from which individuals with complex physical and intellectual needs will participate in community and in-house activities. The program also purchased two, new Hi-tech vans, which can accommodate numerous wheelchairs thanks to a grant from the Governor's Nonprofit Bond Grant Program.

STAR was happy to retain many of the original staff to help fill the new team that includes program instructors and coordinators, community support and an LPN. The Program Manager is Nicole Johnson who is under the direction of Linda Snell, Director of Family Services. Thanks to generous design assistance from Ring's End experts, the professionals of CertaPro Painters, STAR facilities staff and Classic Graphics, the space has been refreshed and redecorated to complement the personalities of the participants. A highlight of the new look is the inclusion of brightly-colored "Rock STAR" wall portraits that feature the individual participants, created by STAR's generous photographer and friend, Mliggs Burroughs,



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# My First Job: Beyond the paycheck...



Who wouldn't enjoy being surrounded by caring people, pets with personalities, and cuddly puppies as they perform much-needed tasks to benefit the team? Lisa Griffin, a STAR participant and resident of New Canaan's South Avenue Cottage for adults with I/DD, seems to have found her perfect match this year at the Norwalk Veterinary Hospital. With the assistance of her job developer, Martha Spiegel, the willingness of owners Charles and Janice Duffy, and the support from her co-workers and STAR's employment specialists, Lisa has just completed her first six months in her first individual job (She had previously been a participant in SONO STARS, a cleanup crew employed to beautify South Norwalk). She works a couple of days each week methodically washing, drying and folding all of the pet blankets used to comfort the hospital's patients. Likewise, she cleans the pet bowls and helps with other duties that endear her to the team. The Duffy's praise Lisa saying, *"She is a welcome addition to our close-knit team. She has an important job and all of us appreciate the enthusiasm and positive spirit she adds to our workplace."*

STAR has developed a proven track record of job development and ongoing support services that has been recently acknowledged as the Number One agency in the state and region in securing jobs and working hours for people with I/DD with over 65 successful placements in competitive employment, job tenure in excess of 9.3 years, and annual job retention rate over 95%. STAR's My First Job program assists graduating high school students and unemployed adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) find and keep meaningful jobs in the community. The unemployment rate for people with I/DD is so much higher than the average population and traditional job seeking efforts often result in failure of this population without proper accommodations made in advance.



One of Lisa's housemates in New Canaan, Todd McInerney, joined her in starting his first competitive job last April. A regular employee in STAR's Café at STAR Center, Todd enthusiastically began work at Dry Dock Café in Norwalk under the supervision of owner, Jamie Doyle.

Similar to the sentiments of other STAR employers, Jamie stressed that *"Todd has brought a positive perspective to the entire staff. Customers have come to know him and recognize him as a regular part of the staff. While there is certainly nice feeling of goodwill and customer support, we were never in this for the recognition. Todd's contagious smile and can-do attitude is our best reward."*

Todd has found his place on the restaurant's team by stamping logos on bags, clearing tables, filling condiments, and other assignments. When asked about his new job, Todd was clear in stating, *"I love it!"*

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# STAR leads state in jobs for people with I/DD.

In the past year, generous funding from *Fairfield County's Community Foundation (\$20,000 Grant in 2016-17)*, *The Arc @ Work Grant with Walmart (\$12,000)* and others were used to compensate an additional professional job developer for time and outreach into the community, certify two more individuals in a state program on customized employment, as well as to fund other costs and materials required to enhance the program and gain greater visibility among potential employers and eligible employees. In 2017 STAR's commitment to transitioning from segregated sheltered employment to integrated employment and community options for all persons served in adult day programs came to fruition when STAR ceased all subcontract work effective 1/31/2017 and stopped payment of subminimum wages in April.

This year, STAR became one of only six agencies in the state, and the only one in Fairfield County, to be accepted for the Customized Employment Certification to train two STAR job development staff, Shelby Grich and Melissa Vanasse and to engage STAR's Board of Directors, Program Director and Executive Director in this pilot program initiative. It is STAR's goal to provide customized integrated employment to all STAR participants who have a desire to work.



*"This is an absolute win-win for all. I was happy to give Todd an opportunity and even more thrilled that he is doing a great job and exceeding expectations."*

*— Jamie Doyle*

## WORDS FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 1952 a group of local parents envisioned a world where their children with I/DD would have opportunities to live, work and thrive in their community with respect and dignity. Today, 65 years later, STAR maintains that vision. So much positive change has been celebrated in those years; but there is still far to go and STAR is dedicated to be on the cutting edge of change.

Forging ahead, despite the ominous storm clouds of state and federal funding which necessitate persistent, organized and intelligent advocacy from STAR and partners at the Arc CT and Arc US, STAR is proud to be the Number ONE agency in the state in securing jobs for people with I/DD. Likewise, STAR's Birth-to-Three program continues to exceed state and local average results with 100% of the children *"reducing the gap"* and 93% *"caught up"* in their development when compared to same-aged peers.

In 2017, STAR was awarded a contract to serve over 20 local people with I/DD and more significant challenges. Renamed STAR Connections, the program has been reenergized by a facelift and expanded staff. STAR's Sports Buddies is a weekly highlight along with STAR's community collaborations that bring inclusive arts, fitness, gardening, literary, and nature activities to our participants. STAR recently sold our TEC location in South Norwalk to reallocate resources as part of our strategic plan. STAR will be opening a satellite office in New Canaan in fall 2017, with other towns to follow.

*Above all, we thank the community for 65 years of supporting STAR and helping us in lighting the way.*



**Assaf Ben-Atar**  
President



**Katie Banzhaf**  
Executive Director



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# Angie's Story: A diva in bloom.



We all know people who enter a room and instantly change the atmosphere. Like a flash of lightning or the whirlwind of a tornado, there is a unique energy that surrounds one of STAR's newest residents, Angie Daniels. Last spring Angie moved into one of STAR's staffed apartments in Norwalk to join her new roommate and pursue her dream of independent living and building a life full of opportunities. She is proud to have her own place where she helps with grocery shopping, preparing meals, setting the table, cleaning her room, recycling and doing laundry every Saturday.

Angie's younger sister and guardian, Shawna, asserted that, "*Angie has always been independent, full of life, and very loveable.*" She expresses happiness and appreciation for STAR's residential supports that allow her sister to be safe and experience all that life has to offer. She tells of Angie's passion for going out to eat, playing at arcades, shopping and having her hair done. A big smile comes to her face as she hears Angie often proclaim, "*I look like a Diva!*"

Echoing the same, Angie's house manager, Latasha Smith, describes her new resident as "*Opinionated about everything, outspoken, full of life, full of fun, and, most importantly, overflowing with compassion and understanding for others.*" Latasha, like other professional staff on STAR's team, dedicates her career to providing adults like Angie every opportunity to build an independent life with safety, good health, personal growth and a positive outlook tantamount in importance. STAR residential services support over 89 individuals each year in a variety of housing arrangements.

Who is Angie Daniels? In her own words, she is someone who "*Loves to dance, cook lasagna (with no tomato sauce), make pottery, swim, watch wrestling and watch Twilight movies with werewolves and vampires.*" Angie aspires to have a job so she can save for her dream trip to Hawaii or the Bahamas. As one might not expect of a diva whose braided hair is an ever-changing statement of her confident personality, Angie's bright pink room (her favorite color) is covered

in WWE posters of her favorites like John Cena. STAR is pleased to welcome this Stratford High School graduate who speaks her mind, is a member of STAR's Self-Advocates group, and a new cast member in the annual Theater of STARs show. When Angie's assistant house manager, Ashley, described her as "High maintenance," Angie just rolled her eyes and beamed as she proclaimed, "*Yes, I am a diva!*"

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"Yes,  
I am a  
Diva!"



"Angie has always been independent, full of life, and very loveable."  
— Angie's sister Shawna



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# Volunteer All Stars: Let's give them a hand!

Paying it forward, STAR participants volunteered over 3065 hours in the community last year while STAR welcomed over 750 community volunteers who contributed over 6,000 hours to benefit STAR participants. Thank you all!



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# Our Mission

STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way is a not-for-profit organization serving individuals of all ages who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), as well as providing support services to their families. We create opportunities for individuals to live full lives with independence, freedom of choice, and personal growth by providing support, services, and advocacy. We inform and encourage the community to recognize and appreciate the value of all individuals.



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Partnering with STAR, Grace Community Church in New Canaan hosted hundreds of guests with special needs and peer volunteers at their first **Tim Tebow "Night to Shine"** event which was one of 380 locations worldwide to simultaneously host an unforgettable prom night on February 10th. Guests were each recognized as kings or queens, and enjoyed a red carpet greeting, crowning ceremony, stylish decorations, catered food, paparazzi parade, photo booth, and dancing with DJ Joey Agostino.

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- Meghan Cioffi**  
1st Vice President
- Mickey Herbst**  
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- Jack McFadden**  
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- Marty Bailey**
- Barry Bosworth**
- John Denton**
- Joanna Galvin**
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- Bob Marchesi**
- Talisha Maxwell**
- Joe Muro**
- Cathleen Piscitell**
- Joe Viesta**

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Our **5th Annual Spring Speaker's Luncheon** attracted over 300 guests to raise over \$44,000 and hear the inspirational story of Jen Bricker, world-renowned aerialist and sister of Olympic gold medalist, Dominique Moceanu.



STAR's **12th Annual Walk, 5K Run & Roll** attracted record crowds to Sherwood Island and raised over \$83,000 at the *First-Sunday-in-May* event. The new 5K run doubled the number of runners since last year.



STAR held its **15th Annual Gala and Fundraising Auction** at Woodway Country Club that raised over \$238,000 to support our neighbors in Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk, Weston, Westport and Wilton.



Over 18 Fairfield County Chefs displayed their talents at the family-friendly **Galaxy of Gourmets** event held in February at Aitoro's Kitchen Showroom in Norwalk which featured the Rubberband, dancing & delectable dining.

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STAR is grateful to all of our generous corporate, foundation, and individual donors throughout the year. We appreciate the families and friends who choose to make STAR the beneficiary of special gifts in memory or in honorarium, especially those who have included STAR in their estate planning and wills as new members of our STAR Foundation Legacy Society.

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