

Looking Back to the Focus on Future***

- Enter Preschool
- Read
- Go to Camp
- Use an iPad
- Play Sports
- Cash a Paycheck
- Dance
- Vote
- Have my own Apartment
- Make Friends
- Swim
- Graduate High School
- Take a Bus
- Learn to Cook
- Kayak
- Rock Climb
- Apply to College
- Ride Horses
- Retire
- Vacation
- Hike
- Paint
- Volunteer
- Fall in Love
- Get a Job
- Be Happy

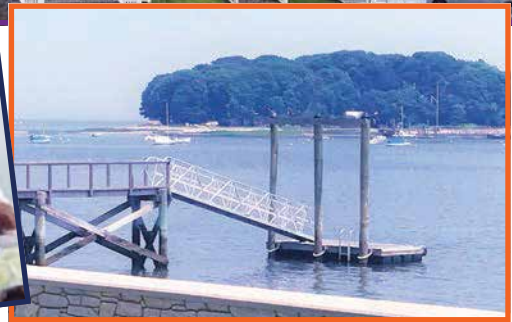


2017-2018 Annual Report

***TODAY** is the future we imagined—**TOMORROW** is the future we'll create!
Providing services to people impacted with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families in Fairfield County since 1952.*

Focusing on Building a Bright Future!

In June 2018, STAR took over management from the State of Connecticut of Martin House, a home for eight adults that is gracefully situated on an expanse of direct waterfront near Norwalk's Calf Pasture beach. The home has already welcomed other STAR visitors for a Fourth of July picnic and is host to a newly-formed fishing club off its deep water dock. Resident, Arthur Martin, whose family donated the homestead years ago to the state, is a lifelong resident who is enjoying the activities STAR has introduced to bring the home renewed energy.



In November 2017, STAR New Canaan had a grand opening at 111 Elm Street. The new site brings services for all ages closer to home for New Canaan residents. Our plan is to find meaningful employment options and other life-enriching opportunities that include people with I/DD right in their hometown. The ribbon-cutting was hosted by First Selectman, Kevin Moynihan, joined by other distinguished guests including the former First Selectman, Robert E. Mallozzi III, the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce, Tucker Murphy, and STAR Inc.'s Board President, Assaf Ben-Atar. Katie Banzhaf, Executive Director at STAR, expressed, "STAR New Canaan is another step in an exciting new vision to bring services to people with I/DD and their families closer to their homes. We appreciate the enthusiastic welcome showed by the town, local businesses and the friends we support."



Ladders and Dumpsters and Scaffolds, oh my! In the past 8 months STAR Center on Wolfpit Avenue has been abuzz with extra activity. A series of grants from the Governor's Non Profit Grant program totaling over \$1,073,000 was transformational in giving the building a complete facelift with new stucco, windows, doors and skylights. Likewise, all new HVAC and insulation improved energy efficiency and healthy air circulation. Finally, the last phase of interior painting, carpet and floor replacement, and construction to improve program space and accessibility has just begun. The generous grant has inspired even bigger dreams for STAR's bright future.



Shining a Light on Our Little STARS

Lia's Story...



Shortly after Henry and Madeline welcomed their daughter, Lia, now 2 1/2 years old, Madeline noticed Lia was not responding to visual cues. After making a panicked call to her husband to share her heart-breaking discovery, followed by a series of visits to their pediatrician, ophthalmologist, neurologist and, finally, Boston Children's Hospital, an LCA diagnosis was confirmed. Leber's congenital amaurosis (LCA) is an eye disorder causing blindness that primarily affects the retina.

As an infant, Lia was quiet, shy, and afraid of strangers. She was delayed in activities that most children do naturally. Never disheartened by Lia's diagnosis, Henry echoed his wife's feelings that **"Everything happens for a reason. We don't know God's plans, but we know our love for Lia is what moves us forward."** Henry and Madeline moved to New Canaan in May of 2018. At that time, STAR was introduced to the family and Lia began a schedule that includes speech, education, physical therapy and occupational therapy. She also receives vision therapy from a professional from the Board of Education Services for the Blind (BESFB). The therapists and parents work as a team to help Lia, and coordinate with her teachers at Jumpstart preschool.

With STAR's help, Lia is learning to socialize and be less fearful. She is starting to finger feed herself, working on forming a few words, and rolling over. With the aid of special standing equipment, she is learning to bear weight while strengthening muscles. She is learning in a bi-lingual home and can point to her "cabeza" and her "belly".

Lia loves music. When her cousins Sebastian and Stephanie visit and play guitar, Lia lights up with smiles. STAR therapists use singing as a prompt for different activities in Lia's daily routine—different songs help Lia transition to different activities. Henry and Madeline have learned from Lia. **"We know that you can't judge a person by their disability. You need to just try to give a hand and be there for them."**



"STAR takes a 360 degree approach to Isaac. They are nonjudgmental and supportive.

The team identifies the nuances in his behavior and provides tools to help break certain patterns and reprogram his brain to allow him to move ahead."

—Mehwish

Isaac's Story...

A common thread among STAR's Birth to Three families is that behind all the professional therapists and developmental milestones achieved by the child, there is usually a "super parent" or two who reinforce the lessons at home on a minute-to-minute, day-by-day basis. Isaac who is almost three years old, has a mom, Mehwish, and dad, Ahmar, who are two of those parents.

Despite hearing that Isaac comes from a **"family of late talkers,"** Mehwish observed Isaac in a Mommy and Me program as overly shy and vocally behind his peers. His pediatrician referred them to STAR in May 2018 for an evaluation. Soon after, STAR helped formulate a plan for Isaac. Mehwish has created a detailed daily checklist of all the learning activities suggested by STAR that the whole family shares with Isaac. His curiosity has been aroused and he is suddenly socializing with other kids. He has become **"one of the coolest kids in the class."** Isaac loves pointing activities, books, trucks, puzzles, and painting. He prefers only healthy Indian foods like eggplant curry and whole grain basmati. The aquarium is one of Isaac's favorite spots, especially the jellyfish room. Today, Isaac behaves in preschool and sits with his sister Aliya for over an hour playing with pegs and latches.

Mehwish credits STAR therapists for **"guiding Isaac to the pathway where he needs to be by three years old. They are with us every step of the way."** Isaac is one of over 220 children served each year by STAR's Birth to Three Program that is consistently recognized as a leading program in the state.



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Zooming in A Look at Rising STARS

STAR individuals of all ages actively participated in over 800 classes in the community this past year to learn new skills, build confidence, socialize with their peers, and engage in the wealth of inclusive educational offerings and new experiences. Classes included fitness, pottery, dance, chocolate making, martial arts, dance, animal care, art, equine care and riding, music appreciation, theater, cooking, aqua fitness, photography, safety and gardening.



Helpful STARS Volunteers contributed over 2381 Hours in the Community this year! STAR participants volunteered at a variety of locations including Meals on Wheels, Norwalk Hospital, Maritime Aquarium, Earth Place, Kingsway, New Canaan Mounted Troop, Waveny Care Center, Person to Person, Domestic Violence Crisis Center, Open Door Shelter, and Circle Care.

Active STARS Over 337 STAR Recreation activities kept STAR participants on the move! In addition to vacation getaways, activities included Waypointe Adventures, Sports Buddies, fishing, concerts, Theater of STARS, and running with MyTeamTriumph. Many enjoyed garden club, book club, bowling, mini golf, bingo, woodworking, girls' salon night, and dinner & movie nights.



"I'm going to Disney World and the Bahamas"



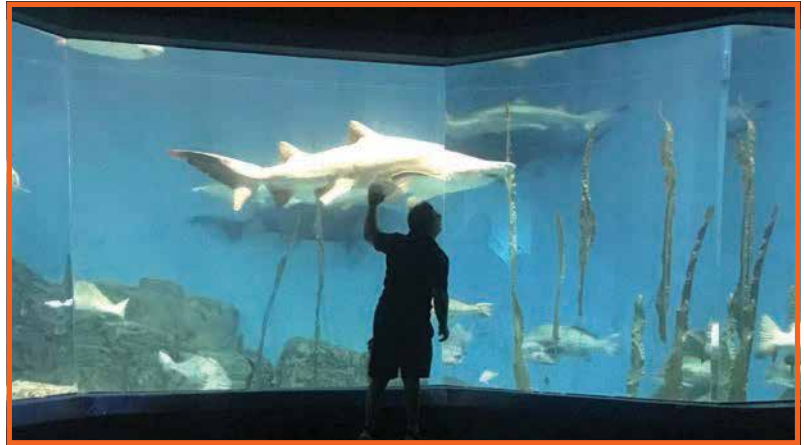
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Seeking New Horizons **STARs Workin' It**

STAR is recognized as the number one agency in Connecticut in job placements, coaching, and hours worked competitively by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In the past year, STAR placed 19 people with I/DD in new jobs including 7 "first jobs" for people 18-42 years old. New placements included positions at Grace Farms, Rye Ridge Deli, Costco, Walter Stewart Market, Bow Tie Cinemas, Townhouse for Dogs, Colony Grill, Maritime Aquarium and more.



STAR is proud to be one of the only six agencies in Connecticut chosen to participate in a Customized Employment Certification Program. STAR has a team of professional job developers, employment managers and job coaches who work with local individuals and network with businesses to create job opportunities and supervise training as well as finding locations to host classes in life, social, arts, and recreational skills starting with transitioning high school students.

Celebrate!

The average tenure of supported STAR employees is 8.9 years. This past year a few of the job anniversaries celebrated at STAR included Robert Trost (25 years Louis Dreyfus), Billy Tolles (20 years Norwalk Library) and Bobby Vento (5 years Lakota Oaks).



WORDS FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As STAR looks back on its 66th year of providing essential services to our neighbors impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities, a renewed energy and sharpened focus on our future inspires us. With the generous support from so many friends like you, STAR delivers independence, hope, respect, confidence and opportunities to help people thrive.

This past year has been a year of building at STAR—building structures to improve accessibility, energy efficiency, safety and capacity; building programs to serve newborns and toddlers, transitioning high school graduates, job seekers, additional residents and aging seniors; and building community outreach and advocacy to facilitate inclusion.

The future of STAR is brighter because of a professional staff that is visionary in the field and focused on a mission of *people first*. Likewise, our gratitude extends broadly into the community for the support and encouragement that has made today the future imagined 66 years ago, and that will propel us to create an even brighter future for tomorrow.



Assaf Ben-Atar
President



Katie Banzhaf
Executive Director

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Michael's Story **STAR Lights the Way!**



Everyone Michael encounters agrees that he is quite the “jokester,” repeating your words or rolling his wheelchair into you and laughing. In spite of his antics, Michael “makes friends everywhere he goes.” Michael was born in 1965 and raised in Westport with a younger sister and brother, by parents Gail and Roger. At age four, Michael entered STAR’s early learning program then housed at St. Paul’s-on-the-Green in Norwalk. The program pre-dated today’s Birth to Three and was designed by local parents who wanted their children to have the same learning opportunities as their typical peers. Gail and Roger recall years of advocating for their son and his rights to be included. Roger was a member of the STAR board of directors and a representative of the Arc of CT (the advocacy arm in the state for people with developmental disabilities) at a crucial time when the right to education laws were being passed and a lawsuit successfully closed the Mansfield Training School.

Thanks to his parent’s advocacy, Michael graduated from Staples high school and transitioned to STAR for adult services.

Today, Michael is a resident of STAR’s O’Brien

house in Weston—a four-person home in a residential neighborhood. Michael was one of the home’s first residents and has lived there for twenty years. His room is decorated with family photos, collected greeting cards, and his own works of art. Michael’s housemates are a second family to him. They share meals, outings to movies or favorite pizza parlors, birthday parties and just relaxing around the television watching Judge Judy. Nancy even graduated from high school with him. They share a special friendship—he makes her laugh and she calls him “Marshmallow.”

On weekdays, Michael participates in STAR’s program based at St. Peter’s Church in Norwalk. One of his favorite activities is his time at New Canaan

Mounted Troop where he is part of an equine care class. As Michael assumes the role of caregiver to his equine friends, he is all smiles and enthusiasm as he feeds and grooms them. He also loves listening to music on his iPad and his tastes range from classical to Michael Jackson! Michael is an avid Rubberband fan and during musical activities at STAR, Michael is eager to play the guitar, tambourine or maracas. He participates in STAR’s Theater of STARs annual performance. From scenic rides in the country to Sound Tigers hockey games, the circus, Beardsley Zoo or the Oyster Festival, Michael loves to be part of the crowd.

Michael is fond of so many friends and support staff that there are too many to list. As one says of him, **“Michael is very smart and loves people and humor. He sometimes has difficulty expressing what is inside of him, but we all know he loves being a part of you, not apart from you. Our motivation with Michael, as it is with everybody, is never to feel we are doing something for him; but to know we are doing something with him. We are lucky to be part of his life.”**

Each year, STAR supports over 280 adults with I/DD with day programs, job training, volunteer opportunities, recreational activities and transportation. Ninety-eight individuals also receive residential supports in a variety of inclusive settings from homes to individual apartments.



“He talks about this so much, it is surely one of the brightest lights in his life.”



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Focusing on our Volunteer All STARS!

Volunteers of all ages and from all corners of the community add an extra sparkle to STAR every day of the year. In the past twelve months, over 720 energetic local volunteers donated over 5,450 hours of service to help people with I/DD. If you would like to share your time and talents to join our family of dedicated volunteers, please sign up online www.starct.org or contact Jennifer Thompson jthompson@starct.org.



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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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In celebration of STAR's 65th Anniversary, a record-breaking crowd of over 330 generous guests supported the **Sapphire Gala and Auction**. A host of sponsors and donors raised a record-breaking \$462,000 to support STAR's **Birth to Three, My First Job** and other programs.



Guest speaker **Ali Wentworth** was featured at STAR's **6th Annual Speakers Luncheon** that raised over \$30,000 in April at Woodway Country Club in Darien. A series of special shopping days at local stores including **J. McLaughlin, vineyard vines, Darien Sport Shop, She la la, Groove** and **Silver Ribbon** raised thousands of dollars from generous local merchants.



Sherwood Island Park in Westport was the spring scene of STAR's **13th Annual Walk, 5k Run & Roll**. Over 45 teams that included over 700 runners, walkers and volunteers shared a crisp May morning to raise over \$106,000 for STAR. In September 2017 and 2018 STAR hosted a new annual **Golf Outing & Family BBQ** event at Silvermine Golf Course. In two years, over 100 golfers along with their families and generous flag and prize sponsors raised over \$20,000.



Galaxy of Gourmets at Aitoro's Kitchen Showroom in Norwalk continues to be a tasty treat for STAR families and friends. This year 18 local restaurants and chefs joined with local wine and beer experts and some lively bands to entertain over 150 guests. Other notable fundraisers this year included a **Bubbles and Blow-outs Salon Day at Fredric & Co.** in Darien and a series of fun, family-hosted **Lemon-Aid** sales.

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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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