



TIME

To Honor Our Past...Celebrate Our Present...Focus on Our Future

70
STAR, INC.
 LIGHTING THE WAY...
 Serving Our Neighbors with IDD since 1952



STAR, INC.
 Lighting the Way
 WWW.STARCT.ORG

2021-2022 Annual Report

Providing services to people impacted with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families in Fairfield County since 1952

Early Childhood Therapy • Assistive Technology • High School Transition • Family Support
 Employment & Day Services • Seniors Program • Residential • Recreation • Sports Buddies

STARgazing with STAR Board President & Executive Director



Serving Our Neighbors with IDD since 1952



Alexandra - A young STAR participant with Down syndrome.

"What if I fall? Oh darling, but what if you fly?" By Erin Hanson

Seven decades ago, a small group of resolute local parents gathered with the dream and determination that their children with developmental disabilities deserved a better life. Driven by a mission of inclusion, they challenged societal norms to light the way for a group of individuals cast in the shadows of isolation and institutionalization. Homemakers, husbands, health care professionals, teachers, friends, family, and even a local industrialist convened to brainstorm, strategize, and organize. Their energy, perseverance, bravery, and persistence were the catalyst to change. In 1952, STAR was born!

Flash forward and STAR is celebrating our 70th Anniversary! As we peruse the archives of early newspaper articles, vintage photos, board minutes, and letters from the founders, we pay tribute to all those who built the unwavering foundation on which STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way proudly stands today. Growing from a handful of children meeting in borrowed space to an organization that annually serves over seven hundred individuals whose lives are impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families in Fairfield County, STAR's future trajectory is boundless.

As we honor and learn from our history, STAR's commitment today is still first, and foremost, focused on the people we serve. Our Early Intervention Pediatric Services now benefit newborns to eight-year-olds, providing direct therapies by licensed professionals regardless of a family's ability to pay. Our high school transition team helps young adults find their first jobs and develop independence, self-confidence, and real-life skills. Our day services and senior day programs promote enrichment classes, community inclusion, volunteerism, employment, healthy lifestyles, and well-being. Over one hundred individuals thrive in our

residential settings. As we gradually come back from COVID, we are stronger and more energized than ever. COVID has honed our acumen for flexibility, technology, adaptability, and invention while spotlighting the selfless dedication of our direct care professionals.

Our seven decades fill a treasure trove of community partnerships that have promoted inclusion for people in hundreds of local jobs, a score of neighborhood residences scattered over six towns, and thousands of classes and activities. Community volunteers have enriched our programs and properties with tens of thousands of individual service hours.

Today, our newly renovated headquarters in Norwalk is a shining beacon to light the future with dramatic new program areas including a senior memory center, assistive technology resource center and lending library, a sensory room, dedicated art space, teaching greenhouse, accessible state-of-the-art restrooms, changing rooms, nurse's station, and an inviting accessible entrance.

As we mark this 70th Anniversary milestone, our STAR is on the rise. We have light years to go before we sleep...and, for our founders and our families, we have promises yet to keep. If you are interested in joining us on this stellar journey, please visit www.starct.org to learn more.



Meghan Cioffi
President of the Board



Katie Banzhaf
Executive Director

STAR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Meghan Cioffi
President

Joanna Galvin
1st Vice President

Peter Moeller
2nd Vice President

John Danaher
Treasurer

Lauryl Schembri
Recording Secretary

Tom McInerney
Corresponding Secretary

Ed Piorkowski
Past President

DIRECTORS

Kate Bagnati

Barry Bosworth

Maritza Diaz

Mickey Herbst

Caroline Hoffman

Doree Levy

Bob Marchesi

Joe Muro II

Pat O'Connor

Cathleen Piscitell

Charlie Sherman

KEY STAFF MEMBERS

Katie Banzhaf
Executive Director
kbanzhaf@starct.org

Peter Saverine
Dir. of Philanthropy
psaverine@starct.org

Barbara Fitzpatrick
Dir. of STAR Rubino Family Center
bfitzpatrick@starct.org

Kari Ryan
Dir. of Employment Services
kryan@starct.org

Rob Greenbaum
Dir. of Operations
rgreenbaum@starct.org

Denise Oakley
Dir. of Financial Services
doakley@starct.org

FOLLOW US ON:



STAR is Born

The Founding Years 1951-1952

By: Jeanne C. Howes

Editor's Note: The following has been edited from "The Story of STAR" written 40 years ago by STAR founder, Jeanne C. Howes. Most of Mrs. Howes' words are preserved as she wrote them.

Having taken a leading role in the founding and direction of this meritorious organization, I sense a need and a responsibility for an official record to report the events that shaped our origins and fostered the early growth.

An Unmet Need. For anyone who did not live just prior to and during our early years of struggle, it is almost impossible to imagine the dark setting of public ignorance and social prejudice and apathy against which this drama unfolded. When no family counseling, no training or schooling opportunities existed in the communities, and without parent groups to offer support, the birth of a child with mental retardation was a very traumatic and often hidden event.

As a resident of Wilton in 1950 (we later moved to Weston) and mother of a child with Down syndrome, I was appalled to learn there would be no schooling opportunities available for my son, Lincoln. Surely, I thought, I cannot be alone. There must be other parents in the area with this same problem.

Initial Efforts. Then, in the New York Times, I read that an organization to help children with retardation was forming. I applied for membership and was told this was for New Yorkers only and that I should organize Connecticut! A housewife with two small children at home, without funds, not even able to drive a car, I considered this an impossibility.

But, determined to start something on a local scale, I enrolled in a driving course and took a part-time job at home. With my earnings and a license, I began a campaign of writing to and calling on educators and doctors, searching for resources and for names of other parents in need. However, the sense of social stigma surrounding mental retardation was so strong that no names were forthcoming. Learning of my efforts, my neighbor Karen Kagey, a psychologist offered to help. She invited Dr. Seymour Sarason of Yale, one of the few doctors specializing in the field of mental retardation, to come to Norwalk to speak to professionals and parents.

New Preparations. After Dr. Sarason's talk in January 1952, my husband rose to say that we were parents of a son with mental retardation and eager to join other parents to start a self-help group. No reaction, but a few buzzed whispers. Then, Gladys Towson, visiting nurse from Darien, said she knew of parents who would join once we had this project launched and underway.

Just as we were leaving, feeling very dejected that no one would stand with us now, Mr. Charles Haas, a prominent Norwalk industrialist, introduced himself as father of a child at the Vineland Training School in New Jersey. He

unfolded a plan to have the Norwalk Teachers Association sponsor a talk by Dr. Walter Jacobs, director of Vineland. **STAR is Born.** According to the Norwalk Hour of February 27, 1952, there were 600 people in the audience that night. I was invited to sit on the platform and make a public appeal after Dr. Jacobs spoke. I had never spoken in public before, but I spoke simply of the isolation of parents, the need to establish services for children with retardation and their families, and the legitimate rights of children who had been forgotten and ignored by society.

On that evening my husband and friend went from aisle to aisle urging people to join the cause. Afterwards, we counted 46 names, 21 of them parents and relatives in 15 families, and the rest names of social workers and teachers who wanted to help. We formed a steering committee and the group chose me to be the leader.

Public Schooling a Birthright. We set our first goal on the right of retarded children to receive public funded schooling to foster their development.

Choosing a Name. Meanwhile, the steering committee felt it was time to establish ourselves on a permanent basis, but we still lacked a name. I proposed the Society to Advance the Retarded, with STAR as the acronym. A five-pointed star represented the five towns radiating around Norwalk and also suggested a rising star to bring light to the lives of forgotten children.

The Early Board. In the summer of 1952 the group nominated me to serve as President of STAR. Pregnant with my third child, I declined on the advice of my doctor, so Robert North of Darien became the first President of STAR in the fall of 1952. I agreed to serve as publicity chairman, Karen Kagey was the projects

chairman, and Dorothy High was in charge of promoting legislative action. Among others who served on the first board were David Norkin of Norwalk and Margaret Hogenauer of Westport.

This brief summary covers only the beginning years of STAR as I saw it.

Editor's Note: STAR was originally an acronym for "society to advance the retarded." After many years, self-advocates and family members pushed to simply use STAR as the organization's name. The year was 2010. President Barack Obama signed Rosa's Law, a federal law that removed the term "mental retardation" in federal education, health and labor statutes, replacing it with "intellectual disability." The law was named for Rosa Marcellino, a young woman with Down syndrome whose family engaged in a two-year campaign to change the terminology. In a White House ceremony, President Obama echoed the words of Nick Marcellino, Rosa's teenage brother, who said, "What you call people is how you treat them. If we change the words, maybe it will be the start of a new attitude toward people with disabilities." Today, STAR's official name is STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way... and we are proud to be celebrating our 70th year of serving our neighbors in Fairfield County promoting inclusion, understanding and respect.



Anne O'Callahan presents award to Jeanne Howes



SCAN TO SEE STAR HISTORY VIDEO

A Bright Future Shines for the Littlest STARS

Meet 18-month-old Mariángel: Mom, Beatriz, was concerned when her daughter, Mariángel, did not roll over at six months...or at nine months. Her “gut feeling that something was going on,” prompted her to do a google search for pediatric physical therapy. She connected with STAR Rubino Family Center and Mariángel’s initial evaluation confirmed low muscle tone. Within the first month, mom noticed a “Big improvement—I am so happy I found STAR! They are angels in my life at a time when I have been frustrated, stressed, and confused. They took the time to explain, teach, and instill confidence while assuring me that everything was going to be alright...it just might take extra time.” Mariángel added speech therapy to the services she needed from STAR. Now, she’s rolling over, cruising, and “teaching her mom about the important things in life like hope, determination and love.”



Accepting
Insurance,
HUSKY and
Private Pay

Offering Pediatric Therapies from Newborn to 8 Years

- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech Therapy
- Family Support
- * Direct Intervention & Coaching
- Developmental Evaluation & Consultations
- Individualized Treatment Plan
- Assistive Technology

Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director
STAR Rubino Family Center
120 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT

203-855-0634 • email: starrubino@starct.org



I am so happy I found STAR! They are angels in my life at a time when I have been frustrated, stressed, and confused.”

— Mom, Beatriz

Therapies for Newborns to Eight-Year-Olds



Meet Phesoj: Three-year-old Phesoj started his life with 38 days in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Yale New Haven Hospital after heart surgery related to Down syndrome. Shortly after his recovery, this tough little guy began receiving regular physical, occupational, speech and behavior therapies. Proudly, his mom Ingrid shares that Phesoj has been walking since March and is a great brother to his two sisters. Ingrid attests, “STAR therapists are so wonderful and patient. They go out of their way to be kind and they take the time to teach me how to be the best mom for Phesoj. They coach me on how to appreciate life’s little milestones and how to be patient!”



“**STAR therapists are so wonderful and patient.**”

— Mom, Ingrid

“**They create a family-like village experience because they are so amazing...**”

— Mom, Nicole

Meet Rhiley: This 5 ½-year-old is now in kindergarten. Rhiley was referred to STAR as a one year old with a neurological condition. Rhiley received PT, OT, Speech and Behavior therapies from STAR. Her mom, Nicole, is happy that STAR extends their services to age eight, as she loves the fact that “STAR has grown up with Rhiley. They create a family-like, village experience because they are so amazing, hard-working, and have always been there as a trusted safety net.” After trying so hard for the first year, Rhiley finally took her first step at age 22 months. Of course, when she spoke her first word it was “Momma.” Nicole cannot imagine where she and Rhiley would be if STAR was not always there to care.



Inclusion in the Work Place



“We love Robert here. Everyone loves Robert,” says Sharon Farrow, Executive Assistant at Louis Dreyfus in Wilton about STAR participant, Robert Trost. In a job that he calls, “The most important thing in my life every day,” Robert began his career almost thirty years ago at Louis Dreyfus on March 22, 1993—a day he has at the top of his mind.

The other day that is very special is April 18, Robert’s birthday! His supervisor says that every year she gets a little note from Robert a few days before reminding her that his birthday is coming up. She smiles knowing that she does not need the reminder. The date is etched on the corporate calendar as an annual holiday where the whole team

comes out to enjoy a catered breakfast to celebrate Robert. Sharon says, “Robert is such a kind soul, he remembers everybody’s name and greets everyone enthusiastically. We need Robert. We miss him when he is out. He handles the copier, fax, paper supplies, mail, FedEx and boxes.”

When not working, Robert has been a resident at STAR’s Shivers residence in Norwalk since 1983 where he enjoys the privacy of his own room, some long-time housemates, swimming in their pool, helping with household chores, and going on recreational outings to ball games. Prior to coming to STAR, Robert was a resident at Southbury Training School from 1975-1982—a time he “didn’t like very much.”

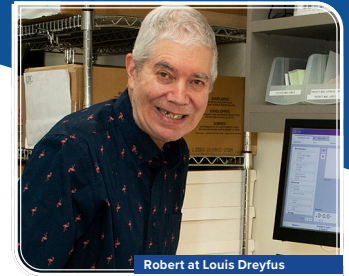
Robert is one of the STAR Employment Program’s many success stories. If you would like your business to benefit from this life-changing experience and build a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, STAR can match you with the perfect candidate. Our customized employment program provides training and support that allow our participants to thrive on their jobs with an average tenure over nine years.

MEET YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE!

Supported Employment

Over 150 local businesses in partnership with **STAR, Inc.**, have provided employment to qualified candidates with disabilities.

★ Qualified candidates meet labor force needs. Internal benefits include inspiring staff and positively impacting morale and productivity.



Robert at Louis Dreyfus

“Businesses that hire people with disabilities statistically perform better relative to their peers and competitors.”

— Accenture Research Project 2019

It’s a win-win!

STAR EMPLOYMENT SOLUTIONS

STAR matches employer needs with job seeker skills.

STAR provides onsite support with job coaches.

STAR develops an ongoing partnership with employers providing follow along services.

85%

of individuals with disabilities are unemployed. Consequently, there is a significant pool of talent available to work.

Contact STAR Employment Services
 Joe Anastasi, janastasi@starct.org
 Martha Spiegel, mspiegel@starct.org
 182 Wolfpit Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06851



CINDY
Michael's



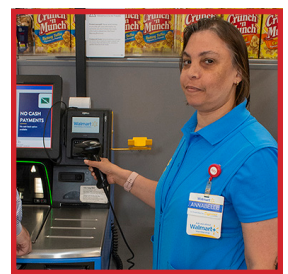
TOM
Darien YMCA



KELLY
Walter Stewart's Market



FRANK
Nicco's Pizza



ANNABELLE
Walmart



AUSTIN
Darien Sport Shop



DENISE
New Canaan YMCA



JOEY
Nielsen's Florist



LAWRIE
Westport Senior Center



JACK
Country Club of New Canaan

PHOTOS BY MIGGSB DESIGNS

Volunteers Make an *IMPACT!*

STAR is overwhelmed each year by the thousands of volunteer hours shared by hundreds of local volunteers. Individuals, business and corporate partners, garden clubs, churches, youth groups, artists, chefs, and so many others donated their time, talent and expertise to improve the lives of people with IDD. While dozens supported STAR's zoom classes during COVID, others have returned on location.

Among the projects pictured below, a special thank you to our friends from Deloitte (exterior landscaping and art project with special visit by US Congressman Jim Himes) and FactSet in collaboration with HomeFront (house painting and repair at Old Lantern residence). Thank you to King Industries (collected our medical and personal hygiene supplies to airlift to Ukraine) and Connecticut Community Bank (funding art supplies and hosting an ice cream social for STAR participants). If you are interested in volunteering at STAR sign up online www.starct.org or contact Jennifer Thompson jthompson@starct.org.



YOUR DONATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE — Time, Money, Cars, Stock WWW.STARCT.ORG



STAR, INC. ANNUAL REPORT • 2021-2022
WWW.STARCT.ORG

SEVEN

Our Mission STAR, Inc., **Lighting the Way** is a not-for-profit organization serving individuals of all ages who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), 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.



182 Wolfpit Ave., Norwalk, CT 06851 | 203.846.9581 | www.starct.org



STAR hosted a Gala Celebration dinner dance and auction at Woodway Country Club in Darien on November 6, 2021. After a one year hiatus due to COVID, an enthusiastic and generous crowd gathered ready to party and hold their paddles high to raise over \$230,000 to benefit our neighbors with IDD served by STAR. The planning committee led by long-time chairpersons Meghan and Rob Cioffi and Joe and Nella Viesta featured professional auctioneer C. K. Swett and heartfelt testimonials from STAR participants, family members and supporters.

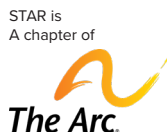


After a series of postponements due to COVID, **STAR's 8th Annual Spring Speakers Luncheon** returned in dramatic new fashion on April 7, 2022 at the recently renovated Country Club of New Canaan. The beautiful spring day filled the room with sunlight, fashion vendors, and scores of stylish supporters to hear the inspiring message from author, activist and survivor, Loung Ung, whose story was featured in a movie by Angelina Jolie, *First They Killed My Father*. Beautiful centerpieces were created by STAR volunteer, Yvonne O'Kane of Westport.



Sherwood Island was once again the scene of **STAR's 17th Annual Walk & Family Fun Day** fundraiser on Sunday, May 1, 2022. The event attracted hundreds of participants of all ages who raised almost \$90,000 to support STAR's programs. On June 20, 2022, the **3rd Annual STAR Golf Outing** at The Connecticut Golf Club in Easton was hosted by the Piscitell Family. The sold-out crowd enjoyed 18 holes in perfect golf weather and breakfast, lunch, dinner and drinks at the club to raise over \$52,000. Jack Piscitell renewed his title of putting champion in his green blazer.

STAR is especially thankful for our partnership and support from:



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**.

Photo credits: Miggs Burroughs, Katie Banzhaf, Jennifer Thompson | Peter Saverine, *Editorial Director*
Jennifer Van Bomel, *Graphic Designer* | HEARST CONNECTICUT MEDIA GROUP