

FOCUS

INDEPENDENCE




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

2022-2023 Annual Report

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

Pediatric Therapies • Family Support • Assistive Technology • High School Transition • Customized Employment
Day Support Options • Senior Memory Care • Residential Services • Recreation • Sports Buddies • JumpSTARS Transportation

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE



Meghan Cioffi
President of the Board

WORDS FROM STAR BOARD PRESIDENT

The last year has seen STAR rising to new heights and focusing on new horizons of opportunity for our neighbors whose lives are impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities.

STAR's Customized Employment Program continues to place and support eager and able adults in real jobs making real wages in local businesses. For many, it is their first job. For all, it is the catalyst for independence, enhanced self-esteem, new friendships, acceptance and understanding. STAR is very thankful for our community partners who hire STAR participants to fill their important job openings.

We continue to welcome back adult and senior participants to our newly-renovated STAR Headquarters to enjoy our Day Program enrichment activities in the dedicated art space, greenhouse and accessible garden, sensory room, and music room. Inclusive activities once again abound in the community where STAR participants deliver Meals On Wheels, shop for the elderly, clean up South

Norwalk public areas, and take art, dance, improvisation, cooking, equine care, and other classes led by local friends and volunteers.

Early Intervention Pediatric Therapies are a springboard to lifetime learning and success in school and beyond. **STAR Rubino Pediatric Therapy Center** is renowned for its direct services and team approach to provide holistic support for newborns to eight year olds (and their families) who benefit from professional speech, occupational, and physical therapy. Our collaboration with **JumpSTARs** also provides important parent/caregiver networking support through casual, welcoming, and free social activities.

Assistive technology at STAR has taken a quantum leap since the pandemic. Our new **Assistive Technology Lab and Lending Library** is now open and stocked with some of the latest devices to improve lives, open doors, and make dreams a reality for people with IDD. STAR is proud to have been designated by CT Department of

Developmental Services to be the **Fairfield County Evaluations Center for AT**. Likewise, STAR, through a series of generous grants, has successfully converted all our residential properties to **Smart Homes** to improve safety, accessibility, comfort, health monitoring, and independence for adult residents and staff alike. Assistive technology is the present and the future—STAR is ready and focused on that bright future for people with IDD.

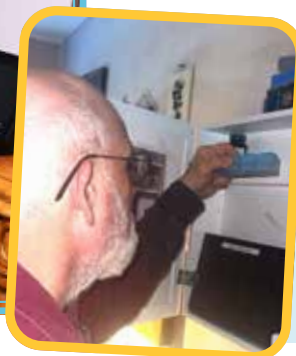
Finally, as you may be aware, **Katie Banzhaf** has shared her intention to retire after 40 years as STAR's Executive Director. We are working with a national search firm to find STAR's next Executive Director and Katie will continue to lead STAR until the new Executive Director is in place. In the months to come we look forward to introducing our new Executive Director as well as celebrating and thanking Katie for her years of service to STAR.

COVER STORY

STAR RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES COMPLETE SMART HOME INSTALLATIONS

Thanks to a leadership gift from the Suzanne McGraw Foundation, STAR was able to leverage generous grants from Darien Community Foundation, DDS, and others to transform 18 residential buildings housing people with IDD into SMART HOMES through the installation of assistive technology. Ashley, who lives in STAR's Darien Cottage, enjoys newfound independence as she can now open exterior doors to the home with a remote control on her wheelchair. Likewise, the Smart refrigerator shares information about the contents' expiration dates and need for reorders. A wall-mounted iPad is shared by Ashley and her housemates and staff to check weather forecasts, view visitors at the front door, and to program entertainment and other features that improve safety, engagement, entertainment, and independence in the house. Her bedroom Alexa allows her to FaceTime calls to her boyfriend or father.

Other STAR-supported properties received custom SMART HOME assistive technology based upon the specific resident's needs. Billy received training from STAR's AT Lab director, Enrico Melchiorre, on the use of a remote-controlled medicine cabinet that he has in his own bedroom. While in communication via iPad with his direct support staff, Billy is reminded of times to take medication and granted access to the locked medicine cabinet.



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FOLLOW US ON:



BRIGHT LITTLE STARS

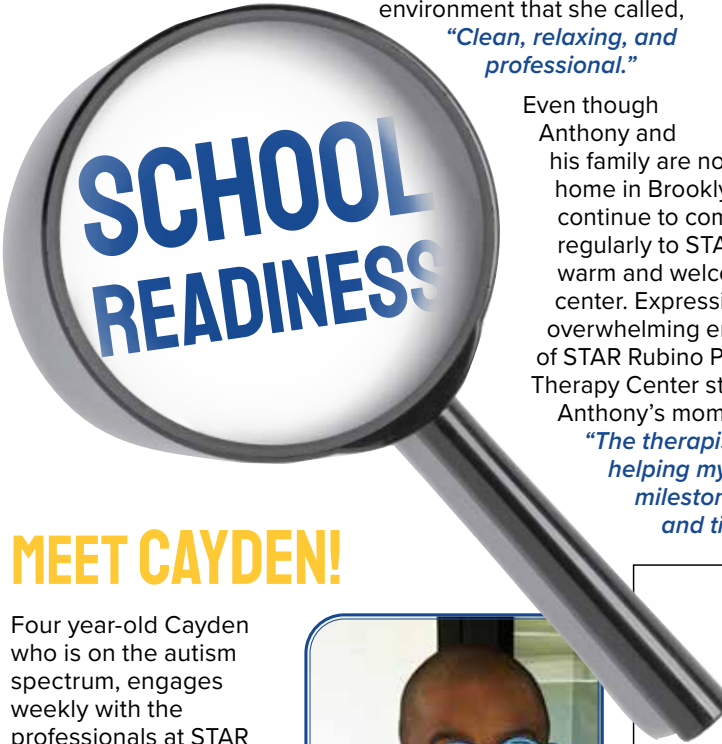
MEET ANTHONY!

A professional referral and summer stay in Westport with his vacationing family from Brooklyn, brought two-year-old Anthony to STAR Rubino Pediatric Therapy Center to continue his pediatric therapies. Although Anthony saw several therapists in Brooklyn, his mom felt it took time to develop relationships and progress was slow. Upon meeting STAR physical and speech therapists, Anthony felt immediately at ease with both and his mom was awed by the environment that she called,

“Clean, relaxing, and professional.”

Even though Anthony and his family are now back home in Brooklyn, they continue to commute regularly to STAR's playful, warm and welcoming center. Expressing her overwhelming endorsement of STAR Rubino Pediatric Therapy Center staff, Anthony's mom says,

“The therapists are a power duo for helping my child and others achieve their milestones while meeting specific goals and timelines.”



MEET CAYDEN!

Four year-old Cayden who is on the autism spectrum, engages weekly with the professionals at STAR Rubino Pediatric Therapy Center for speech and physical therapy. Working on speech and learning sign language, Cayden is responding to his name and directions.

Connecting with the therapists who incorporate exercises into his daily routine that includes his favorite things such as books, cars, food, and outside activities, Cayden continues to progress in school readiness skills. His mom is proud of his progress and the support from STAR, *“They are very helpful teachers, for Cayden and for me as a parent. I feel they are always there to support me and offer encouragement. Cayden is such a sweetie who loves his mama, and it makes me happy to see him light up a room and respond to those around him.”*



RUBINO FAMILY CENTER
Pediatric Therapy Services
Serving Newborns and Children up to age 8 in Fairfield County

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

www.starct.org

A friendly and motivating environment where children of all abilities become "STAR" Kids.

Accepting Insurance, HUSKY & Private Pay
Call to schedule an evaluation!

Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director
STAR Rubino Pediatric Therapy Center
120 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT
203.855.0634 • email: starrubino@starct.org

HOME RESIDENTIAL SUPPORTS



Almost one year ago, before Thanksgiving, John's father and two brothers were working with his case workers from DDS to find him housing. Due to his father's medical issues, and the recent passing of his mother, John was in need of a new place to call "Home" that could provide direct care services and support. For the family, this tough decision at a sad time in their lives, was easier than they anticipated.

John's father recalled his feelings as he walked into Stoler House at STAR and saw the house adorned with corn husks, pumpkins and fall decorations to celebrate the holiday. *"I thought, how caring this staff must be, to make the house a 'home' with decorations that the residents might not even be able to acknowledge—yet they did it from kindness. Then, when I saw the immaculate fish tank, that sealed the deal that this was the perfect new home for John, and my opinion has only been reinforced since."*

John's brothers reaffirmed the ease of this decision. *"We're all impressed and glad that John landed where he did. He is happy, looks healthier after losing a few pounds, and is surrounded by people who now know him well. We often think how nice it would be for our mom to know how comfortable and safe John is in his new home at STAR."*

John will be turning 50 next year. He has Down syndrome. He grew up in Trumbull and attended public schools. John worked at Goodwill, loves summer weeks at Camp Horizon, and enjoys rock n' roll music, adventure movies, and mashed potatoes with chicken tenders. However, since his early childhood, Sesame Street is his obsession. John participates in STAR Day Service Options and loves bowling and karate. His bedroom is neat as a pin, with framed memories on the bureau including a photo of his brothers who his father affectionately calls his three musketeers. *"I am so proud of all my boys and the way they stick up for and help each other. John's happiness and personality have brought great joy to all of us."*



NOTES FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Members and Friends,

As many of you know I have announced to the Board of Directors my intention to retire once a new Director is hired. I have served over 40 years at STAR

and more than 47 years in the human services field supporting individuals with disabilities. It has been an amazing career, and I am incredibly proud of what we have

accomplished together. So, first let me thank each of you who have supported me over the years.

STAR is well positioned for the future with outstanding staff, a stellar job placement program, expanding residential supports, excellent pediatric therapies, and newly renovated facilities including a state-of-the-art Assistive Technology Lab and Lending Library ready to serve all of Fairfield County.

As we wrap up our STAR's Above Capital Campaign raising \$5M under the guidance of The STAR Foundation and our Co-Chairs, Meghan and Rob Cioffi, STAR will be well positioned to expand family supports, respond to changing needs,

and advance our mission and vision while building an even stronger support system for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Whatever has been achieved over my time as Executive Director has been the result of a great team effort. For that, and more, I am grateful to the Board of Directors, the staff, parents, and the individuals we support who continue to teach me about strength, determination, and the joy of realizing their dreams. You have all played a part in ensuring that my professional life was meaningful and joyful.

Thank you,
Katie Banzhaf

DAY SERVICE OPTION ACTIVITIES

Over 200 adults with IDD engage in a rich program of Day Service Options with STAR that promote community inclusion, personal enrichment, skill-building, life skills, volunteerism, job preparation, fitness, and friendship. Participants are busy, busy, busy signing up for cooking, gym, dance, art, crafts, safety, equine care, broadcasting, gardening and other classes out and about our towns. STAR appreciates all of our community business partners and teachers who share their time and talent to welcome STAR participants into their settings for such wonderful opportunities. If you have a talent, experience or class you'd like to share with STAR participants, please contact **Kari Ryan, Director of Employment Services** kryan@starct.org.



STAR DAY SERVICE OPTIONS - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION!

JOBS

INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE



Julian is a 30-year-old man who, with support from STAR staff and his parents, is building his vending machine business aptly named Autism

EATS (an acronym for Empowering those with Autism To Succeed). The entrepreneurial brainchild of his parents, Victoria and Ramiro, over eight years ago, the goal was to create meaningful work for Julian that matched his skills and interests.

Victoria shares, *“One day it occurred to me that taking care of a vending machine is something Julian can do and it would involve things such as going to the store to buy items, filling the machine, cleaning the machine, and making a list of items needing refills for the next visit.”* Starting with one machine, Autism EATS now maintains four locations and is anticipating future expansion once suitable hosts are found. The hope is for the business to continue to grow to the point that more people can be hired to assist and that some of the profits can be donated to projects supporting people with unique abilities. For Julian today, the business introduces him to many new friends in the community while allowing him the joy of bringing home a paycheck, building skills, and enhancing self-esteem.



Supported Employment



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

MEET YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE!

STAR matches employer needs with qualified candidates.

STAR provides onsite support with job coaches.

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

MARTHA SPIEGEL
203-846-9581 ext. 310 | mspiegel@starct.org

JOE ANASTASI
203-846-9581 ext. 317 | janastasi@starct.org
Employment Services, **STAR, Inc.** Lighting the Way...
182 Wolfpit Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06851



WWW.STARCT.org

STAR has four staff members certified in Customized Employment through DDS who provide evaluations, training, and support that lead to meaningful jobs. Today, over fifty STAR participants are supported in jobs in the community with an average tenure of more than nine years. **STAR** is thankful to all local businesses that provide inclusive work sites for STAR participants. We welcome and invite more employers, who need reliable and able employees, to contact STAR for your next hire.



TALON *Stew Leonard's*



EMILY *Andrew Stefanou Salon*



KELLY *New Canaan Library*



TRISH *Eco Evolution*



NEGESTI *Michael's Arts & Crafts*



KATHERINE *Compass USA/FactSet*



KAYWANA *Lamy America*



JACK *Country Club of New Canaan*

PHOTOS BY MCGSB DESIGNS





SPORTS BUDDIES

A program of STAR, Inc.

SPORTS BUDDIES

NEW CANAAN

2023/2024

\$150 /session
Make Checks Payable to STAR, Inc./SportsBuddies

Volunteers Always Welcome!

Saturday Mornings
9:00am - 10:00am

Fall Session
@ South Elem. Backstop
Sept - 9, 16, 23, 30
Oct - 7, 14, 21, 28
Nov - 4, 11, 18

Winter Session
@ MCHS Aux Gym
Dec - 3, 9, 16
Jan - 6, 13, 20, 27
Feb - 3, 10, 24
Mar - 7

Spring Session
@ MCHS Aux Gym
Mar - 9, 16, 23
Apr - 6, 13, 27
May - 4, 11, 28
Jun - 1, 8, 15

SportsBuddies is a recreational program for youngsters with special needs designed to enhance the social, physical, and emotional well-being of children through a fun-filled sports experience. Children of all ability levels are paired with typical youngsters ("Buddies") to learn basic sport skills, improve physical condition, experience team dynamics, build self-esteem, and have FUN!

For More Details:
Coordinators: Howie Berg and Josh MacDonald
Sportsbuddiesnc@gmail.com

Special thanks to:
S.O.B.S., NCL, Sr. A.Y. and all of our volunteering families

CONNECT WITH JumpSTARs

A collaboration of JumpStart and STAR, Inc. to provide a series of activities that are: **Educational, Recreational, and Social.**

Our mission is to promote well-being and create a family support network for parents, caregivers, relatives, and siblings of siblings of individuals of all ages who are impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Please join our JumpSTARs Facebook page to learn about our

upcoming events and to stay in-the-loop on family network news. Please share with your family and friends!

In partnership with



Dottie Jankowski Promoted to Director of Family Support Services!

Dottie brings a wealth of experience with individuals with IDD and their families as well as experience collaborating with the CT DDS and local community organizations. She has a strong commitment to empowering and integrating individuals of all ages--especially high school graduates with disabilities as they enter the STAR program or pursue post graduate employment.

As the Director of Family Services, Dottie plays a vital role in providing guidance, support, and assistance to families and individuals of all ages as they navigate the transitions of life. She assists families as their toddlers transition to school, and young adults as they transition into employment or other services provided by STAR. She is focused on establishing strong relationships with families, listening to their concerns, and addressing their individual needs throughout life's milestones and transitions.

Please contact Dottie Jankowski, Director of Family Supports with any questions about STAR services for your family. jankowski@starct.org

FAMILY SUPPORTS

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



Volunteers Shine for STAR: Hundreds of volunteers shared over two thousand hours this year to improve lives and properties at STAR. Thank you to individuals, business and corporate partners, garden clubs, churches, youth groups, artists, chefs, and all who share their talent and time with STAR. Some highlights included Yvonne O'Kane's seaside art classes, CT Community Bank ice cream social and Walk photo booth. If you or your group are interested in volunteering at STAR please sign up online www.starct.org or email Jennifer Thompson jthompson@starct.org.



Events Shine for STAR: Spring was in full bloom at The Country Club of New Canaan to host STAR's 9th Annual Speakers Luncheon and Spring Styles Boutique. Featured guest, Mia Farrow, radiated warmth, humor, humility, and compassion that awed the full house. Likewise, STAR's 70th Anniversary Gala held at Woodway Country Club in November raised over \$300k to support programs and services. Scores of priceless items filled the auction with maestro auctioneer C. K. Swett, highlighted by a private home in Provence, a ski condo in the French Alps, golf with Joe LaCava (Tiger Woods' caddy), and dinner with private chef Karen Hubrich from Gruel Britannia, Fairfield, CT.



Outdoor Events Shine for STAR: Water views, waves, and rolling greens played host to three of STAR's popular fundraisers. A new Beach, Bands & BBQ event at Ripka's in Norwalk featured lobsters, two live bands, and cooling cocktails. The fourth Annual STAR Golf Outing at CT Golf Club in Easton was hosted by the Piscitelli Family and raised over \$50k for STAR. The first Sunday in May brought sunny skies for a well-attended 18th Annual STAR Walk & Roll at Sherwood Island with teams raising almost \$90k.

STAR is especially thankful for our partnership and support from:



Suzanne McGraw
Foundation



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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