

2016

Annual Report



Why “Starfish”?

Once, a man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a person going back and forth between the surf’s edge and the beach. Back and forth this person went. As the man approached, he could see that there were hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide.

The man was struck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. But the person continued the task of picking up starfish one by one and placing them into the surf.

As he came up to the person the man said, “You must be crazy. There are miles of beach covered with starfish. You can’t possibly make a difference.” The person looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked up one more starfish and placed it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said, “It sure made a difference to that one!”



Our Mission

Starfish Connection supports promising students from low-income families in Stamford, Connecticut. By providing long-term mentorship, educational guidance, social support, and summer and after-school enrichment activities, we help students reach their potential and achieve their dreams of attending competitive four-year colleges and universities.

Our goal is to change the lives of the children and families in our program – one child and one family at a time – through a very hands-on, individualized approach, breaking the cycle of poverty for themselves and future generations.

From the President

Dear Friends and Supporters:

I am so very pleased to report that our ninth year has been one filled with successes thanks to our fabulous Board of Directors, a working board that takes on various operating responsibilities as well as guiding Starfish Connection in its mission; our growing organization of community partners; our most generous financial donors; and, most importantly, our phenomenal group of mentors – the heart and soul of our program.

This year's annual report is dedicated to the memory of one of those mentors, Herma Ehrlich. Herma, a life-long teacher, became the mentor for one of our 3rd-grade boys in 2010. Their photo adorns our cover. The quintessential mentor, she guided him in his schooling, and also in life skills as he and his family faced some very difficult years. Herma's strong support and guidance ensured that he came through those years poised to meet the challenges of high school. Sadly, Herma passed away this year after a hard-fought battle with cancer. While this young man has a wonderful new mentor, Herma's love will remain in his heart and her teachings in his mind forever. She will be missed.

With the six new 3rd graders we have just enrolled, Starfish Connection now serves 54 low-income Stamford Public School children and their families. Our very first cohort will be seniors this fall and they are busy with the college preparation process.

This year, as a result of our successful growth, we have created a new management structure to support our hands-on approach. In keeping with our philosophy of remaining an all-volunteer organization, three of our mentors have become Team Leaders – Lisa Musilli for Elementary School, Janet Schneider for Middle School, and Jami Lo for High School. They will guide the mentors in all the activities for their age groups, so our children and teens remain successful during these years.

Thank you for making it all possible and for your commitment to the mission of Starfish Connection.

Sincerely,



Judy Martin, Co-Founder and President



Who We Are

Starfish Connection supports promising students from low-income families in the City of Stamford. Our approach is longitudinal, comprehensive, and individual – it’s about transforming lives, one at a time.

Mentoring programs for inner-city youth are often short-term interventions providing temporary outcomes. Starfish Connection begins to work with students at the start of 3rd grade and continues through high school graduation. Each year, we enroll five or more children from Stamford’s high-risk socioeconomic groups and provide mentoring, advocacy, educational support, and enrichment activities.

Our organization is driven by an all-volunteer community of adults, including highly qualified mentors, who work together for the success of each child – a true village. This year with a new team leadership structure in place, we are even better positioned to meet the specific needs of our children and teens at each grade level.

In the elementary school years, we focus on exposure to enrichment activities through biweekly outings with mentors as well as individually selected programs attuned to each student’s interests. They might choose instrument or dance lessons, participation on sports teams, academic competitions, or classes in a variety of areas. We also organize group visits to museums, science centers, cultural activities, performances, and nature activities.



Rocket launching with Mayor David Martin,
Starfish co-founder

During the middle school years, we are closely monitoring academics and study behaviors as classes increase in difficulty. We give the “tweens” a forum to meet as a group to discuss topics on their minds as well as ones we know are important, such as decision-making, self-advocacy, resiliency, values, and friendships.

In high school, mentors and teens meet regularly to ensure continued academic success. The students begin internships and volunteer in community organizations as well as seeking summer jobs. They receive intense, individual support throughout the college selection and application process.

We are proactive in setting the highest of expectations, exposing children to the world around them, enriching their lives, and monitoring their progress at every step to ensure that each child will become a successful young adult.

Group Enrichment Activities

Elementary School

This year's elementary school children enjoyed a variety of activities throughout the school year including nature programs, performing arts, science, cooking, and team building. All activities were enthusiastically enjoyed by our twenty young Starfish children in grades 3-5.



Orienteering at Bartlett Arboretum

We began in the fall with orienteering at the Bartlett Arboretum led by Justin LaBaire of the Mayor's Youth Services Bureau. Using compasses and maps, teams of children searched for flags along the trails. This was followed by a picnic lunch.

In October we visited South Salem's Wolf Conservation Center, a favorite trip we repeat for each new group. The children learn about wolves and their endangered status, while

having the opportunity to see "ambassador" wolves up close and howl with the wild wolves on the property.

We took Metro North to New York City in November to see Cuba Vibra at the New Victory Theater on Broadway. For many of our children, it was their first time on a train and first time in the City. After lunch in Grand Central's food court, we walked past Times Square, viewing the New



Exploring Nano Innovations at the Stepping Stones Museum

Year's ball. The show featured Latin music, singing, and dancing. Two-thirds of our Starfish Connection children are Hispanic, making this a perfect performance for our young audience.



Howling with wolves at the Conservation Center

In the winter we traveled to the Stepping Stones Museum in Norwalk. The children participated in a fascinating program on Nano Innovations. Working in small groups, they discovered hidden wonders of this tiny world including memory metal and

invisible glass beads. They were encouraged to “invent” new ways that this technology could help shape our future.



Bake off at J.M. Wright Culinary Center

In March, in partnership with J. M. Wright Technical High School’s culinary arts teacher Francine Bove and David Cingari of David’s Catering, our students participated in a bake off. Each team was given a healthy snack recipe to follow. Their task was to work together to create and present their culinary delight to the mentors and judges. Teamwork, measuring, calculating, following directions, and presenting were the skills needed for a delicious and enticing result. Everybody was a winner at this most fun event.

Finally, in June, we returned to a favorite haunt of Starfish Connection, the Ropes Course at Scalzi Park, where Justin LaBaire and his wonderful staff at the

Mayor’s Youth Services Bureau guided our children as they tested their strength, courage, and teamwork on the various structures.

These group events are so much more than “field trips,” as mentors accompany their children and participate in the programs with them. These unique experiences broaden the children’s horizons, helping them develop skills and an appreciation of the arts, culture, science, and nature.



Culinary teacher Francine Bove and David Cingari of David’s Catering with Starfish Bake Off contestants

Middle and High School

Once again, Kate Herman, one of our wonderful mentors, hosted the spring “moving up” barbecue and celebration for our 5th graders moving on to middle school next year. The mentors celebrate each of our students individually by recognizing the qualities they possess which will help them continue to succeed.



Kate Herman and our Starfish at their Moving Up Celebration

We speak to them as a group about the changes to expect in middle school and how to adapt. All the children receive locker and file organizers as well as tablet computers to help them stay on top of their middle school work.

In addition to monthly Teen Circles guided by our facilitator Harriette Ketover, our middle school tweens attended a presentation by Sergeant Joseph Kennedy, Supervisor of Stamford Police Department’s Youth Bureau. He spoke about personal safety and cyber-safety and about caution in creating a presence on the Internet. He later repeated the talk for the parents and mentors of our middle school youths.

In our last session of the year, we ended the Teen Circles with a celebration of our 8th-grade students, each of whom received a new laptop in preparation for their high school years.



Mentor Paola Mallozzi
congratulating Fabrizio



Enjoying a picnic lunch at Ellis Island

Our teens also enjoyed two trips this year. These trips build on the foundations our mentors instill during the year.

In the fall they traveled to Ellis Island for a tour, passing the Statue of Liberty on the Circle Line ferry. This trip was especially poignant for many of our Starfish students.

While we were there, Ellis Island's special exhibit on Latin American immigration was particularly germane as so many of our students' families have emigrated from Latin America.

In April, the group visited the Malcolm Pray Achievement Center in Greenwich. This nonprofit educational center was founded with the goal of "inspiring the youth of today towards success, a career, understanding the importance of 'drive' and the benefits of entrepreneurship," based on Malcolm Pray's own life experiences.



Mentor Karen Neems accompanying Starfish to Ellis Island

Our students were able to relive history through a collection of rare and exotic automobiles spanning 100 years that had been collected by Mr. Pray, a highly successful car dealer and local entrepreneur.



Dreaming of the future at the Malcolm Pray Achievement Center

In high school our students work with their mentors to learn critical skills such as networking, interviewing, and communicating clearly. Our teen program centers on helping them find meaningful volunteer opportunities, summer jobs, and internships.

All of our high school students secured positions this summer, with jobs at day camps and the Young Mariners program, First County Bank, Stamford Hospital, the Mill River Collaborative Steward program, the City of Stamford, and various retail establishments and medical offices.

We also focus on college preparedness and the application process. Using the sophisticated Naviance system adopted by the Stamford Public Schools, mentors and teens work on skills and interest inventories to map out goals in preparation for college and careers. This detailed program also enables students to screen colleges based on their own interests and admission criteria.

Our sophomores and juniors toured area colleges on multiple trips. In the fall, they visited Wesleyan and Trinity in addition to the University of Connecticut in Storrs. In the spring, they visited Marist College, Western Connecticut State College, and Vassar. In addition, they attended the college fair at Westhill High School. Over the summer mentors and rising seniors will make individual visits to campuses on the students' college lists.

Our juniors also took their PSAT, SAT, and ACT exams. Starfish Connection worked with two different test preparation organizations to help our students compete with their more affluent classmates. Last summer our students attended the SAT classes conducted by Let's Get Ready and then this spring they participated in a Carnegie Pollak ACT program.

During the summer and as the fall approaches, our mentors will continue to work with their rising seniors to ensure that they draft their college



Reina with a well-earned, year-end academic award

admission essays and complete their college applications.

Success Stories



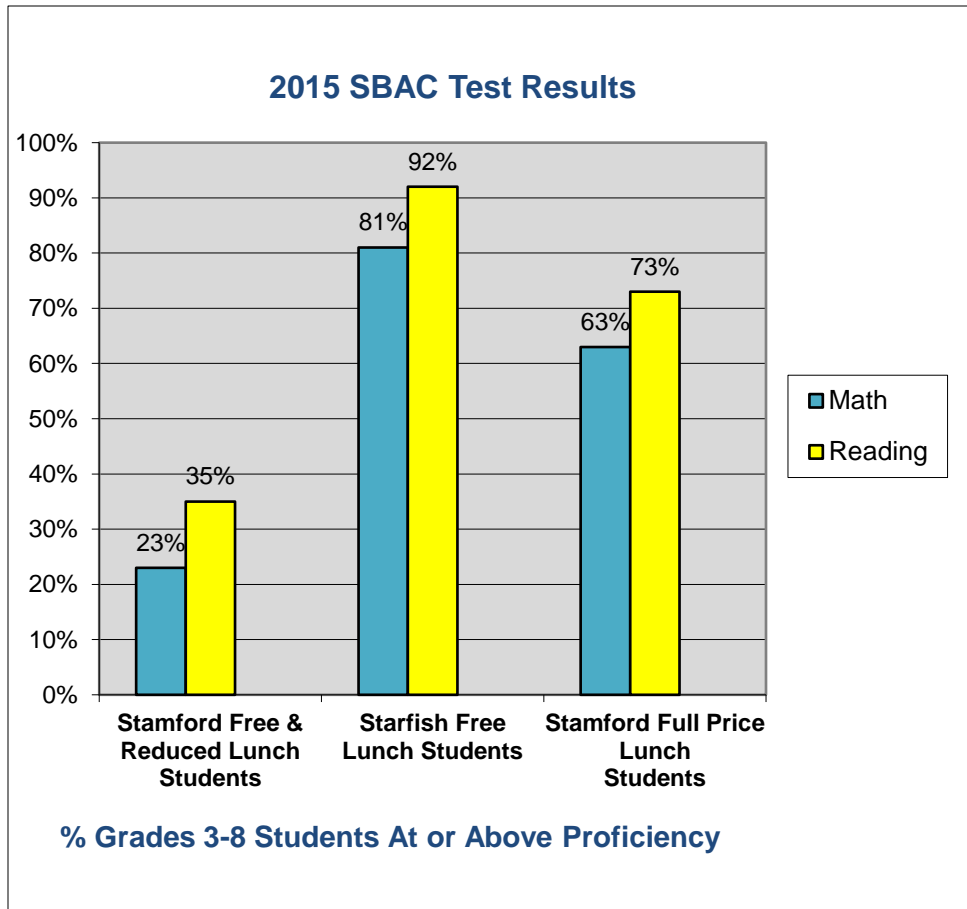
Mischael is a rising Starfish senior who plans to major in engineering in college. He is a serious student with an A average in a challenging curriculum of all High Honors and AP classes.

A member of AITE's National Honor Society, he plans to run for president of the group in the fall. He volunteers at both Ferguson Library and his church. Mischael plays guitar and piano, and he is a varsity pole-vaulter with the Westhill High School track team. Over the summer he is working as an intern in the City of Stamford Department of Engineering through the Mayor's Youth Leadership Program. Mischael was selected by QuestBridge as a College Prep Scholar and has just been named by *Stamford Magazine* as one of their 2016 "10 Teens with Bright Futures".

Academic Performance

Student scores from the new SBAC testing based on the Connecticut Common Core Standards were released last spring for the 2015 testing period. As with the previous CMT exams, our Starfish Connection students surpassed both the Stamford school population as a whole and the free- and reduced-priced-lunch Stamford children, the same demographic as our Starfish children. Of our Starfish children in grades 3-8, 92% scored in the proficient range in reading and 81% were proficient in math! This compares to 35% and 23% for Stamford's subsidized-lunch population and 63% and 73% for Stamford's full-price lunch population respectively.

We are proud of these results, but they are not surprising. Our mentors monitor their children's report cards. If a grade drops, the mentor works with the child, parent, teacher, and guidance counselor to provide any extra help needed. This includes tutoring services provided by the school or by Starfish Connection's wonderful network of pro-bono tutors.



Financials: Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2016

2016 Income

In addition to funds provided by the founders to cover all business expenses, Starfish Connection received financial support during the fiscal year from local foundations, companies, and individuals:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Grants | \$47,500 |
| Owner/Founders' donation | \$ 6,000 |
| Individual gifts | \$26,808 |
| Interest | \$ 205 |
| Total Income | \$80,513 |

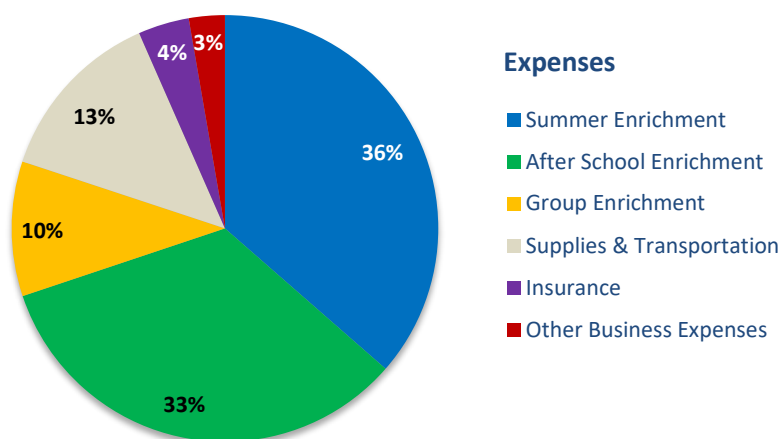
2016 Expenses

Program Expenses

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Summer Enrichment | \$29,048 |
| After-School Enrichment | \$26,662 |
| Group Enrichment | \$ 8,148 |
| Supplies and Transportation | \$10,628 |

Administrative Expenses

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Insurance | \$ 3,085 |
| Other Business Expenses | \$ 2,172 |
| Total Expenses | \$79,743 |



Success Stories

Each year Stamford Young Artists Philharmonic holds a “petting zoo” so that our 3rd graders can make informed decisions about the instruments they want to study in school. Our partnership with SYAP grew this year as they also offered discounted private lessons for our more serious musicians. This program enabled three of our young violinists to join the SYAP orchestra in their spring performance at Carnegie Hall! One student sent the following email at the end of her first middle-school year. “Today I received an academic award certificate signed by the President. I also received awards for science, being a Cloonan ambassador, participation in the orchestra and Stamford Young Artists, and being part of the Aladdin Musical.”

Contributions

Thank you to all of our generous donors for their gifts this past year!

Corporate and Foundation Grants

Ally Bank Foundation

First County Bank Foundation

General Electric Company

General Reinsurance Company

The Knobloch Fund at FCCF

Pitney Bowes Foundation

Purdue Pharma L.P.

St. John's Community Foundation

Tools for Life Foundation



Community Partners

Ballet School of Stamford

Bartlett Arboretum

Bernie Weiss, Photographer

Bruce Museum

Brunswick School Summer Program

Camp Hi Rock

Carnegie Pollak Test Prep

Center Stage Dance Studio

Chelsea Piers

Convent of the Sacred Heart Summer Program

Crescendo Music

Curtain Call

Ferguson Library

Future 5

Girl Scouts of CT

Greenwich Academy LINKS Summer Program

Giuliano's Music Center

Harriette Ketover, Teen Circle Facilitator

Jewish Community Center

Varghese John, Math Tutor

Liz Rubin, Math Tutor

Long Ridge Camp

Mead Creative Summer Program

Mill River Collaborative

Nancy Funt, Math Tutor

Pathfinders Adventure Camp

Pro Bono Partnerships

Robyn Goldman, Adolescent Psychologist

SoundWaters

Stamford Museum & Nature Center

Stamford Music and Arts Academy

Stamford Public School System

Stamford Symphony

Stamford Twin Rinks

Stamford Young Artists Philharmonic

Stamford Youth Services Bureau

Stamford Youth Soccer League

Dr. Steven Shaby

Temple Shalom Nursery School

Terry Connors Skating Rink

Women's Mentoring Network

Young Mariners Foundation

YMCA of Stamford

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Serita Altshuler

Sarah Arnold

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Jim Benjamin

Jill Burns

Trish Carroll

Fran D'Agostino

Rosalea Fisher

Ronne Garber

Diane Green

Ginny Gwynn

Kate Herman

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Isabel Katz

Dorothy Kessler

Susan Krieger

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Kathy Larkins

Carol Lilienthal

Peter Lilienthal

Jami Lo * Team Leader

Paola Mallozzi

Corine Matarasso

Maria Millan

Bette Mocarski

Meg Moorar

Lisa Musilli * Team Leader

Betsy Nagurney

Karen Neems

Cheryl Palmer

Midge Pappas

Joyce Riemer

Fred Rossetti

Liz Rubin

Janet Schneider * Team Leader

Mara Siladi

Jeanne Simon

Frances Sink

Mary Smith

Alan Sosnowitz

Carroll Tobin

Gail G. Trell

Cliff Wells

Cynthia Wicker Williams

Renee Zinn



Monica, Sherley, and Dania performing at Carnegie Hall

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To find out more about Starfish Connection, visit our website, www.StarfishConnection.org

We welcome contributions and support from the community. Please ask us how you can help!

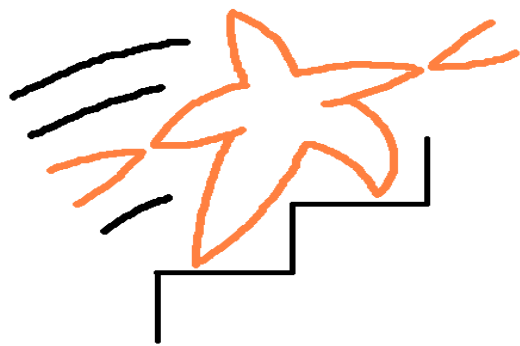
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Stamford, CT 06905
203-276-9690
mail@starfishconnection.org

Success Stories



Beverly is a rising Starfish senior who came to the U.S. in the beginning of 2nd grade speaking no English. She has grown into a charming and delightful young woman with an A average in a curriculum of all High Honors and AP classes.

She was recently named features editor of Stamford High School's award-winning newspaper, the Round Table. Beverly is a member of the National Honor Society and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. She is Drum Major and Band Captain at SHS and a flutist with the Stamford Young Artists Philharmonic. During the summer, Beverly is a Young Mariners Sailing Counselor. She also works year round at Donuts Delight and volunteers as a mentor at Stark's Rising Stars after-school program among other volunteer activities.



Starfish
Connection

Starfish Connection, Inc. is a 501c3 corporation whose mission is to help academically minded youth from low-income families.