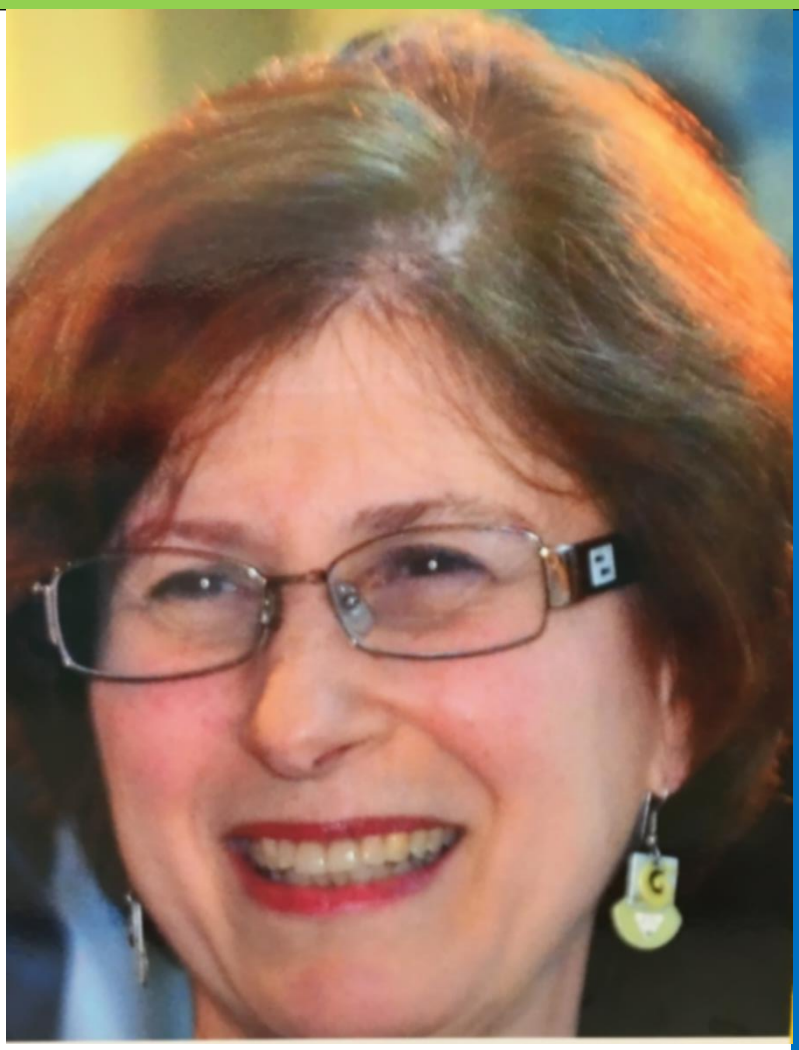
2017

Annual Report



Starfish Connection™

Bright stars... Bright Futures

From the President

Dear Friends:

When my wife, Judy, and I founded Starfish Connection ten years ago, we had a dream of enriching and changing the lives of promising Stamford young people.

Since then, our program has grown from the first few children to our current enrollment of 53 students. This year the Starfish family realized the fulfillment of Judy's dream, and mine, as three of our first students graduated from high school and enrolled in competitive four-year universities.

Sadly, Judy passed away just a couple of weeks before these students received their first acceptance letters. She was immensely proud of our Starfish students and she would have been thrilled to see this recognition of the students, their mentors, and their families.

Judy would have been just as pleased to see the continuing strength of the Starfish organization. With her characteristic foresight, she developed a new organizational structure and recruited new leadership to assure a strong future for the program. I am pleased to introduce accomplished educator and former Stamford assistant principal Janet Schneider as our new executive director in a pro bono role.

Janet is well-known to many in the community, and she has been a Starfish mentor for several years. She and Judy worked intensely together to accomplish a smooth transition. In partnership with our board and our team leaders, Janet has enthusiastically picked up right where Judy left off, and I have every confidence in Janet and the Starfish organization as we move forward with our plans for this year and the years to come.

Judy indeed built a strong foundation for Starfish Connection and it is her shining legacy. I am so proud of her and what she accomplished; and I thank you for your support as we continue her passion to help the deserving children in Starfish.

Sincerely,

David R. Martin

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters:

The Starfish Connection annual report this year is dedicated to the memory of our co-founder, inspiration, dear friend, and hero, Judy Martin. Over the past ten years, Judy meticulously selected an amazing group of children and matched them with loving and talented mentors to help guide them over the many hurdles that are part of the maturation process. Judy carefully nurtured each student/mentor relationship and found great joy in this work.

Judy also assembled an outstanding Board of Directors who work tirelessly in so many capacities and support the Starfish Connection mission as it continues to grow and meet the changing needs of our students. Their dedication and commitment is unwavering.

Sadly, Judy passed away in November after a hard-fought battle against cancer. We miss her tremendously, but we have a strong team and the critical infrastructure to continue Judy's legacy. We have already accepted six new mentors and students who will join our program in the fall.

You are also part of our Starfish Connection family. Your continuing support has enabled us to provide our students with life-changing experiences. This year we have seen Judy's vision come true. Our first three seniors have graduated from high school and will attend college in September. Beverly and Michou will attend Tufts University and Jonathan will attend UCONN-Stamford. Their mentors, Maria Millan, Carol Lilienthal, and Kate Herman, are incredibly proud of the many accomplishments of their students over the last ten years.

The entire Starfish Connection community is committed to fulfilling Judy's promise: to change the lives of the children and families in our program, one child at a time. With your continuing support we can make dreams come true for our students.

Sincerely,

Janet Schneider

Janet Schneider

Executive Director

Why "Starfish"?

Once, as a man was walking along a beach, he noticed a boy off in the distance going back and forth between the surf's edge and the beach. As the man approached, he saw that hundreds of starfish had been stranded on the sand as the tide retreated.

The man was struck by the apparent futility of the task. With so many starfish, many were sure to perish. But the boy continued to pick up the starfish one by one and place them back in the surf.

As he came up to the boy the man said, "There are miles of beach covered with starfish. You can't possibly make a difference." The boy stooped down, picked up one more starfish, and carefully placed it back in the ocean. Then he turned to the man and said, "It sure made a difference to that one!"

Who We Are

The heart of our Starfish program is keeping students active and engaged in academic, cultural, and athletic activities. We believe that, in order to be successful, students need more than academic preparation. They also need exposure to enriching cultural experiences that more affluent Stamford students take for granted. These help to instill a growing sense of confidence that positively impacts a child's life.

What is unique about Starfish Connection? We select five or more promising 3rd-grade students each year from the Stamford Public Schools. Each of our students is matched with an individual mentor who is committed to guiding that student from 3rd grade through 12th grade and beyond. Most mentoring programs are short-term interventions. Our program is longitudinal, comprehensive, and individual – it's about transforming lives one at a time.

2017 Starfish high school graduates

Enrichment Activities

Self-Selected and Summer Programs

Throughout the year our mentors work with their students to choose extracurricular programs tailored to the interests of each individual child. In many cases, these instructional programs would be out of reach financially. Starfish Connection pays the tuition and fees, often at a reduced rate through the generosity of our Community Partners, while mentors help the families with arrangements.

Our students have selected a wide variety of enrichment programs including individual drawing instruction, music lessons, ballet, and sports.

Students often lose much of their academic progress over the summer while school is closed. We see summer as a time to experience new adventures, as well as a time to stay connected socially and to grow intellectually. All of our students attend camp programs, many enjoying their first opportunity to spend two or more weeks away from home at sleepaway camps. This experience is exceptional in helping students maintain active, healthy lifestyles. The students develop self-confidence and independence, and they have an opportunity to learn important leadership skills.

Group Enrichment Program

In addition to individual activities, Starfish Connection engages students in group events designed to expose them to music, art, and theater, as well as science, athletic challenges, and recreational events.

Elementary School

Our elementary mentors and team leader Lisa Musilli selected six group enrichment programs for our youngest Starfish students this year. These included a community service project at Mill River Park, a music program with Connecticut State Troubadour Kristen Graves, and a trip to New York City for a performance of the production *Something* at the New Victory Theater.

Over the winter break, the students visited Stepping Stones Museum for Children to learn about energy. Rounding out the year, our youngest Starfish cruised on the SoundWaters Schooner and spent time on the popular and challenging ropes course at Scalzi Park.

Kinetic Contraptions Workshop, Stepping Stones Museum for Children

Middle School

To help students as they meet new challenges socially and academically, facilitator Harriet Ketover and team mentors planned several “teen circles.” These provide a supportive forum where students can

discuss issues they may be facing. Discussion topics include coping skills, developing a framework of values, self-advocacy, peer pressure, resilience, and GRIT. As a special field trip this year, the students visited the Pray Achievement Center in Greenwich.

Receiving a new laptop for high school

In June, those middle school students who will be moving up to high school attend a special celebration. Starfish Connection provides each of the students with a laptop computer and appropriate software to help them prepare for high school success.

High School

Our high school students meet regularly for special programs on personal finance, interviewing skills, resume writing, and preparing for college.

This year we also increased the number of social activities for our oldest students to help them maintain strong connections with the Starfish program and to promote friendships that have formed over the years.

The College Application Process

When the first Starfish students entered high school, we began to develop a college selection and application process. This year, mentor and high school team leader Jami Lo took steps to strengthen and customize the process even further as our first three students reached their senior year.

Preparing for college admission

Mentors, members of the Starfish board, and several of our community partners were intensely involved in each step of the process including high school planning, test preparation, visits to colleges, compiling lists of appropriate schools, creating student profiles, writing essays, and completing submissions.

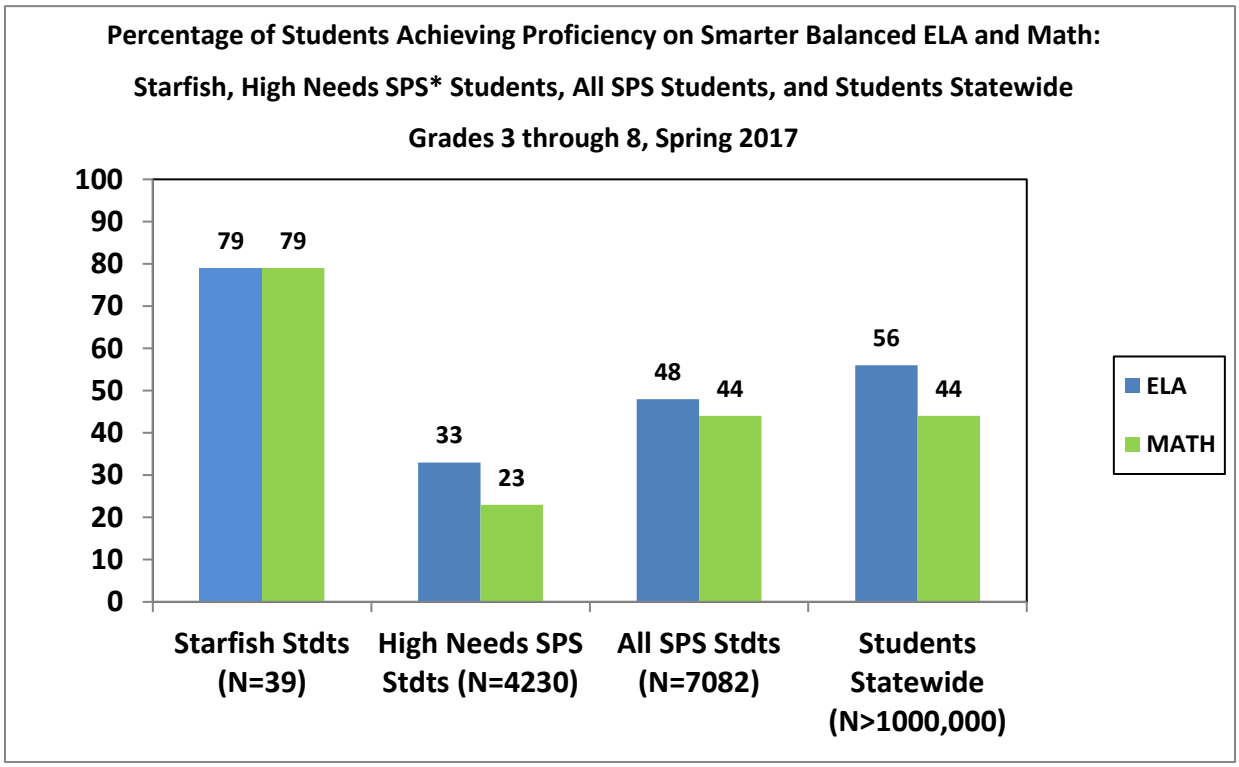
Over the past three years, we have taken students on tours to colleges in Philadelphia, the Boston area, New York City, and throughout Connecticut and the Hudson Valley. Starfish students have attended several different SAT preparation classes to improve their scores on this critical test. This significant support throughout the process made a real difference in helping our students polish their applications.

"Starfish gave me a lot of experiences that I probably would never have had [otherwise]. It made me think of business in a broader sense to the point where I want it to be a major in college."

Jonathan Carias, 2017 Starfish graduate

Academic Results

In spring 2017, Starfish students in grades three through eight participated in the Connecticut Department of Education's Smarter Balanced Assessment in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math based on the Common Core standards. Students are considered Proficient if they achieve Level 3 or Level 4 on the SBA. A total of 31 of the 39 Starfish students (79%) scored at Proficient.



*SPS=Stamford Public Schools

Starfish students significantly outperformed their peers on this demanding test. While the number of Starfish students is small and differences between groups need to be regarded with caution, Starfish students surpassed not only the High Needs students in Stamford, but also Stamford students as a whole, and Connecticut students statewide.

Aboard the SoundWaters Schooner

Science Results!

In addition, Stamford students in grades 5, 8, and 10 are required to participate in the state assessment in science. In spring 2017, Starfish students outperformed SPS students in grade 5 (100% at goal in comparison to 50% districtwide), grade 8 (60% at goal in comparison to 55% districtwide), and grade 10 (60% in comparison to 25% districtwide).

Financials: Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017

2017 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	$ 46,100
Owner/Founders' Donation	$ 7,000
Individual Gifts	$ 45,658
Gifts from Organizations	$ 19,708
Interest	$ 170
Total	**$118,636**

Community service project pulling weeds at Mill River Park

2017 Expenses

Program Expenses	
Summer Enrichment	$ 29,772
After-School Enrichment	$ 29,874
Group Enrichment	$ 7,897
Supplies and Transportation	$ 18,513
Subtotal	**$ 86,056**
Business Expenses	
Insurance	$ 3,164
Other Operating Expenses	$ 3,836
Subtotal	**$ 7,000**
Total expenses	**$ 93,056**

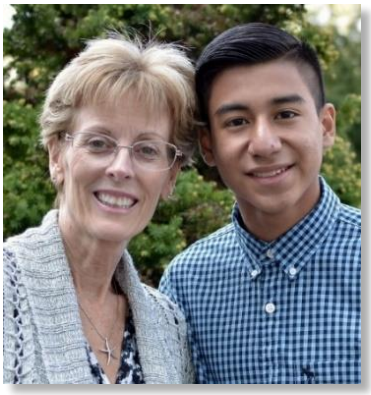
Starfish Connection is an all-volunteer organization. We do not incur any staffing or building costs. Business expenses are paid in full by the founders, and all donations and grants go directly to programming for Starfish students.

2017 Graduates

Congratulations to the first three Starfish Connection students to graduate from high school!

Mischou with mentor Carol Lilienthal

Mischael Anilus attended AITE where he was a top student and a member of the Honor Society. He has enrolled at **Tufts University** for the fall. Michou excelled in science and math throughout high school and he is planning to major in engineering. Mischou was a varsity pole vaulter with the Westhill High School track team, and he volunteered during high school at both Ferguson Library and at his church. He also loves music and plays both guitar and piano. During the summer, he worked in the City of Stamford Department of Engineering. Mischou was selected as a QuestBridge College Prep Scholar and was named one of the 2016 "10 Teens with a Bright Future" by *Stamford Magazine.*



Jon with mentor Kate Herman

Jonathan Carias was accepted at all three of the colleges to which he applied. He has chosen to study business at **UCONN**, Stamford. He attended AITE where he formed many friendships and enjoyed club soccer. Jon was one of the first students invited to join Starfish Connection because, in addition to the basic requirements, he embodies so many of the values and qualities the organization prizes: conscientiousness, love of family and community, and willingness to help others. Throughout the years he volunteered with Neighbor's Link, the Food Bank, and St Mary's RC Church. Through Starfish, Jon was selected to participate in the Stewardship Program at Mill River Park. Recently he interned at First County Bank, an experience that will be invaluable to him in his career.

Beverly with mentor Maria Millan

Beverly Reyes is a charming young woman and a serious student who excelled in high honors and AP classes at Stamford High School. In the fall she will attend **Tufts University**. Beverly was a member of both the National Honor Society and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. She was Drum Major and Woodwind Captain at SHS and a flutist with the Stamford Young Artists Philharmonic. She also worked as features editor of the SHS newspaper while maintaining an after-school job. Among other volunteer activities, she was a mentor at Stark Elementary School. Beverly received the Outstanding Arts Award from the CT Association of Schools. During the summers, she has been a counselor with the Young Mariners program, having learned to sail at YM through Starfish Connection.

Contributions

Thank you to all of our generous donors for their gifts! Many of the contributions we received this past year were made in memory of Judith Martin.

Corporate and Foundation Grants

Ally Bank Foundation
First County Bank Foundation
General Reinsurance Company
Gibor Foundation
The Knobloch Fund at FCCF
Pitney Bowes Foundation
Purdue Pharma LP
St. John's Community Foundation
Young Women's League of New Canaan

Corporate and Foundation Gifts

Anonymous
Ashforth Properties, Inc.
Building and Land Technology
Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP
Fairfield County Bar Association
Fiduciary Investment Advisors
Gaffney Bennet & Associates, Inc.
George Comfort & Sons
Glenbrook Fire Department
Hollander Foundation
J. Fucci Construction, Inc.
Jewish War Veterans
John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Michael Allen Company
Northeast School PTO
Northeast School Social Committee
Parent Teacher Council of Stamford
Selkowitz Family Foundation
Stamford Board of Realtors
Stamford Democratic City Committee
Stamford Education Association
Stamford Health Outpatient Rehab
Stamford Hospital Foundation
Stamford Police Commission
Stamford Professional Firefighters
Stamford Women's Club
Temple Sinai Brotherhood
United Way of Western CT, Inc.
Western Connecticut Council of Governments
Yext, Inc.

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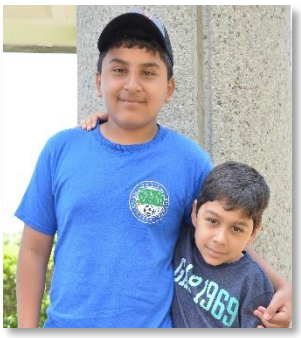

Community Partners

Ballet School of Stamford
Bartlett Arboretum
Bernie Weiss Photography
Beyond Limits
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 Program
Giuliano's Music Center
Harriette Ketover, Teen Circle Facilitator
Jewish Community Center
Liz Rubin, Math Tutor
Long Ridge Camp
Mead Creative Summer Program
Michael Mezzapelle, CPA
Mill River Collaborative
Nancy Funt, Math Tutor
Pathfinders Adventure Camp
Pro Bono Partnerships
Robyn Goldman, Psychologist
Rosa E. Colon, Art Instructor
SoundWaters
Stamford All-School Musical
Stamford Museum and Nature Center
Stamford Music and Arts Academy
Stamford Peace Youth Foundation
Stamford Public Schools
Stamford Symphony
Stamford Twin Rinks
Stamford Youth Services Bureau
Stamford Youth Soccer League
Steven Shaby, O.D.
Temple Shalom Nursery School
Terry Conners Skating Rink
Thomas Cassone, Attorney at Law
Varghese John, Math Tutor
Women's Mentoring Network
YB World Taekwondo Academy
YMCA of Stamford
Young Artists Philharmonic

Individual Gifts

Marlyn & Richard Agatstein
Gayle & Geoff Alswanger
Herman & Myrna Alswanger
Jillian Anderson
Barbara Aronica-Buck
Kenneth & Gwen Asher
Cindy Barber
Karen & Michael Behar
Ginny Gwynn & Jon Bellis
Josh & Lynne Berrett
Carl & Linda Bildner
Melissa & Nicholas Blount
Lynne Burgess
Peter Brandt & Laura Burwick
Martin & Patricia Butensky
Mary Ann Cadieux
Karen Carlin
Joanne Carpanzano
Richard Strahota & Trish Carroll
Stephanie McLaughlin & Tom Cassone
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Gail Clear
Robert Cohen & Marcia Colten
Alan & Judy Cooper
Maryly Culpepper
Fran D'Agostino
Gabe & Dottie DeLuca
Elinor Deutsch
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Carmen & Ronald Domonkos
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Elaine & Robert Erichson
Deborah Erlich
Rosalea & Richard Fisher
Livvy & Doug Floren
Nancy & Richard Freedman
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Paula & Clayton Fry
Donna & Ed Fuhrman
Barbara & Juan Galan
Philip Giordano
Ellen Bromley & Tom Gizicki
Marilyn & Irving Goldblum
Sandra & Robert Goldstein
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Lise Gordon
Lorraine & Noah Gordon
Diane & Henry Green
Illene Greenberg
Dale & Janet Greenwood
Barbara & Ed Guttman
Caryn & Tommy Haendler
Margaret Halleck
Jack Halpert
Karen & Dennis Hannigan
Eileen Heaphy
Jevera & William Hennessey
John & Kate Herman
Duane & Leana Hill
Stephen Hoffman
Paula Homonoff
Suzanne Horn
Edward & Susan Horstmann
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Leslie Ilaw
Billy & Lesley Iuso
Robert & Barbara Karp
Ellen Keats
Cheryl Kendall
Dorothy Kessler
Harriette Ketover
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Amy & Jonathan Kossak
Michael & Shelley Kossak
Joan & Jerry Kranz
Susan Krieger
Carol Krim
Chester & Joyce Kucyn
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Carol Lewis
Naomi Litrownik
Ellin Llodra
Terry Lohmeyer
Norman & Nina Lotstein
Judy & Mark Lowenstein
Christopher & Susan Martin
David & Judy Martin
Dayna Martin
Gene Martin
Herbert Martin
Janet & Lee Martin
Kevin & Carolyn Martin
Risë Mattler
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Maria Millan
Kirk Minnis
Steve & Martha Moss
Maureen Murphy
Mario & Lisa Musilli
Elizabeth Nagurney
Roslyn & Merritt Nesin
Liz & Nagi Osta
Heidi & Howard Ostroff
Marilyn Ott
Rey Giallongo & Cheryl Palmer
Robert & Patricia Phillips
Henry Posner
Pauline Rauh
Patrick Romano & Alisha Rayner
Rick & Robin Redniss
Gregory Reppucci
Jay & Joyce Riemer
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Genaro Rubino
Margo Sandahl
Nicole & Daniel Sandford
Michael & Lisa Scacco
Janet & Marc Schneider
Arthur & Betsy Selkowitz
Ann Sexton
Diane and Steven Shaby, O.D.
Marsha Shendell

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Keith & Claudia Silver
Richard Silver
David & Judy Singer *in memory of their son Jonathan*
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Gloria & Randy Skigen
Edith Samers & Ed Smith
Stephanie Snow
Marianna Sockrider, MD & Martin Sockrider
Kimberley & Greg Spies
Judy Sprotzer
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Brian & Pam Sweeney
Steven & Eileen Swerdlick
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David Watkins
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Jeff & Janelle Wells
Gary Wells
Maria Wells
Richard & Renee Wells
Warren Wells
Barbara & Art Wernicke
Vivian White
Michael & Ronnie Wiederlight
Cynthia Wicker & Clemon Williams
Leigh Shemitz & Chris Winters
Michelle Winthrop
David & Valerie Woessner
Marjorie Woldan
Madelyn Yale

Success story

I remember how tentative and shy Emmi was when we first met. She has become very outgoing since joining Starfish. The first time she went swimming, for example, she was afraid to get her face wet.

After a few summers of lessons at Sacred Heart Camp, she has become a strong swimmer and she gained so much confidence.

That confidence then transferred to lessons at the Ballet School of Stamford 4 ½ hours each week. Recently my heart nearly burst as I watched Emmi perform gracefully on stage at the Palace Theater in *Alice in Wonderland*. It is so gratifying to see how far Emmi has come and all that she has accomplished.

Sarah Arnold Rossetti, Mentor

2017 Mentors

Marlyn Agatstein
Serita Altshuler
Sarah Arnold
Julie Barker
Jim Benjamin
Lynne Burgess
Jill Burns
Trish Carroll
Fran D'Agostino
Rosalea Fisher
Ronne Garber
Diane Green
Ginny Gwynn
Kate Herman
Suzanne Horn
Susan Horstmann
Donna Hughes
Barbara Jacobs
Amy Kamisher
Eric Kamisher
Isabel Katz
Dorothy Kessler
Kathy King
Alice Knapp
Susan Krieger
Hana Lane
Kathy Larkins
Carol Lilienthal
Peter Lilienthal
*Jami Lo
*Paola Mallozzi
Corine Matarasso
Maria Millan
Bette Mocarski
Meg Mooar
*Lisa Musilli
Betsy Nagurney
Karen Neems
Cheryl Palmer
Midge Pappas
Jay Riemer
Joyce Riemer
Liz Rosano
Fred Rossetti
Janet Schneider
Mara Siladi
Jeanne Simon
Frances Sink
Mary Smith
Alan Sosnowitz
Carroll Tobin
Susan Toliver
Gail G. Trell
Tracy Vodola
Cliff Wells
Cynthia Wicker Williams
Walter Young

*Team Leader

I am so proud of the progress Naimah has made as a Starfish Scholar. She holds a straight-A average in the honors program in middle school and plays the flute in the school band. Her academic success has given her self-confidence and poise in social situations. She is more readily able to advocate for herself with her teachers to earn extra credit or get help with a problem. She dreams of a career in medicine. I think she is well on her way!

Meg Mooar, Mentor

Board of Directors

Judith A. Martin, Chair (*In memoriam*)

David R. Martin, President

Patricia Carroll, Secretary

Gilda Bonanno

Barbara Guttman

Jennifer W. Lapine

Maria Millan

Judith Singer, Ph.D.

Kathryn Walsh

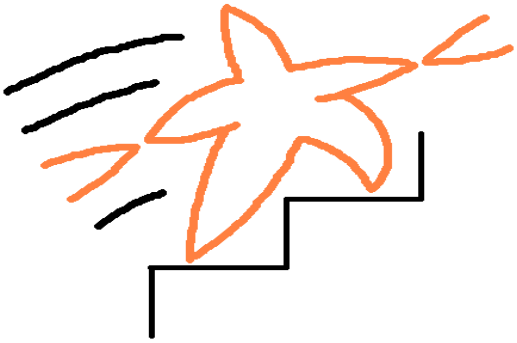
Cynthia Wicker Williams

Janet Schneider, Executive Director (*ex officio*)

The Starfish Connection Board of Directors congratulates Judy and David Martin on the organization's 10th anniversary

Starfish Connection, Inc.
1127 High Ridge Rd., #255
Stamford, CT 06905
203-276-9690
mail@starfishconnection.org

To learn more about Starfish Connection, visit our website Starfish Connection. We welcome contributions and support from the community. Please ask us how you can help!



Starfish Connection

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