

2018

Annual Report



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.



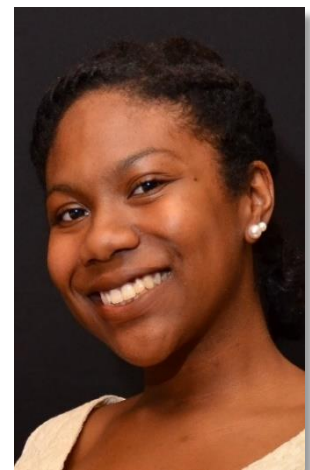
But the boy continued to pick up the starfish one by one and place them back in the surf.

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.



Our 2018 Starfish graduate

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters:

With your generosity and commitment to our program, we have completed our 11th year as a strong and successful mentoring program in Stamford, CT. In the upcoming 2018-2019 year, we will provide support for 58 students in grades 3 through 12, including six new third-graders.

All of our students continue to benefit from the wisdom and dedication of our wonderful mentors who give so much of themselves every day. They give their time and talent, plan and participate in our group enrichment activities, and provide guidance for after-school activities and summer-camp experiences. Our mentors of high school students have become invaluable in the college admissions process. But most importantly, the support and advocacy provided to students and their families has been incredible. A mentor's ten-year commitment and continued desire to go above and beyond all expectations is the key to our success.

This year we are dedicating our annual report to our Starfish parents who play a central role in their children's success. We've recognized that role by expanding our program with a unique, new initiative. The Starfish Parents Connection now meets several times a year to discuss important issues, strengthen parents' connection to our program, and foster networking among families. Experienced parent facilitators provide valuable insights and advice regarding child development and school success. We can now truly say that Starfish parents, the student, and the mentor come together as a powerful team. Details about this new initiative are featured later in this annual report.

I wish to thank you again for your belief in our important mission and helping Starfish Connection become a viable pathway for our students to grow and learn.

Sincerely,

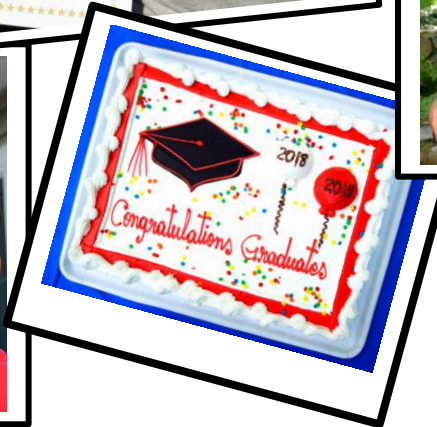
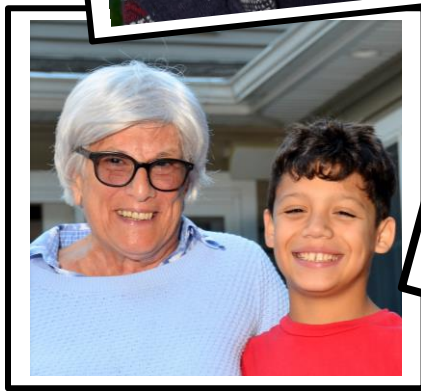


Janet Schneider
Executive Director



Transitions

In June we celebrated the successful close of another school year with six elementary students moving up to middle school in the fall and six students in 8th grade moving on to high school.



College Search

Members of the Starfish community have worked intensely with our students on college selection and admission. In addition to helping students select appropriate, challenging, high school courses, Starfish supports students through the entire application process.

This year we took students to visit several colleges in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York, including a bus trip with parents and mentors to Tufts University. Tufts freshmen and Starfish graduates, Beverly Reyes and Mischou Anilus, spoke to the students and parents in both English and Spanish about their first-year college experience.



Graduation

Congratulations to our 2018 Westhill High School graduate Alanna Thompson and to her mentor of 10 years, Trish Carroll. Alanna will attend Morgan State University in Baltimore this fall. She has a strong interest in healthcare, and she is considering a career in ultrasound technology. Morgan State offers a variety of courses in the health professional fields and has a strong tradition in black history.

Alanna is poised and confident and she loves working with children. She attended the Stamford Boys and Girls Club as a child, volunteered as a Starfish student, and then worked as a counselor.

At our graduation celebration for Alanna, she spoke eloquently and passionately about the importance of education and her connection with Starfish.

*"Before I conclude I wanted to give advice to other Starfish kids. I want all of the kids to remember something my family instilled in me. I want to emphasize recognizing the power of your potential and always striving to do your best. It is so easy to ... lose sight of what is important. However, once you refocus, and put all your efforts into something, you will be surprised with your results. Believe me! **Starfish Connection has truly allowed me to seek my potential and I could not be more appreciative. Thank you!**"*



Alanna Thompson (c.) with Starfish executive director Janet Schneider (l.) and mentor Trish Carroll

Enrichment Activities

Our mentors and students choose cultural and educational programs tailored to each child's individual interests. Starfish Connection pays the tuition, often at a reduced rate through our Community Partners, while mentors help the families with arrangements.

Favorite programs include drawing instruction, music lessons, ballet, and sports. In addition, Starfish Connection engages students in group events designed to expose them to music, art, and theater, as well as science and fun physical challenges.

Our mentors and team leaders also plan wonderful group activities. One of the exciting programs for the youngest Starfish was a trip to the Turn of River Fire Department! Our older students were enthralled with a visit to the Google offices in New York.



2018 Enrichment Highlights

Improv! ✧ Turn of River Fire Station ✧ Discovery Museum ✧ Hiking at Sleeping Giant State Park ✧ Sleepy Hollow Great Pumpkin Blaze ✧ Bartlett Arboretum ✧ Scalzi Park Ropes Course ✧ Washington Irving's Sunnyside ✧ Mill River Cleanup and Carousel ✧ Visit to Google offices



Starfish Parent Connection

Our newest initiative, The Starfish Parents Connection, was created in October 2017 to recognize the important role parents play in the success of their children. In Starfish Connection, parents, mentors, and students form an essential bond to advocate for students and create a wide variety of learning experiences both in and out of school.

In order to strengthen this bond, we invited Starfish parents to come together monthly to learn and share ideas about important issues. Our parents responded overwhelmingly with an average of 40 parents attending each session!

Our welcoming and experienced parent facilitators, Maria Millan, Lilia Angarita, and Adriana Arango, led lively discussions in both Spanish and English. We wish to thank these generous volunteers for their skill and dedication to our parent group.

Together we explored topics of interest and value to all families. These included communication strategies between parent and child and between families and schools; the critical importance of education; health and nutrition planning; parenting techniques; and emergency preparedness.



Based on feedback from our parent survey, the meetings were well received:

- “Excellent workshops! I learned a lot and hope to come back next year.”
- “These workshops have been very beneficial in our homes.”
- “I learned how we can help our children and communicate better.”
- “I personally put the advice into practice with my daughter and it helped.”
- “I am very happy I attended all these workshops. Thank you!”
- “I hope these meetings will continue next year!”

Parents have also formed friendships with other Starfish parents whom they met at these meetings. This helps strengthen the feeling of community within our Starfish Connection family. We look forward to future meetings.



Changing lives

Three years ago, six mentors and their Starfish students created a book club. Rotating among mentors' homes, the group meets once a month. Together members of the book club have read over thirty books! Among the themes we've discussed are bullying, standing up for the underdog, teamwork, responsibility, disabilities, animal cruelty, and loss of a loved one. Each student takes a turn selecting a title. The student who selects the book prepares a list of questions that are sent to all members prior to the meeting. This student also takes the responsibility of leading the discussion. The students are improving their reading skills while developing a love of reading along with organizational and leadership skills. Keyli, Brander, Cindy, James, Dania, and Esther are really proud of their book club and the close bonds they have developed with their mentors. – *Cheryl Palmer, Peter Lilienthal, BJ Mocariski, Amy Starobin, Diane Green, Lisa Musilli*

Jaiden became an art enthusiast during this school year. He now carries around a sketchbook in his backpack and frequently sketches during downtimes. Last winter through Starfish, Jaiden signed up for an art course offered by Stamford Recreation. Although he was the only boy in the class, he eagerly attended each session and his skills improved dramatically. As a *Learning to Look* volunteer in his classroom, I was able to see first-hand Jaiden's blossoming art appreciation skills. We even made a special visit to the Michelangelo exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art last winter and Jaiden now sees himself as an artist. That is an amazing accomplishment for him, thanks to Starfish. – *Kathy King*

Zach is a city mouse and I am a country mouse. I am working hard to convey to him my love for animals, nature, science and the outdoors. In return, he is educating me about superheroes, parkour, and rap music. We have already learned so much from each other and broadened our horizons while building trust and having fun. I truly look forward to our future together and all that it holds. – *Dianna Shattuck*

When I first met Naomi, she was quite the shy little girl. She has since blossomed into a fine young lady. I've watched her take leadership roles in many situations, especially when it comes to helping younger children. Her ability to converse one-on-one is inspiring and continues to improve in group settings. She is dedicated to her schoolwork, music lessons, and soccer. Naomi is supportive of her family and friends. She is a Starfish Connection success! – *Susan Horstmann*

Sherley has a strong passion for writing. Back in March, her Language Arts teacher encouraged her to submit an entry to a national poetry program for young writers. Sherley's teacher has been very impressed with her writing throughout the year. Sherley wrote her poem and at the end of June she was notified that it would be honored with an award. Sherley, her family, and the Starfish community are all extremely proud of her writing accomplishments. – *Isabel Katz*

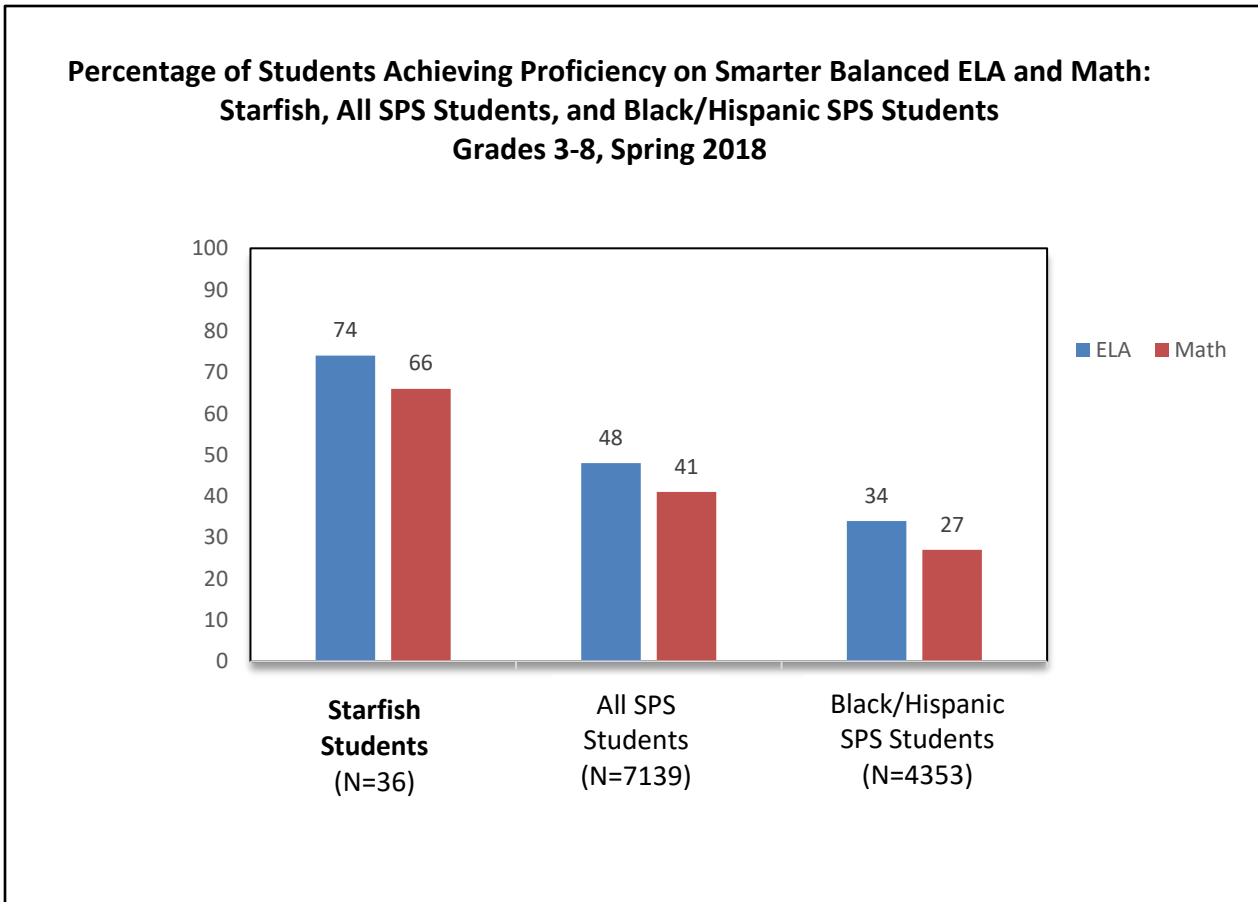
Academic Results

In spring 2018, a total of 36 Starfish students in grades three through eight participated in the Connecticut State Department of Education’s Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. The Smarter Balanced measure assesses student mastery of the Common Core standards. Students are considered Proficient if they achieve at Level 3 or Level 4 on the SBA.

A total of 27 of the 36 Starfish students (75%) scored Proficient in English/Language Arts; 24 (67%) scored Proficient in Math.

The figure below compares the performance of Starfish students to all students in Stamford Public Schools (SPS) and to SPS Black/Hispanic students (in 3rd through 8th grades). Statewide results are not yet available. Starfish students clearly outperformed their Stamford peers in general, and far exceeded the performance of other SPS Black and Hispanic students on this demanding test.

While the number of Starfish students is small and differences between student groups need to be regarded with caution, the performance of Starfish students on the state SBA has consistently surpassed that of their peers both in SPS and statewide over the years.



Financials: Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2018

2018 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	\$ 40,000
Owner/Founders' Donation	\$ 7,000
Individual Gifts	\$ 44,089
Interest	\$ 160
Total	\$ 91,249

2018 Expenses

Program Expenses

Summer Enrichment	\$ 25,455
After-School Enrichment	\$ 23,703
Group Enrichment	\$12,291
Supplies and Transportation	\$ 9,948
Subtotal	\$ 71,397

Business Expenses

Insurance	\$ 2,603
Other Operating Expenses	\$ 2,793
Subtotal	\$ 5,396

Total expenses **\$ 76,793**

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



Community service project pulling weeds at Mill River Park



Contributions

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

Corporate and Foundation Grants

Betsey & Arthur Selkowitz Family Foundation
Claire Helsing Foundation
Fairfield County Assessors Association
First County Bank Foundation
General Reinsurance Company
Gibor Foundation

The Knobloch Fund at FCCF
Louis Casale Charitable Foundation
Purdue Pharma L.P.
St. John's Community Foundation
Stamford Rotary Trust Fund

Community Partners

Ballet School of Stamford
Bartlett Arboretum
Bernie Weiss Photography
Beyond Limits
Bruce Museum
Chelsea Piers
Convent of the Sacred Heart Outreach
Crescendo Music
Curtain Call
Ferguson Library
Future 5
Girl Scouts of CT
Giuliano's Music Center
Greenwich Academy LINKS Program
Harriette Ketover, Teen Circle Facilitator
Janet Hellier, Tutor
Janie Friedlander, Psychologist
Jewish Community Center
Locust Performing Arts Center
Mead Creative Summer Program
Michael Mezzapelle, CPA
Mill River Collaborative
Pam Klem-Dubin, Tutor
Pathfinders Adventure Camp

Pro Bono Partnerships
SoundWaters
Stamford All-School Musical
Stamford Board of Recreation
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, Optometrist
Temple Shalom Nursery School
Terry Conners Skating Rink
Thomas Cassone, Attorney at Law
Trent McCain, Tutor
Varghese John, Tutor
Women's Mentoring Network
YB World Taekwondo Academy
YMCA Camp Hi-Rock
YMCA of Stamford
Young Artists Philharmonic

Contributions

Jillian Anderson
Gwen & Kenneth Asher
Lynne & Josh Berrett
Arlene Bluth
Carol & Donald Borut
Ellen Bromley & Tom Gizicki
Lynne Burgess
Laura Burwick & Peter Brandt
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Jeff and Valerie Cohen
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Suzanne Horn
Catriona Horstmann
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Barbara Kasman & Arthur Wernicke
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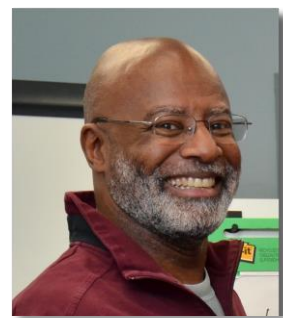


Photo credits: Thank you to Bernie Weiss of Bernie Weiss Photography who provided many of the photographs in this annual report.

2018 Mentors

Marlyn Agatstein
Serita Altshuler
Sarah Arnold
Julie Barker
Jim Benjamin
Lynne Burgess
Jill Burns
Trish Carroll
Patrick Cullen
Fran D'Agostino
Rosalea Fisher
Ronne Garber
Jean Gray
Margaret Gray
Diane Green
Suzanne Horn
Susan Horstmann
Donna Hughes
Barbara Jacobs
Kathy Joyce
Isabel Katz
Dorothy Kessler
Kathy King
Alice Knapp & Walter Young
Susan Krieger
Hana Lane
Kathy Larkins
Peter Lilienthal
Jami Lo* Team Leader- High School

Paola Mallozzi* Team Leader-Middle School
Corine Matarasso
Maria Millan
Bette Mocarski
Meg Mooar
Lisa Musilli* Team Leader-Elementary School
Betsy Nagurney
Karen Neems
Cheryl Palmer
Midge Pappas
Joyce & Jay Riemer
Timothy Rogers
Liz Rosano
Fred Rossetti
Sarah Santasiero
Janet Schneider
Dianna Shattuck
Mara Siladi
Jeanne Simon
Frances Sink
Mary Smith
Maria Sosa
Alan Sosnowitz
Amy Starobin & Eric Kamisher
Carroll Tobin
Susan Toliver
Gail G. Trell
Tracy Vodola
Cliff Wells



Board of Directors

David R. Martin, President

Patricia Carroll, Secretary

Gilda Bonanno

Barbara Guttman

Jennifer W. Lapine

Maria Millan, Parent Facilitator

Judith Singer, Ph.D.

Kathryn Walsh

Cynthia Wicker Williams

Janet Schneider, Executive Director (ex-officio)

On behalf of the Starfish Connection family, we wish to thank Trish Carroll for her 10 years of unwavering support of our program. She has made an indelible imprint in the lives of all our children. Trish served as a wonderful mentor to Alanna, who will enter Morgan State University this fall. Job well done! As well as sharing her wisdom and experience on the Board of Directors, Trish has also served as our music coordinator. She ensured that every student had a quality instrument and that they made progress by practicing their lessons. Her dedication encouraged our students to develop a love for music.

As a Starfish student and promising flute player, Keyli has written, "Thank you, Trish, for giving me the opportunity to play my flute, which has let me experience many great things. I really appreciate your dedication to music and helping students learn about it."

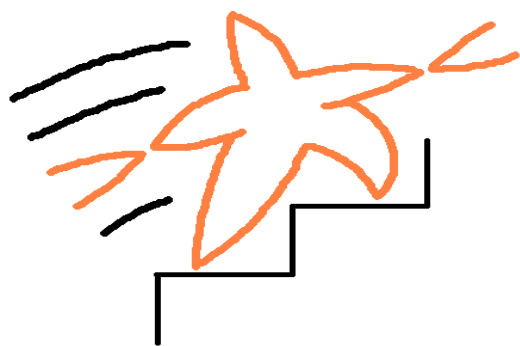
We will miss Trish's infectious enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication to Starfish Connection. We wish Trish and her husband Dick Strahota much happiness as they begin their new life in Arizona.



Starfish Connection, Inc.
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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.