

2019

# Annual Report



## Why “Starfish”?

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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

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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 3<sup>rd</sup>-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 3<sup>rd</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> 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.



## From the Executive Director

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Dear Friends and Supporters:

It is with great pride that I share with you our 12th successful year at Starfish Connection. As a thriving mentoring program in Stamford, CT, we continue to help our students achieve great academic strides, experience a wide variety of enrichment activities to broaden their view of the world, and establish strong relationships with their mentors and members of our community.

This year we are celebrating the many accomplishments of our three high school graduates as they enter college in the fall. Their ten-year participation in Starfish Connection and the dedication of their wonderful mentors have served them well. Our 58 incredible mentors will continue to support and guide our younger students and ensure their ability to access a variety of opportunities in school and in our community. We welcome six new mentors and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students to our program as the class of 2029!

Music instruction is a strong component of the Starfish program, and we are highlighting its importance in this year's annual report. We require all of our students to learn to play an instrument in school from grade three through grade eight. Starfish provides an instrument for each student and private lessons for those who find a true passion in music. Several of our students are now sufficiently accomplished to perform with community music groups. Learning to play an instrument provides many long-lasting benefits to a child's development. These include fostering confidence, self-discipline, patience, time management, creativity, and the ability to work with others. Students apply these valuable skills to their studies and daily life.

Our many successes would not be possible without your belief in our important mission and your commitment to our students. It is with great appreciation that I wish to thank our donors, mentors, community partners, Starfish parents, and board members for their hard work and support. Together we make the dream possible.

With appreciation,

Janet Schneider

Executive Director

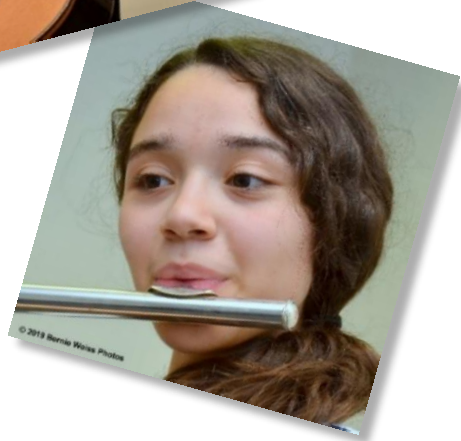


## Music

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Educators report that research shows a correlation between studying music and strong academic performance particularly in math and reading. Practicing an instrument requires self-discipline and time management skills. Music provides an outlet for creativity, increases focus, and develops the ability to recognize patterns and sequences, all important skills for academic success.

Starfish Connection believes that music will enrich a child's life immeasurably. We require all of our students to select an instrument and participate in music lessons through eighth grade. Happily most of our students choose to continue lessons into high school. As they get older, Starfish often choose a second instrument, and many actively participate in highly selective local arts programs. Finding joy and fulfillment in music becomes a lifelong legacy of the Starfish experience!



## 2019 Starfish Graduates

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### *Congratulations to our Starfish Connection graduating seniors!*



**Alexa Reyes** has been a strong student, exploring many fields of interest at Westhill High School. In her younger years as a Starfish, she discovered a passion for dance. Through after-school programs, Alexa has developed into an excellent dancer who projects an air of self-confidence, grace, and style. Academically she has been intrigued with forensics and has become proficient in both French and Spanish. Alexa has volunteered at several Stamford organizations including Building One Community, Stamford Hospital, Stamford schools, and her church. She successfully landed a summer position with YouthWorks which helped her move into several retail jobs. Alexa loves to bake and for two years she has worked in a local bakery. She is a lovely, conscientious, and quiet young woman. Although Alexa was accepted to several colleges away from home, she has decided to attend UConn Stamford this fall. She is excited about this new adventure!

**Katelyn Suarez** is a compassionate young woman who attended the Agriscience Program at Westhill High School. In the fall, she will attend Southern Connecticut State University where she plans to study elementary education. Since 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, with the support of Starfish, Katelyn has enjoyed playing the clarinet. She was a member of the marching and concert bands throughout high school. Katelyn has volunteered at SoundWaters caring for marine life, analyzing water samples, and serving as an instructor for programs during school vacations. During summers, Katelyn learned how to sail at SoundWaters, thanks to Starfish, eventually becoming a counselor. One summer, Katelyn worked with Stamford Public Education Foundation through the Mayor's Youth Program, assisting students in their coursework and helping with lesson plans. During her senior year, she volunteered as a teacher's aide, assisting Spanish-speaking students with geometry. These experiences will help Katelyn achieve her dream of returning to Stamford as an elementary school teacher.

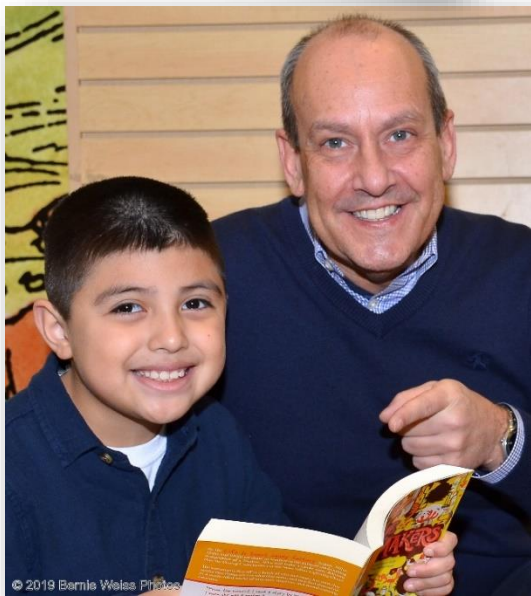


**Reina Torres Beltran** graduated in June from AITE and the Starfish Connection program that so enriched her past ten years. The art, photography, and music lessons she experienced as a young Starfish led first to her membership in the AITE band as sole flutist and, later, inspired her to study guitar as well. Academically, Reina maintained excellent grades in her AP and honors classes. She spent a summer participating in the collegial atmosphere of Girls Who Code, which awakened an appreciation not only of coding but of the value of women working together on projects. She continued working after school with GWC. Her team built a website that provides vital information to children of immigrant parents about living safe, informed lives. Reina has volunteered at the Stamford Jewish Community Center's after-school program, and, for the past two years, she has worked in the Mayor's Youth Employment Program. Reina was accepted to UCONN Stamford with a Leadership Scholarship where she has selected a stimulating variety of classes. She is working this summer in the UCONN advisors office which will help pave her way to a fulfilling college career.



The Faces  
Of  
Starfish





## Enrichment Activities

Our mentors and students choose cultural and educational programs tailored to each child's individual interests. Starfish Connection pays the tuition and provides required materials, while mentors help with logistics. We are grateful to our Community Partners who offer us discounted rates for our students. Favorite programs include drawing instruction, music lessons, ballet, and sports.

In addition to individual instruction and coaching, Starfish Connection engages students in group events. These are designed to expose the children to music, art, and theater, as well as science and fun physical challenges. Highlights from our cultural program this year included painting at Weir Farm National Historic Site, visiting the Bartlett Arboretum, photography instruction with Bernie Weiss at Greenwich Point, and the perennially popular ropes course at Scalzi Park.



© 2018, Bernie Weiss Photos





## Changing lives

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Each Starfish Connection mentor makes an amazing commitment, agreeing to guide his or her student from third grade through high school and beyond. This kind of long-term relationship is extremely rare among mentoring programs, but it is a hallmark of Starfish Connection.

Students and mentors affect each other's lives in unexpected and sometimes even extraordinary ways. Recently, Starfish mentor Sarah Arnold embarked on a journey inspired by her student. Here is her story:

Dear Starfish Friends,

This summer I spent two weeks in Antigua, Guatemala in a Spanish-language immersion program that included four hours a day of individual instruction as well as a homestay with a local family. The absolute highlight of the trip, however, was a visit with my student's grandparents and two aunts at their home in El Carrizal, about two hours away. This small *aldea* (village) is beautiful and quite remote. Running water is a luxury that not many residents enjoy. The family showed me around their village, helped me climb a huge mountain to view a gorgeous *mirador* (vista), and then made a delicious dinner. The farewell was a tear-filled one, because they very quickly made me feel like part of their family. As I hugged Emmi and Jairon's grandfather good-bye, he said, "*Estoy agradecido a Starfish por todo lo que están haciendo por mis nietos.*" (I am grateful to Starfish for everything they are doing for my grandchildren.) In that moment I realized how much Starfish means not only to our Stamford families, but to their extended families wherever they may live.

Sarah Arnold

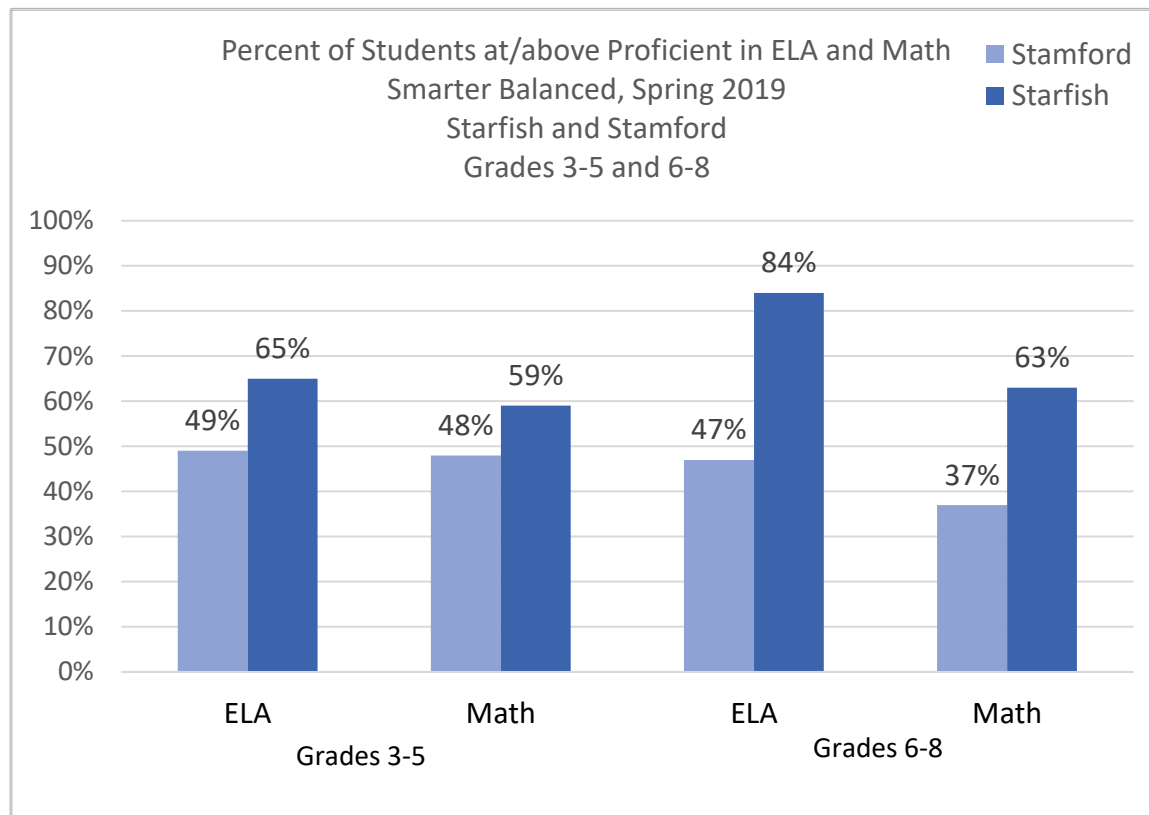


## Academic Results 2019

The Connecticut Department of Education uses the Smarter Balanced assessment to measure academic performance of students in grades three through eight. This annual test specifically measures student mastery of Common Core standards in English language arts and math.

In spring 2019, a total of 36 Starfish students participated in this assessment. The figure below shows a comparison of the performance of Starfish students with that of all students in Stamford Public Schools (SPS). Starfish students clearly outperformed their Stamford peers in general, and Starfish students in grades six through eight far exceeded the performance of their Stamford peers.

Statewide results for 2019 are not yet available, but traditionally Starfish students have compared very favorably to the cohort of Connecticut students as a whole. While the number of our students is small, and differences between student groups need to be regarded with caution, the performance of Starfish students on state assessments has consistently surpassed that of their peers both in Stamford and statewide over the years.



## Financials: Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2019

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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.

### *2019 Income*

Grants	\$ 63,000
Individual Gifts	\$ 26,287
Interest	\$ 175
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 89,462</b>

### *2019 Expenses*

#### **Program Expenses**

Summer Enrichment	\$ 26,000
After-School Enrichment	\$ 22,853
Group Enrichment	\$ 12,834
Supplies and Computers	\$ 13,020
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 74,707</b>

#### **Business Expenses**

Insurance	\$ 2,903
Other Operating Expenses	\$ 2,470
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 5,373</b>

***Total expenses*** **\$ 80,080**

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!



## Contributions

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

### Grants

Betsey & Arthur Selkowitz Family Foundation  
Claire Helsing Foundation  
Credit Suisse  
First County Bank Foundation  
General Reinsurance Company  
Gibor Foundation  
Grace J. Flippingier Foundation

Jeff & Valerie Cohen Foundation  
The Knobloch Fund at FCCF  
Louis Casale Charitable Foundation  
Pitney Bowes Foundation  
Purdue Pharma L.P.  
St. John's Community Foundation  
Stamford Rotary Trust Fund

### Contributions

Kenneth & Gwynn Asher  
Ginny Gwynn & Jon Bellis  
Lynne & Josh Berrett  
Laura Burwick & Peter Brandt  
Irene Durand-Bryan  
Lynne Burgess  
Joan Byrne  
The Children's School  
Maryly Culpepper  
Eric Diefenbach  
Susan DiMattia  
Carmen & Ronald Domonkos  
Laurie Dunn  
Elaine & Robert Erichson  
Rosalea & Richard Fisher  
Nancy & Richard Freedman  
Paula & Clayton Fry  
Donna & Ed Fuhrman  
Anthony Gaglio  
Susan Gibbon  
Philip Giordano  
Ellen Bromley & Tom Gizicki  
Lise Gordon

Margaret Gray  
Diane & Henry Green  
Barbara & Ed Guttman  
Margaret Halleck  
Richard Hahndorf  
Karen & Dennis Hannigan  
Duane & Leana Hill  
Zeena Hine  
Stephen Hoffman  
Suzanne Horn  
Lesley & Billy Iuso  
Barbara & Robert Karp  
Beth Kingkiner  
Gail Korval  
Joan & Jerry Kranz  
Jennifer Lapine  
James & Elizabeth Lee  
Nina & Norman Lotstein  
Gene Martin  
Herbert Martin  
Rise Mattler  
Ellen & Joel Mellis  
Maria Millan

Jennifer Morack  
Steve & Martha Moss  
Maureen Murphy  
Lisa & Mario Musilli  
Roslyn & Merritt Nesin  
Heidi Fieldston & Howard Ostroff  
Marilyn Ott  
Cheryl Palmer & Rey Giallongo  
Robin & Rick Redniss  
Kathryn Walsh & Wes Romansky  
Janet & Marc Schneider  
Ann Sexton  
Diane & Steven Shaby  
Shipman & Goodwin Friday Group  
Judy & David Singer  
Lauren & Steve Strelsin  
Pam & Brian Sweeney  
Philip Tutino  
Janet & Lou Ursone  
Ryan Ventura  
Barbara Kasman & Arthur  
Wernicke  
Cynthia Wicker & Clemon Williams

*Photo credits: Thank you to Bernie Weiss of Bernie Weiss Photography who graciously attended many Starfish events and provided so many of the photographs in this annual report.*

## *Community Partners*

Atelier Constantin Popescu Music  
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  
Fran D'Agostino, Tutor  
Future 5  
Girl Scouts of CT  
Greenwich Academy LINKS Program  
Greenwich Music  
Harriette Ketover, Teen Circle Facilitator  
Janet Hellier, Tutor  
Janie Friedlander, Psychologist  
Locust Performing Arts Center  
Michael Mezzapelle, CPA  
Mill River Collaborative  
Pam Klem-Dubin, Tutor  
Pathfinders Adventure Camp

Pro Bono Partnerships  
The Residence on Summer Street  
SoundWaters  
Stamford All-School Musical  
Stamford Board of Recreation  
Stamford Jewish Community Center  
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  
Temple Shalom Nursery School  
Terry Conners Skating Rink  
Thomas Cassone, Attorney at Law  
Trish Carroll, Graphic Designer  
Varghese John, Tutor  
Women's Mentoring Network  
YB World Taekwondo Academy  
YMCA Camp Hi-Rock  
YMCA of Stamford  
Young Artists Philharmonic



## 2019 Mentors

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Marlyn Agatstein  
Sarah Arnold  
Julie Barker  
Jim Benjamin  
Lynne Burgess  
Jill Burns  
Susan Conner  
Fran D'Agostino  
Rosalea Fisher  
Ronne Garber  
Jean Gray  
Margaret Gray  
Diane Green  
Richard Hahndorf  
Dee Hoo  
Suzanne Horn  
Susan Horstmann  
Donna Hughes  
Kathy Joyce  
Isabel Katz  
Dorothy Kessler

Kathy King  
Alice Knapp & Walter Young  
Susan Krieger  
Kathy Larkins  
Peter Lilienthal  
\*Jami Lo, Team Leader-High School  
Rachel Mackson  
\*Paola Mallozzi, Team Leader-Middle School  
Corine Matarasso  
Maria Millan  
Bette MocarSKI  
Meg Moar  
\*Lisa Musilli, Team Leader-Elementary School  
Betsy Nagurney  
Karen Neems  
Cheryl Palmer  
Midge Pappas  
Joyce & Jay Riemer

Arisleyda & Ralf Rheil  
Timothy Rogers  
Liz Rosano  
Fred Rossetti  
Sarah Santasiero  
Janet Schneider  
Dianna Shattuck  
Mara Siladi  
Jeanne Simon  
Frances Sink  
Mary Smith  
Jennifer Smolewski  
Maria Sosa  
Carroll Tobin  
Susan Toliver  
\*Gail G. Trell, Musical Instrument Coordinator  
Tracy Vodola  
Cliff Wells  
Kenneth & Lori Wentworth  
Donna Wolff



## Board of Directors

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David R. Martin, President  
Kathryn Walsh, Secretary

Gilda Bonanno  
Jeff Cohen  
Barbara Guttman  
Jennifer W. Lapine  
Maria Millan, Parent Facilitator  
Judith Singer, Ph.D.  
Cynthia Wicker Williams

Janet Schneider, Executive Director (ex-officio)

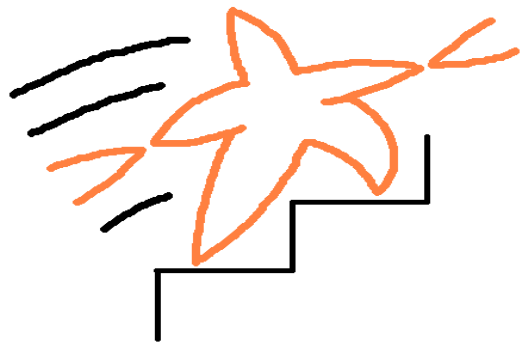
On behalf of the Starfish Connection family, we wish to thank **Cynthia Wicker Williams** for her years of support for our program as a board member. Whether working with students, families, and mentors, or providing invaluable advice and insight, Cynthia has made an indelible imprint in the lives of all our children.

Thank you, Cynthia, and best wishes as you step down from the board!

Starfish Connection, Inc.  
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203-276-9690

[mail@starfishconnection.org](mailto:mail@starfishconnection.org)

To learn more about Starfish Connection, visit our website [StarfishConnection.org](http://StarfishConnection.org). 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.