

## **STAR Inc Expands Services for Younger Children With Developmental Delays**

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STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way is launching an expanded, multi-lingual program for children experiencing, or at risk of, developmental delays.

The enhanced program, generously supported in part by The Community Fund of Darien, New Canaan Community Foundation and other generous grants, expands services from birth through age 5, with additional service options for children up to age 8.

— *an announcement from* [Star, Inc., Lighting the Way](#)

The goal of the program is to assist families throughout the preschool years and beyond by strengthening the continuity of therapy and teaching that will benefit families with basic short-term needs as well as those with greater challenges.

Likewise, to be able to serve all income levels, STAR is an approved provider accepting Medicaid, most medical insurances and private pay.

STAR offers developmental evaluations, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy and special education. Additional services include behavioral supports, assistive technology, translation, and family supports.

Interested families may contact Barbara Fitzpatrick, director of STAR Rubino Family Center, [StarRubino@starct.org](mailto:StarRubino@starct.org) or by calling (203) 855-0634.

STAR has been serving our neighbors in Mid-Fairfield County who have intellectual and developmental disabilities and providing support for their families since 1952.

From its founding by local parents who wanted a better life for children of all abilities, early intervention therapy has been a hallmark of the non-profit's success and a cornerstone of STAR's future vision.

"It is time for STAR to transition to an enhanced program and focus on this opportunity to be in the forefront of high quality, early intervention services that meet individual needs of children and families in our community," said Katie J. Banzhaf, STAR executive director.

Star had input from parents, pediatricians, professionals, pre-schools and community foundations in setting up the direct therapeutic and educational services, she said.

A young family recently praised STAR services:

"Soon after the twins came home, STAR's team arrived ready to provide desperately needed help. We were so scared of the unknown: will our children walk and talk or ever be able to eat on their own? I burst into tears as I unloaded all of my fears on these perfect strangers who, in the months to come, became our biggest support network.

"The team provided perspective on every milestone, and they understood our journey more than any friend did or family member ever could. When our twins took their first steps, spoke their first word, tolerated a bath or played in a swing, and when our son had his G-tube removed, we shared the news first with our STAR therapists."

Barbara Fitzpatrick, director of STAR Rubino Family Center at 120 East Ave., Norwalk leads the program expansion. An exceptional team of certified and licensed professionals who work directly with the children and their families in their field of expertise join her.

Barbara shares a vision for the new program: "To establish the STAR Rubino Family Center as the premier resource for early intervention in Fairfield County where all services are provided based on individual need, not a funding model or ability to pay. We believe direct intervention with a coaching approach by licensed OT, PT, ST, behavioral therapists and special education teachers, can best benefit and meet a child's needs.

"The impact of the program on these children and their families is lifelong as it creates the springboard for lifetime learning, inclusion in the community, building of confidence and self-esteem. We will create opportunities for a healthy, happy, and engaged life at a time when their brains are most responsive to early intervention therapies and stimuli."

Throughout its history, STAR has been offering results-driven early intervention services. STAR began with

“center-based” therapies in the 1960s.

Recognizing the need for children to learn from typical peers, STAR expanded its center-based therapeutic services to include inclusive playgroups. In the early 1980s, when children with special needs often were excluded from traditional daycare and pre-school settings, STAR operated an inclusive preschool.

As inclusion became more accepted, STAR transitioned out of the pre-school model and toward supporting children with special needs in typical daycare centers, pre-schools, play groups and summer camps throughout the area.

Taking the skilled therapists to typical settings not only benefitted the child with special needs, but allowed for interface, consultation and education with typical community program staff; thus, strengthening the programs for all children.

STAR’s new, expanded services will be available on site, in home (pending COVID-19) and remotely in response to COVID-19. Direct individual therapeutic intervention by licensed OT, PT and speech therapists will be offered. Certified special education teachers and developmental therapists associates will offer special education and behavioral supports.

Social services and translation will be provided. STAR will provide group services (pending COVID-19) for birth to early childhood children based on individual needs that will include, but not be limited to, movement and gym, feeding groups, social skills/behavior, music groups and playgroups.

Services will be available at STAR Rubino Family Center at 120 East Ave., Norwalk, for individualized therapy. STAR also offers Early Intervention remote services in response to COVID-19 restrictions. STAR is prepared to complete evaluations and assessments for families, doctors and school districts along with providing transition-to-school services.

Molly, a young adult from New Canaan, exemplifies the potential envisioned for these children:

“STAR has been a part of my life since before I can remember,” she said. “Starting when I was one month old, STAR therapists helped me learn to do what comes easy to most babies but was hard for me, like sitting up, crawling and walking.

“I also learned to talk with the help of my STAR speech therapist. Some days my parents say that the speech therapist did her job TOO well! Well, here I am today, 20 years old, a graduate of New Canaan High School and a sophomore at Lesley College in Cambridge.

“I have many people to thank who have helped me along the way, but I thank STAR for supporting me and my family from the time that I was just a baby up until today, when I am in college and have my first job.”

**About STAR Inc., Lighting the Way**

***Darienite***

***News for Darien***

***<https://darienite.com>***

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[STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way](#) is a not-for-profit organization established in 1952 to serve individuals of all ages who are impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in Fairfield County as well as providing support services to their families.

STAR creates opportunities for individuals to live full lives with independence, freedom of choice and personal growth by providing support, services and advocacy. STAR informs and encourages the community to recognize and appreciate the value of all individuals.

STAR is the only affiliated chapter of The Arc in Fairfield County. The Arc is an advocacy and informational agency benefitting people with intellectual disabilities on state and national levels.