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Your support advances opportunities for all

Paying it Forward

David DeGraff and Sharon Pluta-DeGraff

**ISSUE 1
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Their son, Jason, was 19 years old when David and Sharon first encountered LDA Life and Learning Services. As Sharon recalls, "I didn't know where to turn for guidance and assistance with an adult child with developmental disabilities and such complex needs."

In the 19 years Jason and his parents have worked with LDA and then Starbridge, much has occurred. "Jason has transformed into a much more accepting individual who is able to live fairly well on his own. He still needs assistance but the growth is amazing," Sharon says. Anu Chathampally, a Service Coordinator at Starbridge, says, "I have been fortunate to have



the opportunity to work with the DeGraff family. They are exemplary in the way in which they foster their son's individuality and independence, while simultaneously ensuring that he has the supports needed to assist him in reaching his goals."

David and Sharon not only appreciate the transformation they have witnessed in their son's life, but they also want to ensure that others in the community can benefit from the supports and services Starbridge provides. They have been steadfast supporters of the organization and its mission. In recognition of their partnership with Starbridge, the Welcome Area at 1650 South Avenue was dedicated in their names at a ceremony in September, 2015.

Colin Garwood, President/CEO of Starbridge, comments, "Dave and Sharon are great partners to Starbridge, and their commitment to help others is inspiring."

Sharing Opportunities for Fun

Jayshawna Israel, a senior at World of Inquiry School in Rochester, has volunteered for Together



Including Every Student (TIES) for two years. TIES, a program of Starbridge, provides support to students with developmental disabilities to participate in extracurricular and recreational activities. Jayshawna has provided support to fellow students while participating in fun activities like canoeing, drumming circles, arts and crafts. She has also supported students in the school library. Jayshawna describes volunteering as a fun learning opportunity. She comments, "It helped me realize that it's the little things in life that are important. Something little can make someone else so happy." She also appreciated the opportunity for everyone to enjoy an activity together: **"With TIES, no one is categorized or isolated. Everyone is doing the same things, having a good time."**

THE POWER OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

Improving Supports for Children

When **Maria Vazquez** first came to The Advocacy Center, now Starbridge, she needed help for her son, Jose. As she recalls, "He wasn't learning. I needed help for him due to his medical needs, and he needed supports for learning." Jose has Type 1 Diabetes, seizure disorder, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Maria began working with Maritza Cubi, Bilingual Family Education Specialist. They discussed all of Maria's options, starting with asking staff at Jose's school to communicate with Maria in her native language.

Maria has dreams for her children's futures. Of her daughter Nismary, now 16, and her son Jose, now 11, she says, "I want to see them

graduate and obtain jobs. **I want them to be happy and do what makes them happy.**"

Nismary loves helping others and wants to work in a field that would allow her to work with babies. Jose loves music and anything that is electronic.

As a result of Maria's advocacy efforts, Jose now has the school supports he needs, including a 1-on-1 aide.

Throughout this process, Maritza has watched Maria grow into a stronger and more confident advocate. "My role is to support Maria so she is able to address each of her



concerns and know what her options are. It is not my role to decide for her. It is the family's choice."

Maria says she has learned much. "I learned to be assertive and to advocate. I have acquired many abilities that help me seek and obtain the supports my kids need."

Achieving Self-Reliance

By the fall of 2014, **Don Schofield** was struggling to meet his basic needs: "I was living couch to couch." He had been unemployed for five years, largely because of untreated mental health disorders, and was unable to maintain relationships with his family. Don says, "They got tired of taking care of me."

A counselor referred Don to Starbridge's LASR (Learning to Achieve Self Reliance) program. Shlynn Hodkinson, a Starbridge Service Navigator,

credits Don for his hard work. "He was willing to do anything but needed support to know what to do."

Shlynn and Don started by getting emergency and temporary benefits and restarting his medications. As his health stabilized, Shlynn worked with Don to get his own apartment, a cellphone, and a post office box. Don even acquired a bicycle so he could go to the grocery store on his own.



Now that his life is in order, Don is able to spend time with his kids and grandkids. "I felt embarrassed before when I didn't have a

home. I couldn't give them Christmas presents. But now I can. Now I can take them out to dinner."

"I had nothing. Now, I have everything I need. I wish it had happened a long time ago, but it's a blessing that it happened finally."

CHAMPION FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Board Member Anne Babcock-Stiner

How did you first hear about our organization?

I had known about The Advocacy Center through two of my coworkers. Once my son was born with Down syndrome, in 2010, I became more involved with the organization. I graduated from Partners in

Polymaking® in 2012 and joined the Board in 2013.



Why did you decide to get involved as a board member?

I have spent my entire career working in nonprofits, and community involvement is important to me. It is essential to be involved in the disability community and I want to have a voice in shaping my son's future. Finally, I want to set a good example for my son to be involved in our community. I secretly hope that he will be on the Starbridge board someday.

What has your role as a board member involved?

I have done the legal work and personnel integration for five non-profit affiliations with PathStone, so I worked with the Human Resources committee during the merger between The Advocacy Center and LDA. We met weekly for several months to integrate compensation, benefits, work hours, policies, and other matters.

Is there anything you would like to say to someone who is considering contributing to Starbridge in some way?

I would invite them to be part of our village. The old adage that "it takes a village to raise a child" is never truer as when raising a child with a disability. We rely on teachers, family members, therapists, service providers, advocacy groups, neighbors and so many

other people to help us down our path. There isn't a single person who we've met on our journey that I am not thankful for. Our fellow villagers each have a unique and personal role in my son's success.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Raising a child with Down syndrome has been the most significant journey I have ever embarked upon. When Elliot was born, I truly thought that our family would gradually be excluded from the mainstream world, but I have found the exact opposite. Our world has expanded and we have met so many wonderful people along the way. Being on the Starbridge board of directors is just one more example of how Elliot has made my world bigger.

Anne is the Senior Vice President of Human Resources at PathStone Corporation and a licensed attorney. She lives in Rochester with her husband and their 6 year old son, Elliot.



BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY SERIES:

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF INCLUSION AND SELF-DIRECTION

inspiring conversations • practical tools
positive outcomes
transforming communities

WORKSHOP SERIES

"Dignity of Risk" and Self-Directed Living
August 30, 2016

Living a Self-Directed Life at Any Age
September 22, 2016

The Right to Work: Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency and Self-Direction
November 17, 2016

Time: 8:30am-12:30pm

Location:

Hillside Family of Agencies' Training Center
1 Mustard Street, Rochester, NY 14609

Fee: \$59/each workshop or \$149 to register for all three

Registration: www.starbridgeinc.org/events
or call 585-224-7248 to request a brochure

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Opportunities through Independence

Donnell Evans is a busy man with clear goals for his future. "I would like to go back to school and finish my degree in Communications and Media Studies at MCC. In five years, my goal is to have a job. I haven't found a girlfriend yet, but I'm working on that now,"



Donnell says with a smile. In ten years, Donnell would like to be married, start a family, and hopefully have a good career.

Originally from Brooklyn, Donnell and his mother moved to the Rochester area 15 years ago. Donnell encountered LDA

through recreational events and then joined Friends Helping Friends, a self-advocacy group. Now he participates in several Starbridge programs, primarily focused on skill development to help him achieve his educational and employment goals.

Donnell says, "Starbridge is a good organization. It helps you grow and develop friendships along the way."

In his leisure time, during the warm weather months, Donnell enjoys going to concerts, festivals, and sporting events.

Recently, Donnell moved from his mom's house into a house he

shares with a roommate. He found it overwhelming at first, but he is getting used to being on his own.

Donnell worked with Lucy Palma, a Residential Habilitation Counselor in Starbridge's Supportive Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA), throughout the transition. Lucy says, "Donnell surpassed every goal we set. He has become very independent. He arranges his transportation and goes to all his appointments on his own. I really enjoy working with Donnell."

Donnell is proud of how he has faced that challenge.

You Make a Difference

We value our partnership with you! The success of Starbridge is made possible by the gifts we receive from you and others like you. This newsletter, *Champions*, shares a few of the many ways your giving and involvement matter. We hope you enjoyed reading about the impact your contributions have made in the lives of so many.



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Save the Dates

2016 Education Conference

Featuring

Paula Kluth, Ph.D.

Consultant, teacher, author, advocate, and independent scholar

Parent Workshop

Thursday, October 13, 6:00pm - 8:30pm

Inclusion: What Every Parent Should Know

Hillside Family of Agencies' Training Center

FREE— This session is only open to parents who have a child with a disability.

Professional Conference

Friday, October 14, 8:30am - 3:30pm

Joyful Learning: Using Active & Collaborative Structures To Differentiate Instruction

Hyatt Regency Rochester

\$125/person (includes continental breakfast, lunch and materials)

Registration: www.starbridgeinc.org/events
or call 585-224-7248

