

# Building Self-Advocacy Skills in Local Youth

Over the last several years, Maritza Cubi and Maggie Burgos have collaborated to support Compeer families with their children’s educational needs. Maritza works as Bilingual Family Education Specialist at Starbridge and Maggie is a Senior Family Peer Mentor at Compeer.

After hearing stories shared by families and youth, the two women realized teens needed to develop their understanding of behaviors that can get in the way of success and their self-advocacy skills.

Maritza and Maggie planned a three-part series, called “I Am, I Can, I Will!” The topics presented by Maritza and April Dixon (also from Starbridge) were Building Self-Awareness, Behaviors and Interventions, and Anxiety and School Avoidance. Nearly a dozen teens, ages 13-19, attended the series in November and December of 2016.

Maritza observed, “At first, the adolescents seemed to be holding back. As the workshops proceeded and they went through the different activities, you could see them feeling more comfortable, you could see them opening up and having ‘aha’ moments. The workshops not only provided them with information and tools, but also the opportunity to be heard!”



Front row: Ishmel and TJ; Back row: Maritza Cubi, Salina, Maggie Burgos, Mya, Margaret, and Nick

When asked what they had learned, one student said, “Everyone has anxiety. I am not alone.” Another one shared, “It is okay to ask for help.”

Starbridge was pleased to collaborate with Compeer Rochester in providing this series. Compeer Rochester’s Youth Program pairs community volunteers with youth ages 6-19 living with mental health challenges. Thanks to the support of grants, Starbridge was able to offer this series free of charge to participants.

Other insights from the students:

*“This workshop helped me. I got a lot out of it. I had fun and I will come back if I could.” – Ishmel*

*“Stay to myself and ignore the distraction.” – Nick*

*“I believe in myself more and it helped me understand that some things aren’t meant to be perfect.” – Mya*



# Champions

Your support advances opportunities for all



More inside:  
Board member  
Bob Moore



More inside:  
First HPOG graduate  
Robert Webb

## One Family’s Drive to Help Others

### The Parkes and McNally Family Legacy

To understand why Walter and Barbara Parkes are longtime supporters of Starbridge, you would have to know their granddaughter Kristina McNally’s story. Kristina does not tell it often, but agreed to share with us.

“When I was in first grade, I wasn’t able to understand what was going on in the classroom. I was diagnosed with learning disabilities. At times, my parents were told I would not go to college,” says Kristina.

Kristina’s parents, Susan and Jon McNally, threw themselves into researching everything they could. Susan contacted LDA and began taking every class she could find. Jon investigated assistive technologies (AT) that would support Kristina’s learning. “I have an auditory processing disorder. I needed everything written for me. To this day, I still use AT: Dragon, Kurzweil, and Inspiration.”

Susan was instrumental in a special education support group and other initiatives for parents in the Fairport school district. She also met regularly with Kristina’s teachers—even during the summer. Kristina recalls,

**“She always wanted them to know what I could do, not just what I couldn’t.”**

In fifth grade, Kristina’s parents moved her to The Harley School for more intensive support and its smaller class size. Even with that, Kristina recalls, “It’s hard to stay positive when you struggle so much. My parents and grandparents told me to persevere. They supported me through all of it.”

Kristina’s grandparents, Walter and Carmina, helped however they could. Carmina attended workshops and conferences with Susan, and would take Kristina to tutoring sessions. Kristina says, “My grandmother Carmina was like a second mom to me.” Sadly, Carmina passed away while Kristina was in 11th grade.

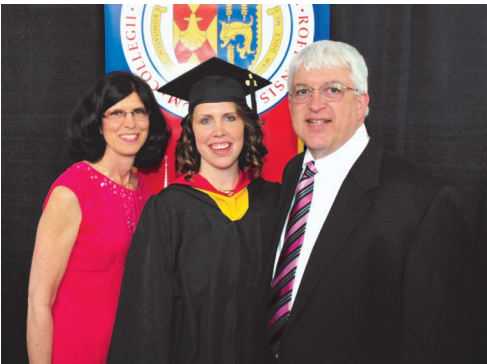
Kristina graduated from high school. She enrolled in St. John Fisher to study education, and had an IEP all the way through college. “I knew I wanted to be an educator. This was my passion.”

Kristina earned an undergraduate degree in Childhood and Special Education with a minor in Instructional Technology. She

then earned her Master’s degree in Literacy for Birth-Grade 12. Today she is in her fourth year as a special education teacher at Jefferson Avenue Elementary in Fairport.

“I am open with parents and students about my struggles. It helps them. I tell the kids, ‘It’s okay. If you have to go to school year-round, then that’s what you need. Miss McNally did it!’” Kristina’s encouragement helps her students feel more optimistic about what they might achieve.

Kristina’s drive to help others is clearly a family trait.



Susan, Kristina, and Jon McNally at Kristina’s college graduation

Continued on inside page



**CELEBRATION OF Champions**

An evening to benefit Starbridge

**Saturday, May 13, 2017**

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The successes of Starbridge and the people we serve are made possible, in part, by the gifts we receive from **supporters like you**. We thank you for your support and hope you enjoy reading about the successes you have helped to make possible. You make an impact in the lives of many!



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# Celebrating Our First HPOG Graduate!

Robert Webb achieved a Starbridge first last December: he became the first graduate from our Health Professions Opportunities Grant (HPOG) program and passed the exam to become a Certified Nursing Assistant.

ROC-HPOG is part of a national program designed to prepare individuals with low incomes for careers in health care. Starbridge is one of twelve partners in a unique collaborative assembled by Action for a Better Community Inc. (ABC). The group's goal is to help 1,000 people in our region prepare for and find employment in health care over the next five years.



Robert Webb receives his CNA certificate

Starbridge staff assist participants in navigating the process from start to finish. Stacy Russell, Director of Employment Services at Starbridge, notes:

**"Barriers are everywhere for people in poverty to get where they want to be: learning about health professions; what programs are available; navigating work schedules to complete the training; finding funding or sponsorship; staying the course... all of these can be mitigated with our support."**

Robert completed the program in about two months. He has been hired by Rochester Regional Health, which also sponsored Robert to complete the class. Adeanna Tazell, Service Navigator for HPOG, praised Robert. "I am excited for his accomplishment and I am very proud!"

**Thank YOU!**

Support from **donors like you** can make a crucial difference for people who have disabilities and their families throughout our region!

# SUPPORT IN A TIME OF CRISIS

## Jessica McTiernan and Julie Marks

In 2015, Jessica McTiernan abruptly received a notice from Social Security (SSA) that they were terminating her benefits. She immediately reached out to Julie Marks, Work Incentives Counselor at Starbridge, to ask for help in appealing the termination. As Jessica remembers, "I was scared to death. There's so much involved and I'm afraid of doing something wrong."

Julie says, "Because of Jessica's recordkeeping and her willingness to seek out the truth, we uncovered an earnings report error by SSA."

For people who receive disability benefits through SSA, losing that safety net is a big fear—and can have devastating impacts. The error Jessica experienced is uncommon. Still, it took a year for Jessica's benefits to be restored and to receive repayment of funds that had been withheld. During that time, Jessica struggled to make ends meet.

Jessica works full-time at ABVI's call center and is visually impaired. She first connected with benefits advisors at The Advocacy Center (now Starbridge) in 2010. As Julie recalls, "Jessica is a very strong advocate who made conscious, informed choices about benefits and working."

Today, Jessica praises Julie's support and determination. "Julie was relentless with the supervisors. She kept saying 'I won't stop until you get this resolved' and she didn't."



Jessica McTiernan

When asked what advice she would give to someone else about working with SSA, Jessica says:

**"They are pretty reasonable. You have to be firm but you also have to be diplomatic. Go in person. Show that you are serious, and keep showing up."**

Since getting her benefits restored, Jessica shares what she has learned with other friends so they can avoid having their benefits cut off.

Jessica's life has returned to normal. She is able to enjoy going out to eat with her friends, play beep baseball, and look forward to a future with her boyfriend.

# Thank you KeyBank Foundation!



Colin Garwood, President/CEO of Starbridge, with KeyBank Foundation's Cynthia Peake, Business Banking Relationship Manager, and Timothy Brown, Business Banking Sales Leader

KeyBank Foundation provided a grant for \$3,000 last year to provide educational supports to help young adults who have disabilities complete education and training programs.

Cynthia Peake stated, "It has been a pleasure working with Starbridge since 2001. With your help, we will continue to prepare students and our workforce for thriving futures. Starbridge is a valuable civic partner engaged in the positive transformation of our communities. We appreciate and thank you for your continued good work."

**Thank you KeyBank Foundation for your longstanding support of our mission!**

# GIVING BACK TO STARBRIDGE

## Board Member Robert Moore

Bob and his wife Jane are the parents of two children, Julia (19) and Steven (17). Bob works as a Vice President at Key Insurance & Benefits Services.



Executive Committee and the Merger Task Force. I remain committed to Starbridge as a member of the board and the Finance committee.

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

I knew LDA Life and Learning Services, and I wanted to give back to the community. The bank I worked for at the time was very supportive of community involvement, which I appreciated. I have volunteered over the years for the American Diabetes Association and various Autism organizations.

### What has your role as a board member involved?

I started as an LDA board member in 2006 as part of the Finance committee. I served as Treasurer and then Vice President, provided I could have 2-3 years before being considered for President. The theory was to walk before running. Naturally, the current President left to take a job out of town three months into his term, and I became President. I spent five years as President, and then served on the

### What have you gained or learned from the experience?

I have gained an appreciation for the dedication of our staff, board members, and the parents who work and live with the people we serve. The people who work here do so because they care.

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

My son, Steven, receives services from Starbridge. It is a worthwhile organization that helps a great many people.

### Is there anything else you would like to add?

It can be overwhelming when you first learn your child has special needs. The friends we have made over the years at both LDA and The Advocacy Center—now together as Starbridge—have helped us navigate the journey. I would encourage parents and caregivers to call Starbridge.

### One Family's Drive – Continued from cover



Walter and Barbara Parkes outside the Parkes Family Conference Room at Starbridge's main office at the Al Sigl Community's Wolk Campus

Walter Parkes, Chairman of O'Connell Electric, has been devoted to helping others in the community for years. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Pluta Cancer Center. The Walter and Carmina Parkes Family Foundation aids charities in communities where O'Connell employees work and live. The Mary Parkes Asthma Center at URM was founded by

the family in honor of their daughter Mary, who died at the age of 32 after a lifelong battle with asthma.

Walter remarried while Kristina was in college. His wife Barbara has been very supportive of Kristina and the family's commitment to community ever since.

For nearly 20 years, Walter has been a staunch supporter of LDA and now Starbridge. Krystyna Staub, Vice President of Philanthropy, says, "One thing I treasure about Walter and Barbara is that they are always available to listen, to learn about what is going on. They want to do whatever they can to make it easier for children to succeed."

Kristina says, "Pops wants to keep seeing kids who are struggling succeed. That's why he keeps supporting Starbridge." That drive to help others succeed is what motivates Kristina in her work, too.

Thank you to the sponsors of our 2016 Conferences!

**VISIONARY**  
**Faraci Lange**  
**ATTORNEYS**

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