



WHO WE ARE

For far too long, more than 400,000 foster youth across the country have been neglected by the system meant to protect them. Their often-tumultuous lives lead to thousands of youth aging out of foster care unprepared for the real world, leading to higher rates of incarceration, welfare assistance, and little education.

Since 2014, the First Star South Jersey Collaborative (First Star SJ) has transformed the lives of foster youth aged 13-19 and grades 8th-12th with immersive residential summers on university campuses and support from highly qualified professionals and peer mentors. Our goal is to increase the college graduation rate of foster youth and support the whole family with resources and life coaching. First Star SJ is the only First Star Academy in the nation to use the Whole Family approach to address family instability – the greatest obstacle to a foster child's success in academics and home life. Together with our agency collaborators, we work to ensure caregivers and children have the resources to strengthen their whole family through one-on-one coaching, mentorship, academic support, and more.

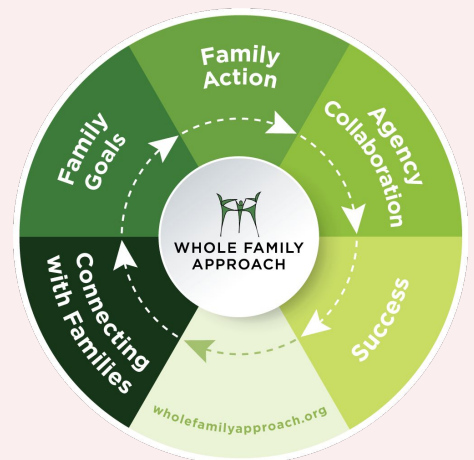
Our collaborative brings together the strengths of four nonprofits to connect families with a full range of services: **CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), United Advocacy Group, Community Treatment Solutions, and Family Strengthening Network.**

THE WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

While families are made up of individuals, their challenges and successes are interdependent.

Our work is guided by the Whole Family Approach, a family-led strategy which equips adults and children with the tools and social support to set, plan for, and achieve their goals together. When the whole family works together to support each other's goals, long-term change and stability become a reality.

Each family is paired with one of our Family Advocates, who acts as a trusted entry point for all family members to access the services we offer to achieve their goals ranging from financial fitness, to career advancement, healthy relationship and child well-being. Seamless collaboration between nonprofits in our collaborative yields better access to services, ensures a coordinated effort to track families' progress and improves well-being for the entire family.



BUILDING FAMILY STABILITY AND WELL-BEING

We recognize that all areas of life are interconnected. Families cannot address one area without factoring in another. Findings from seven years of research conducted by the Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs among eight nonprofit collaboratives implementing the Whole Family Approach in Southern New Jersey, including South Jersey First Star Collaborative, show positive changes for families with two caregivers:

- Primary caregivers report a significant improvement in children's educational outcomes.
- Both caregivers feel a significant increase in the help given and received in their relationship.
- Secondary caregivers report significantly reduced financial stress.

These findings reinforce the positive impact of the holistic services we offer, including: university-based college-preparatory programs, technical assistance for stakeholders, and advocating for policy change.



OUR IMPACT

Working with our team of experts, families learn to reach their goals:

45%

OF PEER MENTORS
ARE FIRST
GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

48%

OF 2019 FIRST STAR
SCHOLAR GRADUATES
ARE ATTENDING A
4-YEAR COLLEGE

98%

OF FIRST STAR
SCHOLARS
GRADUATE HIGH
SCHOOL

ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMIDST A PANDEMIC

As school closures spread across the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our college cohort felt the brunt of that impact. For students like Lukas, instructions for already challenging subjects like Calculus became even more difficult when classes were moved to an online format. With online tutoring opportunities and one-on-one conversations about classes and online resources from First Star, Lukas was able to bring positively impact his education through an unprecedented situation. Despite difficulties, Lukas completed the semester with a 3.74 GPA, passing his class and receiving high enough honors to make the Dean's List.

OUR RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted our foster youth in a way we could have never expected. We remain committed to supporting our staff, scholars, and alumni by:

- Releasing a list of best practices for schools and families to support Class of 2020 Foster Youth
- Forming a list of local and national resources for foster youth and families
- Providing online tutoring through the end of the academic year

TAKE ACTION

Join us in building a thriving and inclusive foster care support network for our scholars and alumni. We can't do it without the help of volunteers and donors like you!

EVALUATION PARTNER

RUTGERS
Senator Walter Rand Institute
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