FIRST STAR IMPACT REPORT

2019
A Letter From Our CEO

Our Impact Report captures the remarkable growth of our organization over the past year. We lift up a thousand lives on over a dozen university campuses. Our students all express the incredible benefits of belonging to the First Star family, and how it transforms their life’s journey, to find success and happiness. Our incredible scholars begin our program with a promise of high school graduation and college attainment. We believe every young person deserves an equitable opportunity for a quality education. Our First Star Foster Youth Academy model and our incredibly resilient scholars work together in a well developed framework that profoundly bonds them with their peers, college peer mentors, and Academy Directors. Our students experience the wonderment of academic curiosity; and through this, reach for new dreams they see as attainable with the supportive First Star foundation and a family as real as any could ever be.

Situated on campuses throughout the country, First Star Academies deliver on dreams, all of which are made vivid and realistic by the exciting ecosystem of the university. As you delve into the contents of our report, you will see how our scholars break the cycle of abuse and neglect each day through the unique aspects of our Foster Youth Academy model. A multitude of opportunities pivots our youth towards secondary and post-secondary achievement.

Our Impact is real. First Star is a robust organization that brightens futures for our country’s foster youth. Over the next year, we will expand to additional universities - all of which have demonstrated a commitment to excellence and to improving the lives of foster youth. First Star first made its commitment to excellence in 2010, when the initial idea to begin Foster Youth Academies for teenagers in the system was conceptualized by Dr. Kathleen Reardon. Each of our top flight university partners recognizes the collective accomplishments of the First Star network and have committed to reaching for the impossible alongside many other universities, because together we are greater than the sum of the parts. First Star is responsible for an unprecedented 98% of our young people graduating from our program with a high school diploma and 88% transitioning to post-secondary education, against a national benchmark where only 10% of the nation’s foster youth enroll in college. First Star scholars push back on the notion of impossible and enter school at a rate almost nine times that of their foster youth peers.

This report underscores the passion, ingenuity, and brilliance the First Star network brings to foster youth throughout the country. We hope to have your support and camaraderie for the long-term. Please reach out. In the words of the African proverb, “It Takes a Village.” First Star is ever ready to lead from the front as experienced experts in the field.

Lastly, on a personal note, I have been promoted to First Star’s Chief Executive Officer. I am especially proud and humbled to take the helm of this transformative organization performing incredible work in the foster care sector. With our University partners, Academies, and our scholars, we are achieving incredible feats, one youth at a time! I look forward to working closely with our founder and ongoing President, Peter Samuelson, our staff and board to continue to ‘deliver the goods’…

Onwards and upwards!

Lyndsey Collins, MA
CEO, First Star, Inc.
PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST

A national public charity, First Star has worked since 1999 for America’s abused and neglected children by strengthening their rights, illuminating systemic failures, igniting necessary reforms, and now pioneering support programs to launch foster youth into productive lives and careers through higher education. In 2011, First Star Academies were created to keep youth on track for high school graduation and prepare them for higher education and adulthood.

The First Star Academies are the country’s only long-term college-prep programs for high school foster youth that include both four immersive residential summers on a university campus and monthly sessions during each school year. The First Star Academies keep youth on track for high school graduation and prepare them for higher education and adulthood by providing specialized programming that address the academics, life skills and necessary adult supports unique to students in foster care.

“Education is the pivot that turns lives blighted by abuse or neglect towards happy, productive, and engaged futures. Our 13 national partnerships with leading universities give us the leverage to provide partially residential, continuous four-year Academies for foster youth through the high school years, who are housed, educated, and encouraged by the full community of each university. Education is the pivot, and universities are the leverage.”

- Peter Samuelson, Co-Founder and President
There are over 440,000 Foster Youth in the United States. Every year, 28,000 age out of the system unprepared for adulthood.

Statistically, outcomes for youth leaving the foster care system are characterized by low academic achievement, chronic unemployment, homelessness and incarceration. These painfully poor outcomes are almost guaranteed by widespread home and school instability, and the resulting revolving door of inconsistent adults who are not invested in the youths’ futures.

First Star believes that higher education is one of the best ladders out of these desperate circumstances and into stable, supportive and nurturing environments.

The First Star Academies are the only programs within their geographical regions that provide long-term academic and permanency support services and include multiple residential opportunities on a university campus.

The First Star Academies serve hundreds of foster youth between the ages of 13-19. Nationally, First Star students come from a variety of backgrounds, reflecting the culture and diversity of each Academy’s city or region.
The First Star Academies

University Immersion
First Star partners with universities and child welfare agencies throughout the country to improve the lives of foster youth through innovative college-preparatory programs. By placing high school foster youth on a university campus, we allow them to access the multi-disciplinary resources needed to help break the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect and poverty.

Removing Barriers to Academic Success
First Star works to keep all participating youth on track for high school graduation and prepares them to successfully transition to higher education through remedial and college-prep curricula. Academy staff works with each individual youth to know their educational rights as a foster youth, and monitors their academic progress during each school year until they graduate.

Life Skills Needed for Successful Independence
We prepare youth to successfully transition from foster care into adulthood. Life skills workshops include: career readiness, financial literacy, social justice, health and wellness, study skills, and access to foster care specific resources. The Academies provide ongoing consultation to the youth as they implement these skills in their daily lives.

Caregiver Support & Engagement
Too often, foster youth move placements and exit foster care without any family or permanent adult supports. The Academies work to ensure youth are in appropriate foster homes. If placements are disrupted, staff works to identify other potential homes for the youth within their family or among the caregivers of other participating youth. The Academies engage caregivers to ensure they have the supports and resources needed to support the youth’s academic achievements.

We’re stronger, smarter, wiser, and incredible. Creativity, ingenuity, integrity, intelligence, wisdom, and love. We possess the memories to relight our forgotten drive and we now own the sense and purpose of living. We know we’re more than just a shade on a pie graph, more than just young adults who lost their childhood too soon. We are worth wonders.

- First Star Scholar
Alumni Program

To ensure that the Academy model remains both effective and relevant, the First Star Alumni Program, extends our support for our Academy graduates as they navigate higher education and adulthood. Our goal is to provide support and guidance throughout their college careers by keeping track of how our Alumni are excelling post-high school graduation. The Alumni Program provides responsive services, a national resource toolkit, an interactive social media presence, and celebrates important moments in the lives of our Alumni. Our Peer Mentors play an integral part in the program, through their shared lived experience managing the transition between high school and higher education.

Edwin is a 2018 graduate of our First Star UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy who is in his second year at Chapman University, CA. He is studying to become a fashion journalist, with the goal of one day becoming the artistic director of his own brand. He returned this summer to serve as a peer mentor to the current UCLA scholars, one of whom is his younger brother. “I’m the first person in my family to graduate high school and go onto college. The academic part of the program is important, but the self-advocacy and empowerment portion was something that I really latched onto. While I was in the program, getting to learn from the peer mentors was really exciting to me. It’s definitely a privilege to be a part of it and I want to come back every summer now. I want to pave the way for other foster youth to experience all that First Star has to offer.”

Peer Mentors

Peer mentors are the university student-staff who work with our scholars each summer and throughout the academic year. Both our scholars and peer mentors are uplifted from the experience. Our scholars feel like they have role models who understand their unique needs as foster youth. For our peer mentors, a job within the Academy provides summer housing, income, job skills and opportunity. Peer mentors develop leadership, communication, presentation and management skills, which have helped many of them find full-time employment through Academy connections, after completing their degrees.

A 2018 graduate of the First Star Loyola University Chicago Academy. Mianna is in her second year at Loyola University Chicago as a Business Management & Marketing major with the dream of opening up her own law firm one day. “Most people don’t know what it’s really like in the foster care system. Being around other strong people who came from a similar background of trauma, abuse, and neglect gave me that extra push and support that I wasn’t getting anywhere else. Most of us don’t have a family member who has ever been to college and graduated. It’s really challenging for us to even think about. First Star inspired us to really want that for ourselves.”
OUR OVERALL IMPACT

How First Star Scholars Compare

- Graduate High School
- Enter Higher Education

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<th>Non-Foster Youth</th>
<th>Foster Youth</th>
<th>First Star Graduates</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Higher Education</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>88%</td>
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Beyond Our Scholars

First Star is committed to expanding its reach beyond our scholars. The First Star Academy program is not only transforming the lives of our scholars, but is also uplifting the peer mentors who work with them. The peer mentors are comprised primarily of undergraduates at the host university, who are former foster youth or first generation college students. Some peer mentors are also graduates of the First Star program themselves. This shared life experience positions our peer mentors to uniquely connect with our scholars, making them the best role models available.

Our Peer Mentors:

- **3%** Formerly Homeless
- **23%** Former Foster Youth
- **45%** First Generation College Students
Some of the colleges and universities our alumi are attending:

- Azusa Pacific University
- Chapman University
- Clark Atlanta University
- College of the Canyons
- Colorado College
- CSU Fullerton
- CSU Los Angeles
- CSU Northridge
- CSU San Bernardino
- CSU San Marcos
- Daytona State College
- DePaul University
- East West University
- Humboldt State
- Loyola University, Chicago
- Malcolm X College, Chicago
- Montgomery College
- Norfolk State University
- Rowan College, Gloucester
- Rowan University
- Saint Peter’s University
- San Francisco State University
- Tufts University
- UC Davis
- UCLA
- UC Riverside
- University of Rochester
- University of the District of Columbia
- University of Virginia
This year we have seen unprecedented growth across all of our social media platforms. We challenged all of our Academies to create their own social channels, which has allowed us to increase engagement, drive new fans to our national news, and organically lead more viewers towards the First Star website. We’ve increased the amount of videos posted, streamed important events on Facebook Live, and added a new Instagram handle for our Alumni program, all of which has helped us continue to raise First Star awareness across the country!

In the last year....

- **25%** Increase in New Fans
- **1,913** New Website Visitors

Overall Engagement Rates

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<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Non-Profit Average</th>
<th>First Star</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Some of our most shared posts:

- [First Star](#) published on [Facebook](#) on 4 May - Bridget Healy, from our First Star Loyola University Chicago Academy, answers the question, "What are your greatest hours for your scholars?" Watch for her inspiring answer!

@firststar.org @firststaracademies
First Star Arizona State University Academy, Phoenix, AZ
First Star CSU San Bernardino Academy, San Bernardino, CA
First Star College of Staten Island Academy, Staten Island, NY
First Star Illinois State University Academy, Normal, IL
First Star Kent State University Academy, Kent, OH
First Star Loyola University Chicago Academy, Chicago, IL
First Star Sacramento State Academy, Sacramento, CA
First Star UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy, Los Angeles, CA
First Star University of Central Florida Academy, Orlando, FL
First Star University of Miami Academy, Miami, FL
First Star University of Utah Academy, Salt Lake City, UT
South Jersey First Star Collaborative at Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ
South Jersey First Star Collaborative at Rutgers University, Camden, NJ
**ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS**

## 2019 College Tours

Scholars from our University of Miami and College of Staten Island Academies took part in college tours this past year. Through a partnership with Educate Tomorrow and Our Kids, our UM scholars were able to tour nearly a dozen colleges and universities in Florida that offer tuition waivers to foster youth. Thanks to a grant from the AT&T Foundation, our College of Staten Island scholars were able take part in an HBCU STEM college tour that took them from Pennsylvania all the way to North Carolina.

## College Signing Day

Scholars from our UCLA Academy were able to celebrate National College Signing Day with former First Lady Michelle Obama on UCLA’s campus.

## UCF Academy Innovators

Two scholars from our University of Central Florida Academy presented at the Florida College Access Network Summit. In sharing their educational experiences, they were able to begin conversations with decision makers that challenge existing structures and empower others to be agents of change.
WellCare Community Foundation Appreciation Day

This summer our Academy at Arizona State University was able to thank the WellCare Community Foundation for their generous funding, which has helped First Star triple the number of students attending the Academy and expand its reach throughout the state. Our ASU scholars are now from 40 different schools within 20 school districts across Maricopa County and beyond.

2019 Graduations

More than half of our Academies had graduating seniors this year, including Rowan University, Loyola University Chicago, UCLA, UCONN, Illinois State University, University of Central Florida, and The College of Staten Island. We are so proud of all of our 2019 graduating scholars!

First Star Give Back Scholars featured on ABC World News Tonight

A partnership with the Give Something Back Foundation prioritizes First Star graduates who are Pell Grant eligible in providing scholarships to its partner colleges and universities throughout the country. ABC World News Tonight featured our Rowan University scholars in a story highlighting the work of Bill Carr, Give Back’s founder. To date, scholars from UCLA, CSU San Bernardino, Illinois State University, and Rowan University have taken advantage of this wonderful opportunity. We look forward to many more doing so in the years to come.
Governor Gavin Newsom has signed the 2019 state budget, including an unprecedented $740,000 to establish a First Star Academy for Foster Youth at California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State). This extraordinary action in support of foster youth in Sacramento County is a legislative demonstration that underscores the Newsom Administration’s, Senate’s and Assembly’s sincere desire to reverse the dismal outcomes often associated with these most vulnerable of California’s youth.

"These are legally our children. We parent them through our Judges. Our foster kids deserve our best help, a real chance, a leg up to a productive life. First Star’s educational immersion in college life over the four years of high school strongly influences foster youth to qualify for and apply to university, and greatly facilitates their success as undergraduates."

- Dr. Robert Fellmeth, Executive Director, Children’s Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego

We are also establishing a new Academy at Kent State University this year!
Through an innovative Ohio Corp grant addressing the opioid crisis and its effect on communities, nearly $500,000 in funding has been awarded to begin the Academy at Kent State University.
FINANCIAL SPOTLIGHT

Expenses
Fiscal Year 2018

THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS 2018 & 2019
INDIVIDUAL DONORS & FOUNDATIONS

$200,000 +
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Pascale Sykes Foundation
WellCare Community Foundation

$100,000 - $199,999
Bill & Deirdre Catuzzi
CG Charitable Trust
Give Back Foundation •
Julian Grace Foundation
Jessica & Steve Sarowitz

$50,000 - $99,999
Achelis & Bodman Foundation
Angell Foundation
Annenberg Foundation
Educate Tomorrow •
May & Stanley Smith Charitable Trust •

$25,000 - $49,999
AT&T Foundation •
Batchelor Foundation
Jay Paul Deratany
Dwight Stuart Youth Fund
Beryl Golden
Green Foundation
Our Kids of Miami-Dade and Monroe •
Ralph M. Parsons Foundation •
The Katz Family Foundation
Snider Foundation

$5,000 - $24,999
Albert & Elaine Borchard Foundation
Cloud Family Foundation Fund
Craig H. Nielsen Foundation
Rob Densen/Tiller LLC
Sarah & Paul Densen

Do A Little Fund
Edison International
The Eileenberg Family
Ervin, Cohen & Jessup
Glen & Elizabeth Freidman
Glenda G. Morgan Charitable Foundation •
Judith & Bruce Hackett
Hilda and Preston Davis Foundation
In-N-Out Burger Foundation
Melinda & Jonah Kaufman
Louise & Herb Horvitz Charitable Fund
New Yorkers for Children •
Michael & Lori Milken Family Foundation
Danny & Sara Monempour
Our Little Light Foundation
Philip & Janice Levin Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation •
Sharon Hall Family Foundation
Staten Island Foundation •
Vince & Jacqueline Thompson

*Funding provided directly to our University Partner
List in Formation
NEW VOICES

With an eye towards diversity and inclusion, and in an effort to add experts in their fields to our governing body, we have recently added four new board members. Each has already made an incredible impact on our work in 2019.

Raul Cardenas, Jr. PhD, President & CEO at J.K. Mullen High School in Denver, CO, Raul earned his Bachelor’s Degree from Pepperdine University, his Masters from Northern Arizona University and his PhD from Arizona State University (ASU). He helped create and implement two charter high schools that serve predominately high-risk students. Formerly CU Denver’s Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Raul has focused his career on ensuring people have an opportunity to access higher education and earn a degree. With that passion he has been one of the driving forces behind our expansion to Denver.

Judy Hackett, Founding Partner at Bryant Stibel, Judy has over 25 years of experience in both B2C & B2B strategic planning, marketing, advertising, brand development, sales and product management. Previously, she was the General Manager of the Credibility Division at Dun & Bradstreet, Chief Marketing Officer for Dun & Bradstreet Credibility Corp., Web.com, and CareerBuilder. A graduate of Kent State University, Judy has been instrumental in our establishment of a First Star Academy in Ohio.

Kathleen Strottman has been a sought-after expert on policies related to the welfare of children. As a trusted advisor to Senator Mary Landrieu, Kathleen worked to pass key pieces of legislation including the Intercountry Adoption Act, the Child Citizenship Act, the Adoption Tax Credit and the Family Court Act. As Executive Director for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute and the Global Alliance for Children, Kathleen sought to increase the opportunity for positive dialogue and the exchange of best practice between the United States and its partner countries.

FIRST STAR STUDENT BOARD MEMBER

This year we have added a First Star scholar to the board, who will represent the collective voices of our scholars across the country, making sure their needs, desires, and concerns are always represented. Fatuma Johnson, a junior at our First Star University of Utah Academy, has been elected as our first First Star Student Board Member. Originally a refugee from Somalia, Fatuma is full of energy, love and joy and cares deeply about First Star and the First Star mission. With plans to pursue a career in nursing, she is already a strong leader at the University of Utah Academy and within her local community. We are thrilled to welcome her as the student representative who will help elevate First Star Academies across the country.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peter Samuelson  
Samuelson Productions  
*First Star President & Co-Founder*

Raul Cardenas, Jr. PhD  
J.K. Mullen High School

Michael H. Cook, Esq.  
Liles Parker PLLC

Brian Gray  
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Children’s Advocacy Institute  
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Judy Hackett  
Bryant Stibel

Fatuma Johnson  
First Star Student Board Member

Adrien Sebro, PhD  
University of Texas at Austin

Kathleen Strottman  
Alexandria, VA

Vince Thompson  
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Robin Winston  
Chief Operating Officer

Erin Buchanan  
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Jennyann Gallo  
Program Coordinator

Brian Ritchey  
Curriculum & Programming

GET IN TOUCH

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