FIRST STAR
2020 IMPACT REPORT
PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST
A letter from our CEO

Dear Friends,

YOU ARE THE FIRST STAR FAMILY. We have persevered through this very trying year of 2020. It began like all others, filled with optimism for our foster youth, and the abundant hope a new year brings for them: advancing in school and experiencing a safe and positive home placement. However, our excitement quickly shifted to disappointment for our youth as the novel Coronavirus took hold of the country and of the world. By springtime, our youth were catapulted into their new realities, ones where they were required to navigate daily life 24/7 within the confines of a stranger’s home and with a newfound dependence on tech and the internet to access school, keep in touch with biological siblings and family, and meet the daunting obligations placed on them by the child welfare system. First Star recognized their imminent needs. We quickly and fervently adjusted programming - through those early weeks, we found and invented new solutions to support our youth.

WE SHIFTED OUR FOCUS. We reimagined connectivity and engagement and repositioned our goals to align with innovation, sustainability, and social justice. We understood the potential that is realized when these goals are combined. We were ejected out of our comfort zone, resulting in fresh ideas of what is possible in First Star. Our network of exceptional Academies and our brilliant scholars met these challenges and far exceeded what we thought was possible.

WE CELEBRATED. In the midst of all the woes this year brought us, we managed to highlight the good. We celebrated our graduating seniors for their unrelenting pursuit of academic attainment and post-secondary enrollment. 100% of our scholars graduated from high school! In a pandemic! We celebrated our colleagues during our 3-day Zoom National Conference. We rejoiced in the monumental progress and work that our organization coordinated and executed each and every day at our Annual Virtual First Star Celebration: Full STEAM Ahead. ABC News celebrated the stories of two First Star scholars as they addressed the burden the pandemic was having on the lives of all foster children. And millions of viewers across the country watched.

LOOKING AHEAD. First Star acknowledges the issues that have been put on display during the pandemic - racial injustice, tech inequity, learning loss, joblessness, food and housing insecurity, and the like. We are working towards enhancing our current programmatic structure to tackle several of these issues with many more foster youth across the country. The First Star National STEAM Academy, led by technology and grounded in social justice affirms and validates our youth’s experiences while simultaneously exposing them to careers that can break generational cycles of low socio-economic status, and offer opportunities to give back to their communities. Our peer mentors (most of whom are former foster youth and/or first-generation college students) have taken on leadership roles to assist our scholars as they navigate high school and the new virtual college environment. As we welcome more scholars across the country to First Star we focus on student learning and broadening the path to post-secondary success.

ABUNDANT GRATITUDE. It is at moments like these that we take inventory of our lives, our work, and our communities. I am beyond grateful to report that after taking inventory of the First Star Network, I clearly see that we are resilient, formidable, that we care and show love...and that we are stronger than ever. Our endless days and tireless nights of work and concern affirm our steadfast commitment to our youth. This year was a striking reminder of what our team can do in facilitating real, lasting change. We are #FirstStarBrilliance and I am humbled to be your colleague in this work. Let’s keep doing this. It takes a village.

With abundant gratitude to each of you,

Lyndsey C. Wilson
CEO
Today, there are an estimated 440,000 U.S. children in foster care. Many suffer from neglect or abuse, while others endure chronic physical and psychological problems. An overwhelming majority of these young people face abysmal prospects after leaving the foster system. For example, only half graduate high school, fewer than 3 percent go on to earn a college degree, and more than half end up homeless, incarcerated, or on welfare within two years of aging out of care.

First Star students have a chance to strengthen the skills they need to move on to higher education, employment, and productive adulthoods, all with the guidance and support of caring adult and peer mentors.”

Peter Samuelson, Co-Founder and President

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 peer and adult supports unique to students in foster care.
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.

Our Scholars

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.

How First Star Scholars Compare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Foster Youth</th>
<th>Foster Youth</th>
<th>First Star Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Higher Education</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ENROLLMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DIVERSITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Collected in June, 2020*
First Star Academy

PROGRAMMING

ACADEMY PROGRAM
4 year college prep. program for foster youth focused on academics and life skills

STEAM ACADEMY
Monthly virtual sessions and access to online courses that focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math

ALUMNI PROGRAM
Offered to scholars who graduate the Academy as a resource as they transition to adulthood

SUMMER ACADEMY
Intensive 3-4 week residential enrichment program on a university campus

VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT
Weekly mentoring and tutoring sessions, as well as an open environment to connect and build community through virtual hangouts

SCHOLAR ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Leadership opportunity for scholars focused on becoming civically engaged and enacting change in their local communities

PEER MENTOR ENGAGEMENT
Peer mentors are comprised primarily of undergraduates at the host university, who are former foster youth or first generation college students

CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT
Seminars and workshops that provide tools to caregivers to become advocates for their youth

Scan the QR Code to access our Scholar Interest Form.
Want more information? Visit our website! http://firststar.org
The changing world this year gave us the opportunity to pivot our events to the virtual space. We had the largest class of graduating seniors this past spring, so we celebrated with a Nationwide Virtual Graduation ceremony. Scholars from our Academies at Arizona State University, College of Staten Island, Illinois State University, Rowan University, Rutgers University Camden, UCLA, and the University of Utah all took the ‘stage’ to share in the joy of completing four years of hard work and perseverance. We are FIRST STAR. Let’s Go Class of 2020!

First Star 2020 Graduates REACH for the STARS!!
2020 GRADUATING CLASS OUTCOMES

FIRST STAR’S USE OF DATA ANALYTICS

First Star recognizes the need to approach our Academies and our growth through a data lens. Data analytics allow us to gain information to better support the Academies and understand how the changing environment is impacting our scholars. First Star actively tracks scholar data throughout the academic school year to ensure that all graduating scholars are supported and on track for high school graduation and enrollment into higher education.

2020 FIRST STAR SENIOR DATA

Data captured in June of 2020 showed that 100% of First Star seniors graduated from high school in the spring.

2020 SENIOR DATA
POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

Of the First Star scholars who graduated in June of 2020, 87% enrolled in higher education. First Star defines higher education as four year and two year colleges, in addition to vocational schools.

2020 SENIOR DATA
NON POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

Of the First Star scholars who graduated in June of 2020, 13% did not enroll in higher education. First Star takes a whole scholar approach, supporting youth and exploring options beyond two and four year colleges. Our data includes scholars enlisting in the Military and pursuing employment.

100%
First Star scholars who graduated from high school in June 2020

87%
First Star scholars who graduated high school and are pursuing higher education

64%
First Star scholars who are pursuing higher education by enrolling in four year colleges
2019 & 2020 COMPARISON DATA

First Star compares scholar graduation data annually to measure progress and identify areas of growth to focus on during the following school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>HS Grad</th>
<th>Post Sec. Educ.</th>
<th>4-Year College</th>
<th>2-Year College</th>
<th>Vocational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

- Increase in high school graduation rates & number of scholars who are pursuing four year colleges.
- First Star continues to take a whole scholar approach, supporting youth and exploring options other than two and four year colleges.
- Impact of COVID-19 led to an increase in the number of scholars who are pursuing either the Military or employment instead of higher education.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Many of our scholars come from placements where caregivers, family members, and loved ones are considered essential workers. Many have lost their jobs and face economic insecurity because of COVID-19. As a result, we have seen a decrease in the number of scholars who are pursuing higher education and an increased desire for scholars to seek out employment or enlist in the armed forces. This trend could also be influenced by institutions of higher learning choosing to move instruction online for the fall of 2020. This change impacts foster youth decisions, as they see the opportunity to go onto higher education as a chance to be in a positive academic environment and have stable housing.

Sources: Army recruitment adapts to coronavirus. Keck, Colleges Could Lose 20% of Students, Jaschik, For college students, taking a gap year good way to outwit coronavirus, Leasca.

Oh, the Places They’ll Go

Some of the colleges and universities our 2020 alumi were accepted to:

- Alabama A&M University
- Arizona State University
- Baruch College
- College of Staten Island
- CSU Fullerton
- CSU Los Angeles
- CSU Northridge
- CSU San Bernardino
- Fashion Institute of Technology
- Howard University
- Illinois State University
- Loyola Marymount University
- Loyola University, New Orleans
- Marymount Manhattan College
- Morehouse College
- New York University
- Norfolk State University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- San Diego State University
- SUNY Buffalo State
- UC Davis
- UC Irvine
- UCLA
- University of Albany
- University of Rochester
- University of Utah
- Valparaiso University
Officially launching in early 2021, The First Star National STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) Academy will expand our programming to include a national learning platform led by technology and grounded in social justice. First Star will be building the virtual First Star National STEAM Academy through partnerships with universities throughout the country in addition to individuals and companies that will assist in developing age-appropriate, culturally responsive content. The First Star National STEAM Academy aims to increase teenage foster youth engagement in STEAM careers with a series of interactive “Tech Talks” led by positive STEAM professionals, as well as the expansion of technology in driving learning opportunities. Our objective is to guide more foster youth towards exciting STEAM careers with increased earning potential to help break the cycle of poverty and provide a greater opportunity to contribute to their community.

Why First Star? Why Now?

• First Star acknowledges its responsibility to uplift foster youth and expand their understanding of STEAM careers and the vital role they play in the 21st Century.
• The Covid-19 crisis has motivated First Star to be a leader in transforming education, work, and social environments into technologically savvy spaces that allow for continuous growth, development, and connection.
• Pervasive systemic racism against people of color has led to significant education and wealth gaps, health disparities, higher incidences of police brutality/death, incarceration, homelessness, indigence, and higher incidences of child welfare placements. These effects are amplified in the foster care system.
• First Star is committed to supporting social justice movements and aims to provide validation through representation as well as impactful opportunities centered on technology for our POC foster youth.

Our Goals & Objectives

• Bring a high-intervention education program to MORE foster youth
• Introduce foster teens to real people who are working in STEAM fields
• Shift thinking from shrinking to growing job fields, increase earning potential, & job security
• Uplift foster youth to become leaders of change in their communities, their states, and their government
First Star Arizona State University Academy, Phoenix, AZ
Gabriela Jimenez, Academy Director

First Star CSU San Bernardino Academy, San Bernardino, CA
Kurt Manio, Academy Director

First Star College of Staten Island Academy, Staten Island, NY
Senemeht Olatunji, Academy Director

First Star Illinois State University Academy, Normal, IL
Joel McReynolds, Interim Academy Director

First Star Kent State University Academy, Kent, OH
Danielle Green-Welch, Academy Director

First Star KVC Academy, Charleston, WV
Walter Swoope, Academy Director

First Star Loyola University Chicago Academy, Chicago, IL
Bridget Couture, Academy Director

First Star Sacramento State Academy, Sacramento, CA
Linda Ram, Academy Director

First Star UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy, Los Angeles, CA
Karina Garcia, Academy Director

First Star University of Central Florida Academy, Orlando, FL
Dr. DeShawn Chapman, Academy Director

First Star University of Miami Academy, Miami, FL
Maria Pia De Castro, Academy Director

First Star University of Utah Academy, Salt Lake City, UT
Alexa Hudson, Academy Director

South Jersey First Star Collaborative at Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ
Julio Nieves, Academy Director

South Jersey First Star Collaborative at Rutgers University, Camden, NJ
Julio Nieves, Academy Director

Academies in Formation at:
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
University of Missouri-Mizzou, Columbia, MO
Our Academies conducted robust virtual summer programs by engaging scholars creatively. In Ohio, our youth participated in cooking demonstrations; in Chicago, they spent time outdoors, socially distanced, learning about the beauty and tranquility of nature; in New Jersey, they participated in weekly jam sessions; in New York, our young people delved into real estate to enhance their entrepreneurship acumen; and our Alumni program supported countless alums with emergency COVID funding.

**Arizona State University - Community Involvement**

Our ASU Academy’s multiple ASU-based and local community partnerships have helped them increase their reach, encourage others to become involved in supporting Arizona’s foster youth, expand to serve more foster youth across the state, and leverage resources in the community for their students.

**California State University San Bernardino - Mental Health**

The effects of the health crisis have been especially hard for our students. Our CSU San Bernardino Academy has concentrated on making the mental health of their students a top priority by creating a multi-month curriculum focused on various mental health topics.

**College of Staten Island - Life Skills**

This year, our CSI Academy, used the new virtual world to get creative with their life skills curriculum. By partnering with Project Destined, students took part in a real estate course that taught them the importance of ownership, budgeting skills, and real estate fundamentals. They also explored gardening and the importance of sustainable food, especially in urban settings like New York City.

**Illinois State University - Social Justice**

We are so proud of Sincere Williams (far right), a 2020 graduate of our First Star Illinois State University Academy for becoming one of the leading voices in his community during the current struggle for racial equality. Along with 20 other young black men and women, Sincere started the ‘Young Revolution’ group to promote peaceful protests and unity across the city of Peoria, IL. Their first march was attended by hundreds, garnering the attention of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker who came out to support and offer his praise and congratulations to the group.

**Kent State University - Star-Gazing Sessions**

Our KSU Academy has initiated a series of virtual career panels, First Star-Gazing Sessions, as a means of introducing scholars across the entire network to potential occupations and an opportunity to engage in community advocacy. The sessions will highlight different career avenues through the perspective of successful professionals who also come from disenfranchised backgrounds.
KVC West Virginia - Our Newest Academy

We are excited to announce that a new First Star Academy has started this fall in West Virginia, through a partnership with KVC. Led by Interim Academy Director Walter Swoope, the Academy is entirely virtual, which will enable foster youth throughout the state to become part of the First Star family.

Loyola University Chicago - Leadership Adventure Camp

Our Loyola University Chicago Academy took part in a Leadership Adventure Camp this summer. Conducted through socially distanced small groups, students had the opportunity to hike, canoe, and take part in team-building activities focused on problem-solving, communication skills, and trust.

Sacramento State University - Care Packages

Our First Star Sacramento State University Academy Director Linda Ram has gone above and beyond, safely hand-delivering care packages to her students EVERY MONTH since the summer. As one of our newest Academies, this cohort hasn’t been able to meet in person yet due to the health crisis, so this is her way of building community with students and making sure they feel a part of the First Star family.

UCLA Academy - Foster Boy Premiere

Before COVID-19 hit, students from our UCLA Academy had the opportunity to join Shaquille O’Neal on the red carpet at the premiere of the film Foster Boy, produced by both O’Neal and First Star President Peter Samuelson. Our UCLA students had an integral part in the making of the film, adding their stories and voices as inspiration to the actors and spending a day on set.

University of Central Florida - Web Series

In order to connect with students more regularly, our UCF Academy produced a series of videos that students could watch at their own pace. They offered students opportunities to get involved in their local communities and to connect to the broader First Star network.

University of Miami - Give Miami Day

Our University of Miami Academy participated in Give Miami Day, an annual online initiative aimed at increasing local philanthropy and community engagement in Miami-Dade county. Our UM Academy was one of the nonprofits that benefited from local donations, all of which went towards providing delivered lunches to our students during their virtual sessions.
All summer long, our Rowan & Rutgers Academies took part in weekly News Hour sessions, giving scholars and peer mentors the chance to report on current events and topics important to their lives. Special guest speakers including national First Star team members, Academy Directors, and local community members joined to give their expert advice and opinions on each subject.

NATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Faced with the changing educational landscape and its effect on our scholars, in May, First Star, in collaboration with United Friends of the Children, and FosterEd (NCYL) drafted a two-page document to assist school-based professionals with guidance on how to best support foster youth during this challenging time. This list of best practice strategies was designed for teachers, counselors, SpEd teams, FY liaisons, administrators, and any individuals or groups with the K-12 education system that work with foster youth.

Read the entire report here.
2020 has been a hard year for everyone, but none more than the foster youth we serve. ABC Nightline sat down with our President Peter Samuelson, CEO Lyndsey C. Wilson, and two of our amazing scholars Maryori and Azaria to discuss how the current pandemic has affected their lives.

Azaria, in her ninth foster home in five years, had struggled to see her biological siblings due to the crisis. She also faced a lack of technology impeding her ability to stay connected in school, but was ultimately able to advocate for herself and received a laptop.

Maryori and her older sister, who have lived in six different homes in five years, were in the process of being adopted, but the pandemic put that on hold. She is hopeful the process will begin again soon and in the meantime is excelling at school and making plans to one day become an immigration lawyer to advocate for kids like her.
ALUMNI PROGRAM

Our First Star Alumni Program follows our First Star scholars post-high school graduation and provides responsive service and support. The program connects our TAY youth with resources, a dynamic network of role models, and speaking opportunities. The Alumni Program maintains an uplifting social media page, hosts in-person and virtual events, celebrates their achievements, and more. With these ongoing touchpoints, our scholars are given continued support from the First Star Family to persevere through the challenging transitions of early adulthood.

Alumni Spotlight: Boston T.

“Being a part of First Star means so much to me. The program is family, and I’ve met people with whom I have lifelong connections. I’ve learned about many different experiences while being in the program. They gave 8th grade me a chance and today I attend UCLA. First Star has taught me that there is a community that will aid me after high school. They won’t abandon you. My current post-grad goals are to go to graduate school. For a long time now I’ve wanted to become an academic teacher in the Social Sciences.”

The iFoster - First Star Mentorship Program

The iFoster and First Star Mentorship Program connects First Star Alumni with trained and qualified TAY Americorps Mentors to provide consistent and intentional mentorship for a group of foster youth alumni transitioning into higher education and adulthood.

Program Focus Areas

- Physical & Mental Health Care Resources
- Tools for Unexpected Challenges
- Education & Career Exploration
- Post-Secondary Education Enrollment & Retention Support
- Resources for Housing & Food Security

2020 VIRTUAL EVENTS

Alumni from across the nation met online this year to engage in community, gain professional skills, access resources and expand their networks.

Meetup and Event Topics

- Q&A With a Professional
- Self Advocacy & Self Care
- Taxes 101
- Holiday Events & Giveaways
- Community Activism
- Budgeting 101
- Speaking Opportunities
- Linkedin & More!
Our use of social media has evolved incredibly this year, due to the ongoing health crisis and social justice movements of 2020. It has become a channel of connection for all of us and a vital tool in our national communication efforts. Despite the challenges of the year, we have seen unprecedented growth across all of our social media platforms, including the addition of YouTube Live as a platform for streaming our 2020 virtual events. We look forward to even more social media expansion in 2021 with the launch of our First Star National STEAM Academy and all the vital work we will continue to do to serve our students.

**Facebook, Instagram & Twitter**

- **39% Increase in New Followers**

**First Star YouTube Channel**

- **2,333% Increase in Subscribers**
THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS 2019 & 2020 INDIVIDUAL DONORS & FOUNDATIONS

$250,000 +
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Pascale Sykes Foundation
WellCare Community Foundation

$100,000 - $249,999
Bill & Deirdre Catuzzi
CG Charitable Trust
Children’s Trust
Give Back Foundation
Julian Grace Foundation
Jessica & Steve Sarowitz
Walter S. Johnson Foundation
ASU Women and Philanthropy

$50,000 - $99,999
Achelis & Bodman Foundation
Angell Foundation
Annenberg Foundation
Bryant Stibel
Educate Tomorrow

$25,000 - $49,999
AT&T Foundation
Batchelor Foundation
Jay Paul Deratany
Dwight Stuart Youth Fund
Beryl Golden
Green Foundation
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Our Kids of Miami-Dade and Monroe
Our Little Light Foundation
Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
Snider Foundation

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