

Goodbye

Summer 2017



STARFISH
FAMILY SERVICES

Autumn 2017 Edition



THE STARFISH SCOOP



STARFISH
FAMILY SERVICES

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Strengthening families to create
brighter futures for children

**Connect
With Us!**



What if you or someone you loved suffered from Autism?

Imagine if ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches were painful? What if unfamiliar environments often felt hostile and a simple trip to the grocery store was agonizing?

A Not So Fun Trip to the Grocery Store

Meet Sam. Sam has Autism. It affects all aspects of his life. Even a quick trip to the grocery store with his mom can be severely distressing*.

Sam explains why:

- My hearing is hyper acute.** I can hear dozens of people jabbering at once. The loudspeaker booms today's special. Music blares from the sound system. Registers beep. The meat cutter screeches, babies wail, carts squeak, the fluorescent lighting hums. My brain can't filter all the input and I'm in overload!
- My sense of smell is highly sensitive.** The fish at the meat counter isn't quite fresh, the guy standing next to us hasn't showered today, the baby in line ahead of us needs a diaper change, and they're mopping up pickles on aisle three with ammonia. All the odors are mingling; I feel like throwing up.
- And there's so much hitting my eyes!** The fluorescent light is not only too bright, it flickers. The pulsating light bounces off everything and distorts what I am seeing. The swirling fans on the ceiling, and the many bodies in motion all affect how I feel. I can't even tell where my body is in space. It's all too much for me to be able to focus (my brain may compensate with tunnel vision).



*Many children with Autism experience sensory issues like Sam. However, not every child has the same experience and even those faced with severe challenges can be helped greatly with therapy.



From *Ten Things Every Child with Autism
Wishes You Knew* by Ellen Notbohm
www.ellennotbohm.com.
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So long STARFISH SUMMER



We have a butterfly house! Thank you to our wonderful Ford volunteers, who worked hard this summer to build and plant so our preschool children have an engaging space to learn about plants and bugs!

In August, we celebrated our wonderful Chief Operations Officer, Cindy Murdock's, tenure at Starfish. We were sad to see her go but know she has earned a fun and adventurous retirement.



Starfish was thrilled to welcome David A. Williams as our new Chief Administrative Officer. Williams takes over for Cindy Murdock, who retired in August and formerly served as the organization's Chief Operations Officer. The position has been renamed to CAO to better reflect the responsibilities of the role. Prior to joining Starfish, Williams spent 20 years in leadership roles at the Michigan Humane Society (MHS).

It was a bountiful harvest. This year we gathered over 1000 pounds of produce for those in our community.



Melissa Says, “Thank You!”

Your Support Helped Transform a New Mother's Struggle into a Success.



After my twins were born I was diagnosed with severe Post-Partum Depression (PPD). I was completely overwhelmed and struggled with very frightening feelings and thoughts of self-harm. It was like nothing I'd ever experienced. I knew I desperately needed help. It was so bad that I called a crisis line and immediately started seeing a therapist. I was soon referred to Starfish.

I was convinced that my babies hated me.

On top of coping with my PPD, I thought my babies hated me. I felt like I wasn't bonding with them at all. I knew something wasn't right, but I thought it was me. They wouldn't respond to me. Wouldn't make eye contact, it was as if they couldn't even hear me when I spoke to them, they seemed to be in their own little world.

As they grew older, they played with toys oddly, and wouldn't point at or identify things. They would spin around constantly and seemed to never interact appropriately.

I enrolled in Starfish's Infant Mental Health program which included home visits from trained therapists and screening for developmental delays for the twins. Both were diagnosed with Autism.

A New Challenge for our Family: Autism

My husband was devastated, he broke down and cried about it. Instead of feeling relieved about the Autism diagnosis, I was angry and resentful. I was in therapy myself. How would we overcome this new challenge?

Fortunately, Ms. Krystle, the twins' therapist from Starfish is wonderful. She's positive, hopeful, and empathetic; I trusted her immediately. Her guidance along with my therapy helped me to overcome my anger and focus on what I could do to help my children. And there was a lot to do.

We use a therapy called Applied Behavioral Analysis or ABA. It's a therapeutic philosophy which rewards

good behavior. The results are astonishing and very encouraging.

Previously, the twins would each have 3-6 meltdowns every single day. They would throw themselves on the floor and scream uncontrollably, while biting, kicking, and scratching. Now the tantrums happen once or twice a day or not at all.

Before Starfish, they had no functional language skills. They could quote verbatim entire scenes from movies but couldn't tell me what they wanted for lunch or ask for a drink. Now they can communicate the basics and tell me when they are hungry, thirsty, or need to go to the bathroom. They are identifying objects and even making eye contact.

My husband and I are so pleased with their progress. I get emotional thinking, "Where we would be without Starfish?" Starfish helped us at a very bad time in our lives, I wasn't doing well, and we didn't know what was wrong with the twins. Now we have dreams for the twins: of attending college, being self-sufficient, having a job, and living independently. It's possible. And donors like you have helped to make it so. Our family is so grateful for Starfish and programs like these.

YOUR Gifts Matter!

To serve more families coping with Autism, we will be opening a new location in Dearborn. Our expected launch date is January of 2018.

Please support our work and help give local children access to high quality services that improve their lives and future. Please use the QR code to donate online today! Or visit starfishfamilyservices.org



The GREAT HEARTS GALA

**A FESTIVE EVENING
BENEFITTING
STARFISH FAMILY
SERVICES**

Gala Gallery!

Thank you to all who supported our June 8, 2017 Great Hearts Gala! Because of the generosity of you and many others, \$500,000 was raised for the 2,000 children and families who we serve daily!

Nearly 400 guests came together at Cobo Center in Detroit to socialize, dine, celebrate families, and to honor the 2017 Great Hearts Honoree, The Jewish Fund.

The spectacular evening directly benefit our 2017 key priorities:

- **Building Resilience** in children who have experienced emotional and physical trauma.
- **Strengthening the Parent-Child Bond** through programs like Baby Power and Dad Power, in which parents and caregivers can receive developmental guidance, self-care skills, and family/parent involvement.
- **Empowering Parents** to succeed in supporting their children's development and with their own goals through Starfish University.

A successful event would not be possible without the hard work of our Great Hearts Gala Event Leadership Team comprised of **Karen Schoenberg** and **Nancy Grosfeld**, the honorary co-chairs, **Janet Lawson**, Starfish Board Chair, **Ron Sollish**, Starfish Immediate Past Chair, and **Lisa Widner**, chair of the planning committee and the sponsorship committee.

SAVE THE DATE!

Thank you again and we hope you'll join us next year on May 18, 2018, to honor Beaumont Health!

