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Champions

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A Tribute to George Gray

We are deeply saddened by the loss of our longtime friend and board member George Gray. His commitment to ensuring a brighter future for people with disabilities in our community was evident in both his legal practice, Gray and Feldman, LLP, and his service. Starbridge President/CEO Colin Garwood wrote this tribute to George:

George Gray served on the Board of Directors, first for LDA Life and Learning Services and then Starbridge, for 25 years. I first met George in 2000 when I was hired for the role of Executive Director for LDA.

At my first board meeting, George asked me what my approach would be to address a pressing organizational issue. I nervously shared my idea and he barked, "That's the last thing we would want to do."

Needless to say I was a little intimidated by George. But I soon learned that George's deceiving gruff affect was more than offset by his compassionate and supportive nature.

Throughout those years, George's top priority was always the people with disabilities whom we served. George even became a legal guardian for a young man who had no family member or friend to help him.

George became a confidante. He was wise and would reassure me that "the sky wasn't falling."

George had a dry sense of humor. When he led board meetings, and it came time for me, the CEO, to do my presentation, he

would often cue me up by saying, "And in conclusion..."

We became close friends. We went to baseball and hockey games and played some bad golf together. We went out to lunch frequently and perhaps even more so after his cancer diagnosis.

George was always interested in my family and how everyone was doing, and he loved sharing updates about his family, Pat and Peter and Rosalyn and his granddaughter Georgina, as well as their dog Angus... and, of course, their infamous cat, Gretzky.

We talked about his health. Not once did he utter a word of despair or self-pity. He remained determined and optimistic to beat his cancer.

I will fondly remember George for his courage, his humor, his intellect and his caring nature.



Colin Garwood and George Gray at the 2017 Celebration of Champions

George, you trained me to be brief and to the point... "And in conclusion", I will miss you.

Mother's Intuition and Guidance from an Advocate

Lilly Flores sees so much potential in her son. "Marc loves meeting new people. He wants to be a construction worker, a mechanic, or a scientist. His interests are anything he can build."

But at school, it was a different story. Lilly recounts, "The school was telling me that Marc was throwing things, shoving – he was never doing that at home."

Lilly was often contacted by the school to pick him up. She estimates that he missed 30-40% of school.

"I didn't realize but picking him up was reinforcing avoidance behavior and rewarding the other behaviors."

Lilly finally reached a point where she felt they weren't getting anywhere. A friend and a medical professional both recommended she call Starbridge.

Through her conversations with April Dixon, Family Education Specialist, Lilly got reassurance that her intentions were in the right place, along with constructive advice on working with the school to advocate for Marc's needs.

Lilly also signed up for Starbridge's *I am My Child's Best Advocate* series last fall.

Of the series, Lilly says, "I like the atmosphere. I can connect with other parents and we validate each other. It almost doubles as a support group. We can say 'we're not alone in this.'"

Lilly used her new knowledge to work with Marc's school team to get additional supports in place. At last report, Marc was staying in school.



Marc and Lilly



Starbridge's Employment Team: (L-R) 1st row – Stacey Daly and Ursula Nicholson, Director of Employment Services; 2nd row – Melissa Stadler, Samantha Brown, Shannon Swetman, and Lora O'Neil; 3rd row – McKenzie Graham, Kimberly Schaeffer, Dave Mauro, and Jeff Diekvoss. Not pictured: Cheryl Morrison and Michelle Schojan

Employment Team Fosters Success

"What jobs can a disabled person do?"

"How do I get hired with no experience?"

Google lists these questions as the most common searches for job seekers who have disabilities.

Starbridge's Employment Team works with individuals to find the answers to questions like this every day.

Ursula Nicholson, Director of Employment Services, understands the challenges faced both by people trying to get a job, and by employers who would like to hire but aren't sure how to accommodate an employee with a disability.

Ursula says, "It's already difficult for youth to get their first job. Add in a disability, and it can make it challenging."

We also know that potential employers might have questions about whether a candidate can do the job, if a job coach will truly be helpful, and how successful the match will be."

To support job seekers, Starbridge offers a continuum of employment programs, available depending on the age and current skills of each person.

Individuals can build skills through internship programs and supported coaching-style services. Employment Counselors get to know each individual first, and tailor their searches and opportunities to the best possible match.

For businesses, our Employment Counselors build relationships with potential employers to understand their workforce needs, what skills an ideal candidate would have, and how best to support an intern or new employee.

These programs have great results for both employers and employees. Over 50% of participants in our internship program are hired at the end of their internship. Of those who aren't hired immediately, the majority receive additional support through our supportive program and then proceed to jobs.

For employers, knowing that our counselors are thoughtful about the matches they suggest and will check in and provide support appropriately builds trust and confidence—in Starbridge and in **how easy it can be for employees with disabilities to succeed.**

PAUL VISCA— Board Member Profile

Paul is a partner in the firm Stokes Visca & Co LLP CPAs. Paul and his wife, Lisa, are parents to twins Mary and Matthew, and live in Pittsford. Paul has been a board member since 2011.

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

Having a son with Autism, I was interested in getting involved with an organization that provides services to people with Autism and developmental disabilities. I was and still am interested in learning about the programs available as well as how the nonprofit community supports people with disabilities. Some of my interest is unique to getting better prepared in helping our son navigate the future. I also want to volunteer my time and whatever knowledge I can offer to Starbridge.

What has your role as a board member involved?

I serve as the Board Treasurer, Chair of the Finance Committee, and Chair of the Audit Committee. Our committees provide financial oversight, which includes the budget process, monitoring the financial position and resources of Starbridge, and advising on financial issues.

What have you gained or learned from the experience?

At each Board or Committee meeting I learn something new about what we offer to the community and Starbridge's talented employees. I have been impressed by the quality and variety of programs the organization provides. In my role as Treasurer I've also gained an appreciation for the fiscal challenges associated with running these programs,



many of which we have little control over. However, Starbridge and its staff find a way to adapt in an ever-changing environment.

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

Starbridge is a vital organization that positively impacts people's lives. Supporting Starbridge will help many people, whether directly or indirectly. It is an honor to serve and assist in any way I can to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

I feel that I receive more from being a Starbridge volunteer than I give.

What will be your legacy?

A **Legacy Gift** is a thoughtful commitment you can make now that will support people who have disabilities and their families in finding their way to the **hope** and the **how** for generations to come.

Join our **Champions Circle** giving society by making a legacy gift today. To learn more, go to:

www.starbridgeinc.org/LegacyGiving

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And to YOU

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 impact you have in the lives of many!

Thank You

Please join us for an exciting evening
to benefit children and adults who have disabilities.

Presented by Starbridge
at The Strathallan City View Ballroom

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 2019 | 6:00 PM

Among the Stars

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- ☆ Jazz Quartet
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