## Light AT THE END OF THE Tunnel

2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

The





2019 OTO Winners: (from left to right) Brandon Thomas, Matthew Connolly, Natalia Vera, and Nasir Browne.

### KIDS CAN OVERCOME THE ODDS

#### A DISABILITY, OR ANY ISSUE AFFECTING A CHILD'S EDUCATION, IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION.

That's the approach we take in our advocacy. We dream big, believing that every child can overcome the odds given the right support.

That's also the reason we started the Overcoming the Odds (OTO) Awards in 1996 - to highlight and honor youth who have overcome the odds, making school a priority despite significant obstacles. Since the awards were started to honor youth, rather than focus on our service, we accept nominations from any Westchester school.

Next year will be the 25th OTO Awards ceremony, bringing the total number of winners to 100!

#### THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

PEOPLE TOLD ME "OH, THERE'S LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL' WHEN REALLY I'M JUST SICK OF THE DARN TUNNEL. AND LET ME JUST SAY, THAT TUNNEL IS AN UNFORGIVING, RUTHLESS PLACE TO BE. BUT WITH THE HELP AND GUIDANCE OF MANY PEOPLE, I WAS ABLE TO MAKE A PATH TO FIND THAT LIGHT, AND IT'S A STUPENDOUS THING."

-Matthew Connolly, client and 2019 OTO winner

Dear Friends,

Our hope is to create that light at the end of the tunnel for every child struggling in school. Our track record proves this is possible. After our advocates secure the right opportunities at school, 86% of parents report significant improvement for their child within just a few months. That means better attendance, better grades, fewer disciplinary problems and a better attitude towards school.

Our challenge is to grow to meet the extraordinary demand for our service so that no child is left in the dark.

Thank you for sharing this stupendous dream. Together, we ensure their education. Together, we enhance their lives. Together we can!

Thank you,



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Jill Bernstein, President

Lisa Syron, Executive Director

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# Curious

# Isaiah

### FROM HIDING UNDER THE DESK TO APPLYING FOR COLLEGE . . .

When Isaiah first came to Student Advocacy, school regularly overwhelmed him. Though bright and curious, Isaiah's autism led him to experience sensory overload in the classroom. Often, he would be in so much pain he would hide under his desk and cover his ears to escape.

Advocate Maria Suchy-Kozak worked hard to get Isaiah into a learning environment where therapeutic support and a calm atmosphere would allow him to feel comfortable enough to focus on learning. Over the next several years, Maria educated both Isaiah and his mother about the kinds of accommodations available to help him thrive in school.

Now a high school senior, Isaiah is passionate about school and can't wait for college. Instead of hiding beneath his desk, he is among the most successful students in his grade. Isaiah's needs may change in college, but Maria's steady guidance has ensured that no matter where he goes in life, Isaiah has the skills he needs to advocate for himself and his education.

\*All Client stories presented in this report are true. Names, images and other identifying information have been changed to uphold our promise for confidential services.

# Mateo

### CAN'T I GO TO SCHOOL WITH MY FRIENDS?

When asked to describe Mateo, teachers and school staff regularly offered high praise – he's sweet, friendly, energetic, and inquisitive. Still, Mateo was like a small tornado in the classroom. Consequently, at only six years old, he had many unofficial suspensions. Eventually, Mateo's mom was told he could no longer come to school. Instead, he would receive Home Instruction which amounts to a tutor for an hour each day.

A sociable child who loved spending time with his cousins and neighborhood friends, Mateo needed a program that could attend to his individual needs without isolating him. On top of his multiple learning disabilities, Mateo spoke Spanish almost exclusively, and his school district simply didn't know how to help him. When Attorney and Education Advocate Judi Callan first started working with him, she was determined to get Mateo back into school with the help he needed.

She successfully advocated for him to have a one-on-one classroom aide who speaks Spanish, to give him all the individualized help he needed, while keeping him in a class where he could interact with other children. Mateo loves his new school and his mother reports phenomenal progress, remarking that he is practically a new kid. Now excited and eager to learn, Mateo's friendly and personable nature is able to shine.



## mdependent

## Very bright

## Malcolm



# WILL HE EVER GET THE HELP HE NEEDS?

Malcolm succeeded in elementary school because he is very bright; in addition, his mom worked with him every day and had him tutored multiple times each week. Nevertheless, Malcolm was still struggling to read even the simplest sentences. His teachers suspected a learning disability – in fact, they reported that he needed more support than they could provide. His mother tried to get Malcolm's disability formally recognized so that he could begin to receive support and accommodations, but the school district failed to respond. Knowing how vital interventions were to help her son learn, yet blocked by the school district at every turn, Malcolm's mother turned to Student Advocacy. Attorney and Education Advocate Meryl Rosenblatt brought Malcolm's case to the State Education Department and secured the needed evaluations so that his disability could be properly diagnosed before the end of the summer, the first critical step to securing needed school services in the new school year.

Now in a seventh grade program that addresses his learning disabilities, Malcolm's school performance is improving exponentially – he's reading much more independently, a skill that seemed out of reach just a year ago. What's more, his mother reports that Malcolm's attitude towards school and his self-esteem have also improved. Mom writes, "I'm so happy that he is finally getting what he needs academically. You did a great job—thumbs up!"

## Lexie



When you look at Lexie and her twin sister, you can see that they are best friends. The siblings love to spend time together, and if Lexie could choose, she would do everything by her sister's side. However, this is often impossible. While her twin can learn and function without a problem, Lexie suffers from a seizure disorder that impacts every part of her life. Lexie's medication often made her drowsy in class, so she struggled to recall and process what she was taught. Her loving family did everything they could to support her. Still, it was hard for Lexie to face these obstacles while watching her sister succeed. More than anything, Lexie feared that her academic struggles would prevent her from graduating with her twin, a dream that was beginning to feel impossible.

Desperate to graduate on time, but told it wasn't possible, Lexie and her family called Student Advocacy. Legal Director Stefanie Shabman knew what it would take for Lexie to accomplish her goal. She already had a full understanding of recent changes in the requirements for a N.Y.S. high school diploma, which school district staff were just beginning to digest. Stefanie brought the new diploma rules to the attention of the Superintendent and reviewed how they applied to Lexie's situation. Following the path that Stefanie successfully negotiated, Lexie was able to complete the needed classes and exams and graduate from high school alongside her sister.



#### **EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY**



JUST THREE MONTHS LATER... of our families report that their child is already doing much better in school, citing better academic progress, fewer disciplinary problems, better attendance and a better attitude towards school.

## **REPRESENT** CHILDREN & FAMILIES

**525** children and families were represented by attorneys and educational advocates at special education meetings, disciplinary hearings, school meetings and negotiations related to transportation or school registration. Result: 86% of youth served are more engaged in school, improving academically and on route to graduation.

## PARENTS & PROFESSIONALS

**1,669** parents or professionals tapped into our knowledge and expertise through one-on-one technical assistance, live training, webinars, and our information services. Result: 81% of youth are now on track to school success.

### REFORM SCHOOL POLICIES

**1,420** students benefitted from our work reforming school policies and practices that reduced suspension rates and our OTO awards program which highlights the value of investing in services for at-risk children and youth.

### WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL!

THE OVERWHELMING SUCCESS REPORTED HERE BELONGS TO THE MANY DONORS WHO BELIEVE IN CHILDREN. THANK YOU FOR SHINING A LIGHT FOR CHILDREN.

## CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN \$10,000 +

Eugenia and David Ames Elizabeth and Jeffrey Berman Jill and Rob Bernstein Israel Englander Impact 100 Westchester Jandon Foundation Loretta and Victor Kaufman Carol Kekst M.J. and Caral G. Lebworth Foundation Arlene and Reuben Mark Robert Menschel Lucy and Steven Oppenheim OPWDD The Grace Jones Richardson Trust Beth and David E. Shaw Mia and Sheldon Solow The Philip and Lynn Straus Foundation Westchester County Youth Bureau

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3,614 CHILDREN BENEFITTED FROM OUR 2018-2019 SERVICES! Elana and Peter Rothschild Ann and Andrew Tisch Nancy Travers Joan Weill Westchester Building Futures Linda and Benjamin Wetchler

#### FRIENDS OF FAMILIES \$4,999-\$3,500

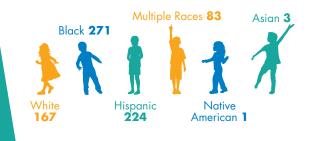
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## 2X More Requests for Sons



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84.6% OF THE FAMILIES DIRECTLY SERVED LIVE IN POVERTY. FOR EXAMPLE, A FAMILY OF FOUR WOULD HAVE AN INCOME OF \$62,000 OR LESS

\*This list reflects contributions to Student Advocacy from Aug. 1, 2018 – July 31, 2019, excluding those who give anonymously. Names have been listed alphabetically in categories by cumulative giving during this time frame. Every effort was made to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the list, but there may be inadvertent errors. We apologize for any mistakes in recognition. If your name has been omitted or misprinted, please notify Jamie Stone at jstone@studentadvocacy.net or 914.347.7039 x122

### **STAFF**

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#### WHO ASKS FOR OUR HELP? (BY COMMUNITY)



### 2018 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

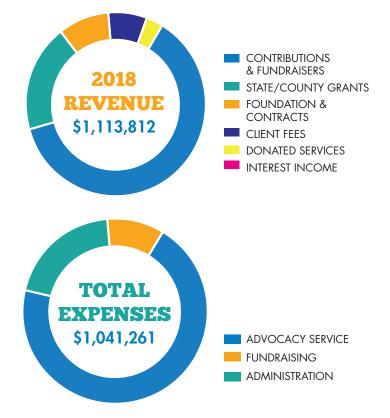
**Sound Financials:** Even with a 7% growth in expenses, revenue fully covered this expansion. To ensure financial and service stability, and consistent with board approved policy, we maintain a cash reserve equivalent to four months of expenses.

**Strong Investment in Service:** The proportionate share of revenue invested in service to children rose from 71% to 72%, reflecting efficiencies achieved through improvements to technology and support.

Finances without Service Compromise: The sources of our funds ensure a strong, independent voice for children.

**Efficient Fundraising:** We raise more than five dollars for every dollar spent.

Revenue and expenses are reported on our fiscal year, from January 1 to December 31. Our audited financial report is prepared by Victor J. Cannistra, CPA P.C. A copy of our latest report is available online at www. StudentAdvocacy.net or from the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, NY, NY 10271.



## YOU MADE THE GIFT. WE PROVIDED SERVICE. SHARE THEIR THANKS.



"I wanted to thank you for remaining with Andrea and advocating for her. She had no one in her court. You have made a difference in her life."



"John graduated successfully. It was a wonderful and unforgettable moment. Thank you so much for your involvement and walking me through the educational door to seeing John strive independently, arriving where he is today!"



"I wanted to thank you for your help today, I don't think the meeting would have gone as smoothly without you. There would have been a lot of confusion, uncertainty and what ifs, without your knowledge and confidence. Having you at today's meeting to advocate for Chris helped us feel confident in our decision."



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