



Sterling House
COMMUNITY CENTER

Annual Report

2019-2020



It was one of our best years yet – until it wasn't

It would be easy to say this was a challenging year marred by the significant impacts of the pandemic. That would be absolutely true. But that narrative would not tell the full story of our year at Sterling House. There was a constant and consistent theme that spanned our year. Sterling House was a positive force dedicated to remaining steadfast and flexible in service to our great community, whatever the need.

Our Camp kicked off in the summer of 2019 with a newly refurbished pool and more campers than we had seen in decades - filling the grounds with joy. We hosted our Back-2-School Giveaway and prepared our pantry to continue the Food-4-Kids program, supporting more than 75 select students each week with a backpack full of food. Our Preschool and Afterschool programs welcomed 85 children per day, with growing wait lists eager to be served. Our holiday initiatives were on track to support families with Thanksgiving dinner, Toys, and – thanks to generous donors – we were even able to gift 10 trees from our annual fundraiser to families who would otherwise go without.

Our Board of Directors started the year making Diversity, Equity and Inclusion an intentional focus. Recognizing that Sterling House can inspire positive change, our Board spent the year reviewing statistics, discussing the challenges our community faced, and identifying barriers in our ability to welcome ALL.

We focused on new innovations and technology to modernize Sterling House. Our online registration database evolved and we unveiled our Text-to-Give platform and raised more than \$5,000 in one evening for our Food-4-Kids program.

We celebrated a legend and welcomed an all-star. Bill O'Brien announced his retirement and was honored for more than forty years of service. We hired a new dynamic Athletic Director, Catherine Proto, who brings deep experience with athletics administration and youth sports. Bill passed the torch to Catherine at the close of our fall soccer season and we were able to get a full season of basketball in under her leadership.

Then we entered March 2020 and everything changed.

The pandemic impacted everyone. It cancelled all our programs and fundraising events, effectively ending our revenue stream for the fourth quarter. Our staff reported daily to the House and our Board continued to meet virtually to ensure we were ready to serve. And serve we did! Our Food Pantry saw double the number of patrons. We became a location for the emergency feeding program in Town, distributing both breakfast and lunch. Service Saturdays grew from monthly to weekly and became a vital way for our community to stay connected and positive while remaining safe and distant. We strived to bring light and hope to the community, we delivered meals to seniors and those suffering from COVID-19, and we were one of the first to define what a safe summer camp could look like for our children.

In a year that was unimaginably difficult Sterling House did not falter. As strange as it may seem, the year was a success. Service is our mission and we unequivocally succeeded – we are stronger and more unified because of it. We hope you will find pride in this Annual Report and what we were able to accomplish. Thank you for placing your trust in our service.

Carl Glad

Chair, Board of Directors

Amanda Meeson

Executive Director

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Meeson honored with '40 Under 40' Award

Sterling House Executive Director Amanda Meeson was among those honored by The Fairfield County Business Journal in its Annual 40 Under 40 Awards for 2019. The winners were honored at an awards reception on June 11, 2019 at LaKota Oaks in Norwalk attended by a Sterling House contingent including outgoing Board of Directors Chair Jamie Millward and incoming Chair Carl Glad. Meeson was nominated by Carole Adzima and Stratford Mayor Laura Hoydick, who said in their nominating essay,

“In her first few years, she has led the organization through a \$2.4 million renovation, the 85th Anniversary Celebration, revenue and program growth totaling more than 20 percent of the agency’s budget, and multiple technology and infrastructure advancements.”



BRBC names a 'Rising Star'

Just months after receiving a 40 Under 40 award, Sterling House's Amanda Meeson was named by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council as its 2019 Leadership "Rising Star" award winner. She was among those feted Dec. 12, 2019, at Waterside in Monroe.

Meeson was presented her award by ConnectiCare's Kim Kann, with the Keynote Address presented by BRBC Board Member Chuck Firlotte, President & CEO of Aquarion Water Company.



Beth Benson completes 2nd term on our Board

Outgoing Board Treasurer Beth Benson was one of the veterans of the 2019-2020 Board of Directors, first joining in 2012 when the organization was legally transforming into a non-profit corporation.

A volunteer who wore many hats, Benson completed her second term effective June 30, 2020, and was honored with The Mary Hardy Award in 2018 for her many volunteer contributions, among them: ice cream scooper/server, wallpaper stripper, Food Pantry volunteer, house painter, museum-quality framer, bookkeeper, and 85th anniversary event co-chair, among others.

She is a role model for volunteerism and a true community champion.



Bill O'Brien retirement feted, capping decades of service

Bill O'Brien's impact on our community has been incredibly deep and farreaching, touching so many of our lives and institutions in Stratford.

Yet, as rich as his influence has been, it can be defined in two simple words, "Semper Fidelis." Whether serving his country, or his town as an elected official, or his community through numerous organizations – and especially Sterling House – it is the United States Marine Corps motto of "Always Faithful" that exemplifies Bill's essence.

Since 1992 when he first became employed here, Bill has been an institution at Sterling House. Thousands of youth athletes, including me, have experienced the joy of fall weekends out on the soccer field as well as winter nights and weekends on the basketball courts.

Bill has worked to ensure their fun. And through his unwavering support of youth sports and programs, he has faithfully upheld the vision of Cordelia Sterling – all in service to our community – working countless volunteer hours with many other organizations, too.

Sterling House is incredibly lucky to have been a recipient of Bill's love and dedication. For that, we will always be thankful.

- Carl Glad, Board Chair

Funds raised at the retirement dinner were used to create the Bill O'Brien Athletics Scholarship Fund.



Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful

Sterling House Community Center honors Bill O'Brien for more than forty years of extraordinary service and dedication to this organization and to our greater community.

March 4, 2020 Vazzano's Four Seasons

Welcome Catherine Proto: Sterling House's new Athletic Director

There is a certain amount of stress when one begins a new job. But when that job is to replace a much beloved and accomplished predecessor, well that is another story.

On Nov. 1, 2019, Sterling House welcomed Catherine Proto as our new Athletic Director, replacing Bill O'Brien, who retired after 27 years at the helm of our athletic programs.

As Proto herself tells it, "It was exciting and nerve racking to follow in Bill's footsteps. I knew what great programs SHCC put out each season and Bill's continued commitment to sportsmanship and having fun."

Proto, a Stratford resident, comes to Sterling House from the Naugatuck YMCA, where she served since 2016 as its Sports and Recreation Director and then Health and Wellness Director before accepting her position at Sterling House. The position hiring committee consisted of regional leaders in athletics, recreation and non-profit management.

"I wish to continue Bill's legacy by providing quality programming while instilling a love of sports, physical activity, teamwork and fun in the youth of our community," Proto said. The entire Sterling House community welcomes Catherine.



Sterling House dedicates new solar photovoltaic project; 231 panels atop Erin's Gym generating 'green' electricity

Under sun-filled afternoon skies, Sterling House Community Center dedicated its newest addition – a 83.2 kW DC roof-mounted photovoltaic system – now generating clean, renewable electricity powered from panels atop Erin's Gym. The system went live on Dec. 23, 2019.



Sterling House Executive Director Amanda Meeson opened by greeting the special guests in attendance. "We are so grateful to all the partners who came together to bring this project to fruition, with an extra thank you to the Babineau Family and Erin's Gym for saying YES to the installation of 231 solar panels.

"As the community center, it is important to us that we make sustainable decisions, both for the House and for who we serve." Carl Glad, Board of Directors chairman, added, "We are excited to bring renewable energy to Sterling House. For 88 years, Sterling House has been giving back to the Community and now we can continue that mission while also giving back to the environment."

Those attending the symbolic dedication included Stratford Mayor Laura Hoydick; Stratford's Chief Administrative Officer Chris Tymniak; Tim Sadler from Stratford-based Encon – which installed the project this past Fall; Tom Cariglio from United Illuminating (UI); Desiree Miller, Senior Manager – CT Green Bank Finance; Brian Farnen, General Counsel, CT Green Bank, which arranged the financing for the solar project; Jeff Babineau of Erin's Gym; Lindy Lee Gold, Senior Specialist, CT Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD); Jeff Bishop from the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce, and, Dan Onofrio, President & CEO of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and the Stratford Chamber of Commerce.

"I am very excited to see the completion of the solar project here at Erin's Gym," said Mayor Hoydick. "This is the kind of innovation toward renewable and sustainable energy that will be critical to the future, and I am pleased to work alongside Sterling House, one of Stratford's most essential institutions, leading the way with this initiative."

Among members of Sterling House's Board and staff attending was Building Committee chair and immediate past Board President Jamie Millward, the original inspiration for the solar project who worked with Encon when it was first conceptualized. Millward said, "Sustainability is a critical component of our modern world," and he praised the utilization of zero initial cost energy upgrade programs, the partnership with Encon, and the "good fortune of having a large roof on Erin's Gym face orient- ed perfectly for solar gain."

Meeson and Glad stressed that the solar photovoltaic project is just one of several ongoing capital and building improvement initiatives at Sterling to save energy and to reduce the agency's overall "carbon footprint," including conversion of lighting to high-efficiency LED, replacement of windows, a pending kitchen renovation and a project to upgrade the main building's heating and cooling systems.

Resource Connection

No one knew in the early Fall of 2019 that the new Sterling House Home Food Delivery program to qualified senior citizens would grow so fast. No one knew, either, that less than six months later in March 2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic would virtually shut down society. Sterling House food pantry director LeAnne Reynolds remembers,



“We first started thinking about home delivery to seniors after I received two calls in a week in the Fall of 2019 from two people who used to frequent the pantry but couldn’t get to the building due to health reasons.” Reynolds continued, “I knew that this could be an issue for more people.”

So using the Sterling House van and a volunteer who Reynolds recruited - “the easy answer was to deliver to them directly.” Thus, a new program was born for the Food Pantry with Stratford Senior Services staff assisting by providing direct referrals for home food delivery to LeAnne and staff. So from a handful of home deliveries in the Fall of 2019, by June 2020 the number had grown to 53 households. Throughout the summer of 2020, “We received a lot of thanks from the seniors for helping them avoid the grocery stores. One woman said she didn’t leave her house those first couple months because of the virus so she was very grateful for the delivery.”

100 deliveries to homebound seniors each month

450 food pantry patrons visit each month, totaling more than **5,000** meals a month

More than **65** Stratford students visit daily for breakfast and lunch distribution



Sterling House Community Center has created a T-shirt to embody all of the characteristics of Resilience, Support, Strength, Gratitude, Selflessness, Community, and Love.

Designed by Emily Barksdale

Printed by My T Graphics

Athletics

The advent of COVID-19 in March 2020 forced us to shut down all our Spring 2020 Athletics programs including soccer and lacrosse. Prior to that - in the the summer 2019 girls volleyball and a Fall 2019 volleyball clinic were held. In the Fall of 2019, regular seasons of soccer and lacrosse were held, followed by the Winter 2020 Boys Basketball.

1,342

Athletes stayed active in our



sports programs



561

Soccer players

477

Basketball players

286

Lacrosse Players



Youth Development

300

Campers went home happy, dirty, tired, and eager to return!



Sterling House Summer Camp had an epic 8 weeks of camp wide activities, Erin's Gym, Pool, playground, snack shack, and so much more! Our newly refurbished pool was filled with 300 joyful swimmers.

Preschool



Community Engagement

Remote Service Saturdays

Service Saturdays serve as a great teaching moment for families to learn respect, empathy, and compassion for all of those in the community. These prompts showed us how strong our community is in an unimaginable year:

APRIL 18, 2020 Hooray for Our Heroes

We want to thank all of those who are working so hard on the front lines in our hospitals during this time. We're asking you to donate Grab-n-Go healthy snacks for our hospital workers! You may also include photos, drawings, and messages of hope in your bags!



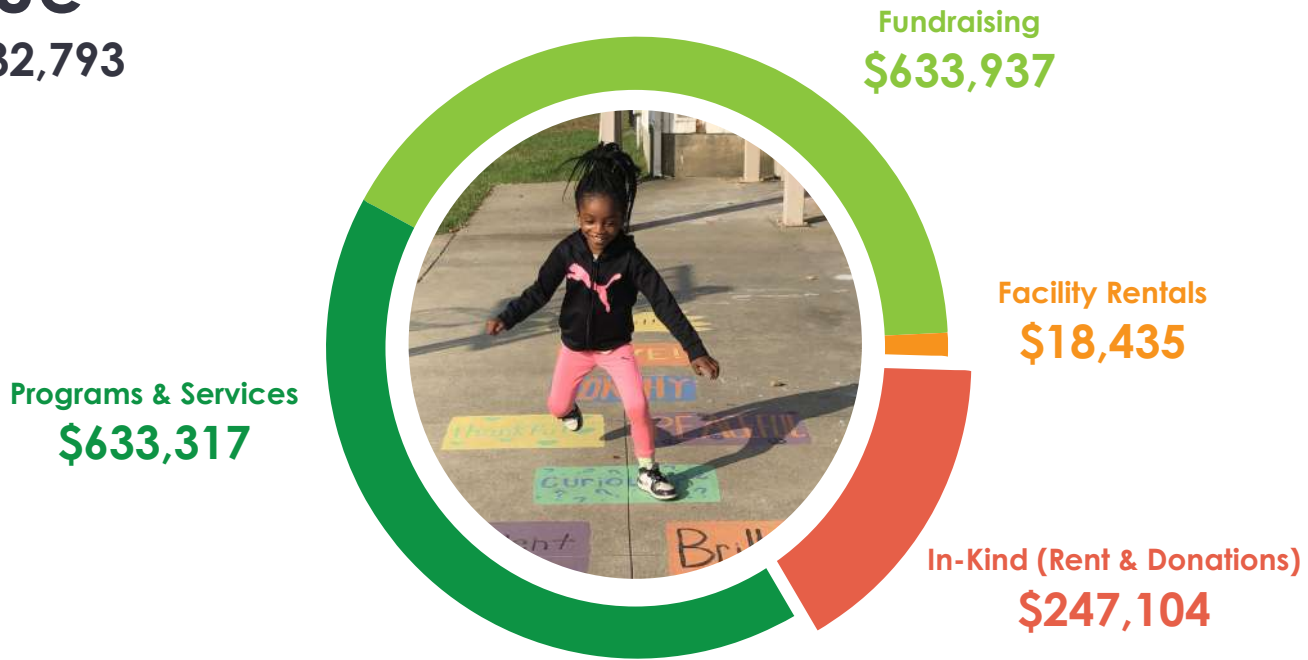
APRIL 4, 2020 Attitude of Gratitude

If you've got sidewalk chalk, we want you to write messages of gratitude on your sidewalks and driveways!

2019 - 2020

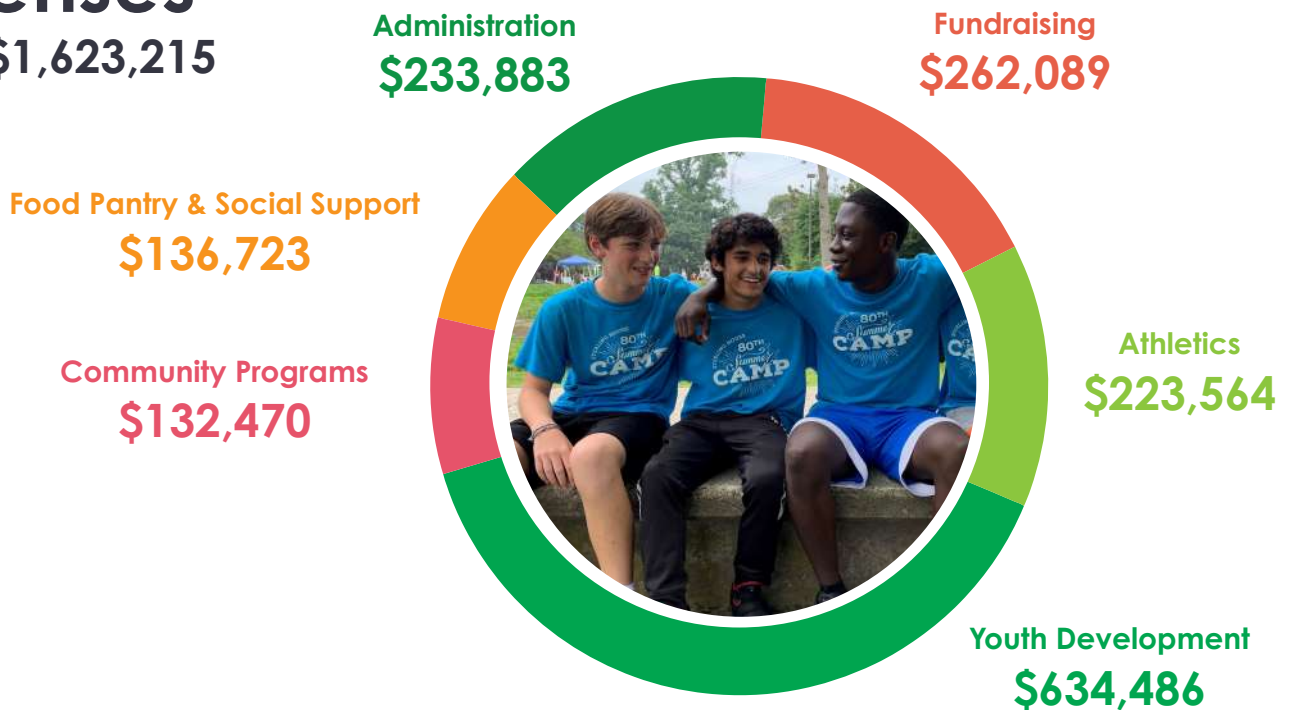
Revenue

Total: \$1,532,793



Expenses

Total: \$1,623,215



*significant decrease in program fee revenue due to onset of COVID19.
Deficit supported by first round of PPP loans in spring of 2020.

For a copy of our Audited Financials or IRS Form 990, please contact our development office at 203-378-2606 ext 106 or email ccarroll@sterlinghousecc.org

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