

*Sterling House*  
COMMUNITY CENTER

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# Annual Report

## 2020 - 2021



*Sterling House Community Center's  
light shines its brightest  
when the community is in need.*

# 2020

Our fiscal year began on July 1, 2020 just as our last had ended: A global pandemic held the world in a state of uncertainty. Yet Sterling House was determined that this would be another successful year in service to our community. We took the challenges of the pandemic and turned them into opportunities and bright spots.

The summer's sunshine and warm weather gave us all an opportunity to spend time together and enjoy what our community had to offer. Just like that sun, Sterling House shined brightly. Our Summer Camp was a massive success giving children the opportunity for much needed socialization and fun. The planning and preparation in the previous fiscal year and our amazing camp staff allowed Sterling House to host hundreds of children in a COVID safe environment.

As Autumn began the uncertainty returned. Our schools began the year with hybrid learning causing parents to struggle to find school aged childcare options. Sterling House welcomed students into a new Kids On Campus program to attend virtual classes, complete homework, socialize, and engage with their peers.

We also modified our fall athletics programs to provide for safe versions of soccer and speed lacrosse, and then when 'Trick or Treating' was deemed a high-risk activity Sterling House shined its light working with our community partners we created a "Spooktacular" event that allowed children to safely 'trick or treat.' We were able to provide turkeys and all of the Thanksgiving dinner fixings to a record 390 families, and added a special touch of handmade notes and cards.

Through the Fall the Board focused on its own leadership development and hosted a former member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to talk about leadership in times of crisis. The Board also continued its deep-dive into Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and approved a formal Diversity Statement for the organization.

As the usual joy and celebration of the Winter holiday season became impacted as the global pandemic Sterling House twinkled 173 lights on families. Working with the Stratford Junior Women's Club and other volunteers, we provided hundreds of gifts and a free "Toy Shop" to families in need.

# 2021

The New Year 2021 started with news of vaccines and a hopeful return to normalcy. Sterling House took that as a sign to shine a light on our own House. We began the much overdue process of modernizing and reinvigorating the building. Our Board and its Committees and the Staff spent countless hours working on a plan to raise the much-needed funds for a project to replace the 135-year-old original roof and exterior. For months we developed and executed a plan that resulted in the State of Connecticut providing a grant of \$2 million and a visit from U.S. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and her promise to provide an additional \$1.5 million in funding.

Additionally, the light of the Babineau family shined on Sterling House. The Babineau family and the Erin's Gym Memorial Fund officially transferred ownership and control of the beautiful 14,000-square-foot field house to Sterling House. This amazing gift will allow Sterling House to serve children in our community in new and exciting ways. We are forever honored, humbled and thankful for the generosity, care and community mindedness of Jeff, Donna and children Rachel and Cory.

Throughout the year and into the Spring, Sterling House shined brightly in all that it did. We continued to provide a safe and vital food pantry and home food delivery program. Sterling House also became a leader in raising COVID vaccine awareness throughout our community and hosted a vaccine clinic. This year we provided a record number of scholarships and partnered with our schools to identify students who would most benefit from participation in our athletic programs. Our Spring sports provided another opportunity for children to safely engage with each other. We closed out our year by moving our annual Night of Entertainment to an outdoor celebration on the grounds of the Shakespeare Festival Theater. We ended with a fantastic concert that exemplified the joy and positivity we bring to this community.

This fiscal year 2020-21 was challenging throughout. The global pandemic did not end and we were unable to host two of our annual fundraisers. However, Sterling House's light always shines and it does so at its brightest. As the year begins, we pledge to continue to work in service to our community



**Carl Glad**  
*Board Chair*

# SUCCESS OF SUMMER DAY CAMP

## *Summer 2020*

Summer Day Camp 2020 almost didn't occur for the first time in 79 years due to COVID-19.

It was only in mid-May, well after Sterling House had registered campers for the summer, when state and local officials devised strict health and safety protocols that would allow camps to open and operate.

Training staff about and protecting camp staff from COVID-19 transmission included a total revamping of organizational cleaning and sanitizing procedures. Innovative camp group activities planning occurred and were designed to keep all campers and staff separated per the distancing standards that were implemented by state and town health officials.



“It was nothing short of heroic what our team did to both prepare and train our camp counselors to welcome our campers during a pandemic. They were a courageous example for others to follow, always in service to our community.” said Board Chair, Carl Glad. Summer Camp parent appreciation was evident and effusive.

# SPORTS REMIX

## *Summer 2020*

Faced with a Summer in 2020 when youth sports leagues were virtually canceled across the board, Sterling House's Athletics Director Catherine Proto devised and implemented a new program we called "Sports Remix."

Throughout the summer of 2020, Proto led local youth through a series of sports clinics intended to introduce youth to a variety of sports and games and to keep kids active and healthy outdoors during the summer months.



# YOUTH ATHLETICS ARE BACK

## *Fall 2020*

As sad and unfortunate as the spring 2020 athletics program cancellations due to COVID-19 shutdowns were – it was “happier days are here again” as girls and boys youth soccer and lacrosse programs resumed in September 2020.

While player census numbers were down from previous years due to the continuing pandemic, Athletics Director Catherine Proto reported that special health precautions were taken to ensure safe play for all involved. Despite the ongoing reality of the pandemic, spirits were high.

“It was gratifying to be able to get our youth

back outside and onto ballfields after losing our entire spring program,” Proto said.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the youth basketball program at Sterling House, which was entirely lost as a result of a second peak of COVID-19 infections recorded in December through February 2021. The following spring, soccer and lacrosse were able to return as the warmer weather welcomed a happy return of youth athletes on the outdoor fields. COVID19 caused isolation for so many, so keeping our kids active and engaged was a top priority for Sterling House.

# RETURNING AND RENEWED YOUTH PROGRAMS

## *Fall 2020*

On Sept. 9, 2020, Preschool classes resumed for the school year after being canceled mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19. “We felt so proud and purposeful as we welcomed our smiling preschool faces back to their classrooms again... even if behind their facemasks. Our team engaged in thorough preparation to ensure the safety for our youth, families and team” said Executive Director Amanda Meeson.

The Sterling House staff also created “Kids on Campus (KOC)” as a result of the Stratford Public Schools re-opening in September 2020 in a hybrid - distance learning schedule. KOC bridged the gap for working parents who needed care three days a week when students took part in video classrooms

from home – or at Sterling House. “It was a huge challenge for us to get off the ground with staffing, IT requirements, safety precautions, and more - but this is what we do. When the community has a need, we seek to fill it.” Meeson said, “It was a huge adjustment for everyone involved, but our teamwork and partnership with our families was stronger than ever.” Difficult as it was, the KOC program personified Sterling House’s “can-do” attitude during the pandemic.

## UNWAVERING CARE





## FOOD PANTRY & SERVICES

Starting when the federal emergency COVID-19 declaration was made in March 2020, the Sterling House Food Pantry became laser focused on serving the urgent needs of our community.

In July 2020, our Food Pantry continued to serve to anyone in need an emergency “Grab-and-Go” meals, in partnership with the Town of Stratford and Stratford Public Schools.

We were also delivering food from our Food Pantry to seniors at their homes, a program that began in the Fall of 2019 but became an acute and a much-faster-than-anticipated growing need during the height of the pandemic. Seniors were staying home for their safety and we were helping to keep them there.

With our children back in school, our Food-4-Kids program resumed and we provided students with food insecurity six meals and snacks intended for Saturday and Sunday.

**200** patrons visited our food pantry each month and we provided **115** students a backpack of weekend food each Friday.

## THANKSGIVING DISTRIBUTION *Fall 2020*

In a measure of both the extraordinary need brought on by COVID-19 and incredible generosity of our donors and volunteers in the greater Stratford community, a record-setting 393 turkeys were distributed - along with Thanksgiving dinner supplies – potatoes, cranberry sauces, canned veggies, stuffing mix, pie, and more!

“We were able to meet the Thanksgiving needs of everyone who requested it; whether it was through delivery or curbside pick-up... a COVID-inspired innovation,” noted Food Pantry Director LeAnne Reynolds.



“ We were able to meet the Thanksgiving needs of everyone who requested it ”

## HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE *Winter 2020*

Our Toy Drive and Family Holiday Adoption effort celebrated another successful year to the community, in partnership with the Stratford Junior Woman’s group. Families are registered, donors shop, the committee organizes and bags, and Stratford EMS delivers to the homes the Saturday before each Christmas - complete with a Santa in tow. More than 900 children were served in this community effort, thanks to generous individuals, community-minded businesses, and our dedicated volunteers.





# ERIN'S GYM *Spring 2021*

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*Sterling House will be eternally grateful to the Babineau family for this gift to our community and ever mindful of its origins*

”

In April of 2021, The Babineau Family of Stratford generously and graciously gifted Erin's Gym to Sterling House Community Center; one of the most significant gifts the organization has ever received.

Family members Donna and Jeff Babineau, Executive Director Amanda Meeson, Athletic Director Catherine Proto and Sterling House Board Chair Carl Glad presided over the transfer that began more than a decade ago after 10-year-old Erin Babineau was tragically lost in a February 2005 accident. Erin's Gym was built in her memory after Erin's passing.

Erin's Gym is a 14,000-sq.-ft indoor youth athletic facility located on the rear of the town-owned Sterling House property. The “loft”

space in Erin's Gym will continue to be operated by Jeff & Donna, featuring pitching and hitting lessons. Jeff is head coach - softball and volleyball, as well as assistant athletic director - at St. Joseph's High School.

For many years, Sterling House has utilized Erin's Gym for our annual Summer Day Camp. Effective in April 2021 Athletics Director Proto and staff assumed the day-to-day operations including leasing of the facility to third parties. “Sterling House will be eternally grateful to the Babineau family for this gift to our community and ever mindful of the beloved memory of Erin.” shared Meeson.

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For more information on Erin and the Erin Babineau Fund:  
[www.erinsgym.com/in-memory-of-erin.html](http://www.erinsgym.com/in-memory-of-erin.html)

# Team SHCC

## Summer 2021

This year, our very own **Patty Calabrese** retired from her position as Events Coordinator. She began with us as a volunteer supporting the 75th Anniversary Committee and later joined the team, not only leading our fundraising events, but decorating the House, cameos as Cordelia Sterling, and being the energetic and creative team player we all know her to be. She served SHCC for more than a decade in this role and has already promised to continue with us as a volunteer in our food pantry.

We are thankful for her mission-driven spirit, her top-notch event planning, and her efforts resulting in raising more than a million dollars for our community center during her time here!



# Team SHCC

## *Summer 2021*

Later this year, we welcomed **Emily Shufrin** to the team as our new Events Manager, responsible for our fundraising events, in addition to our community events and initiatives. Emily has done development work for The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, Manchester Community College, and The Noah Webster House. She also began her own consulting firm, Connecticut Development Resources in 2016. She is a mother of two boys (who have already joined us at camp!) and lives in Trumbull.



In June of 2021, **Michael Rosati** joined us full-time as our new Director of Youth Development!

Michael will lead our Preschool, After School, and Summer Day Camp after spending three years on the summer camp team. He recently graduated from Salve Regina University with degrees in both Elementary and Special Education.

He has proven himself to be a burgeoning leader with high-integrity, a love for this mission, a passion for youth and community development, and the readiness to step up and serve. **Onward and upward!**



## Revenue 2020 - 2021

### Total Revenue

\$1,835,854.00

### Programs & Services

\$720,483.00

### Fundraising

\$698,842.00

### Facility Rentals

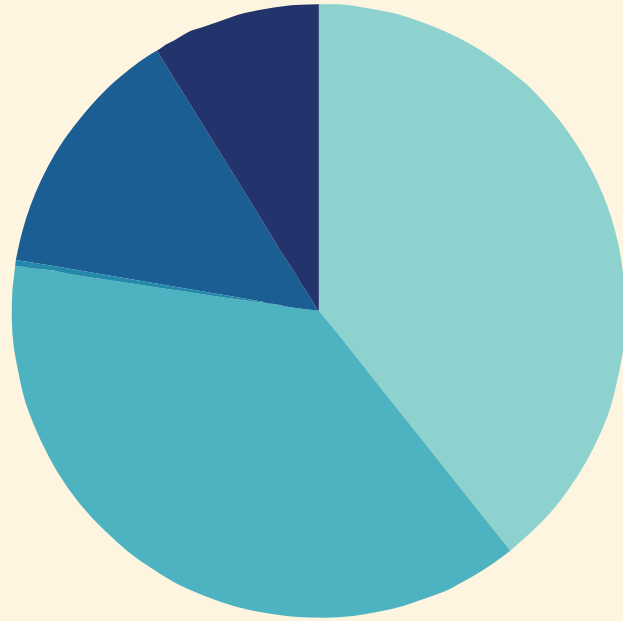
\$6,525.00

### In-Kind

\$247,104.00

### PPP Loan Forgiveness

\$162,900.00



## Expenses 2020 - 2021

### Total Expenses

\$1,786,215.00

### Youth Development

\$715,715.00

### Fundraising

\$254,883.00

### Administration

\$287,520.00

### Food Pantry & Social Services Support

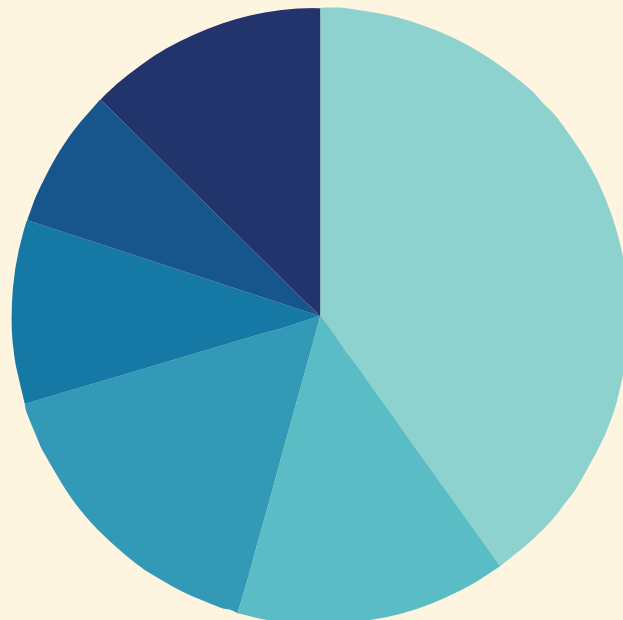
\$172,548.00

### Community Programs

\$131,047.00

### Athletics

\$225,247.00



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