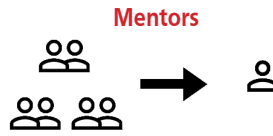




In this issue...



## Fall 2015 Newsletter

**“Starfinder has made me a better person.”** *-Program participant*

At Starfinder, we’re committed to providing the highest quality programs for young people. Our work is research-informed and thoroughly evaluated. We collect data through surveys, report cards, fitness tests, and focus groups. The 2014-15 Senior Leader Program year was a huge success! **Here’s how our students performed in our three program “pillars”.**

### Pillar 1: Health and Fitness

Weekly fitness trainings, soccer practices, and plenty of time to play helped our teens improve in their physical fitness, based on their PACER scores. Saraa improved her score more than 100%! And all of our Senior Leaders demonstrated hard work and commitment to good health.

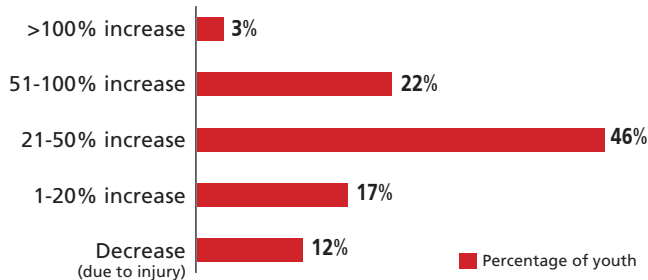
**Participants took the PACER\* test in Dec. and May**  
 (\*Progressive Aerobic Cardiovascular Endurance Test = progressively faster timed sprints)

65 of 70 youth (who finished the year) completed both tests

Score is based on consecutive laps run



Change in score between Dec. and May:



**89%** of all youth maintained or improved their fitness

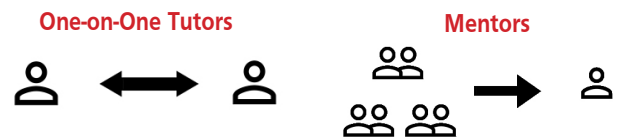
*“[The coaches] help us be more determined and motivated. They push us beyond [what we think are] our limits, then we look back and see, ‘oh man, look what we did.’” - participant*

*“It’s been a great change. He used to just stay home and watch TV and play video games. Now he is more concerned about his health and personal hygiene and nutrition.” - parent*

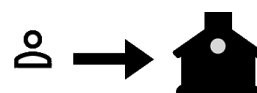
### Pillar 2: Academic Support

Research shows that on average, grades do not improve as students move through high school, which can impact graduation and success in college. To fight this trend, Starfinder supported Senior Leaders with one-on-one tutors, mentors and college exposure opportunities. One teen commented, “there’s only one college counselor at my entire high school, so I wouldn’t get this anywhere else.” Senior Leaders motivated each other and worked toward their future goals.

Senior Leaders had access to:



College Exposure Opportunities



By the end of the year:

**95%** of seniors graduated from high school

(One chose to repeat his final year in order to be better prepared for the next step. He is on track to graduate in 2016.)

**74%** of Senior Leaders improved or maintained their grades throughout the school year

*“There’s only one college counselor at my entire high school, so I wouldn’t get this anywhere else.” - participant*

*There have been great changes in his academics. At Starfinder he can do his homework.” - parent*

*Continued on next page...*

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## Pillar 3: Leadership Development

Independent evaluators found that Starfinder participants develop in all five areas of Emotional Intelligence--the key components of effective leadership according to the Harvard Business Review:

- **Self-awareness**
- **Self-regulation**
- **Motivation**
- **Empathy**
- **Social skills**

Participants developed skills to be leaders at Starfinder and in their own lives and communities.

In the words of 11th grader Alexis, "Starfinder has developed me not only as a soccer player, but also as a leader. As somebody that has a voice not only on the field, but also outside the field." Alexis has been a part of Starfinder for two years and was selected to travel to Sweden for the Gothia Cup in 2014.

*"The most important thing is that he is working with a lot of different people from different cultures and backgrounds and it is important that he understands those difference for personal growth." - parent*

*"A lot of people think Starfinder is just a place to play soccer. It is so much more. It changes you." - participant*

*"Before, I would always get angry. But here, they help me calm down, teach me how not to get mad. Now I trust my teammates." - participant*

## Teens Lead as Kids Play

Ten of our Senior Leaders learned the rewards of giving back this summer, serving as role models, mentors, and coaches in our summer camps. For some of our teens it was their first job, and for others it was a chance to feel fulfilled while earning a paycheck.

"The most fun part of my summer was getting to build relationships with children and actually teach them something," said Cydney (age 18), who spent her last summer at Starfinder before heading to college at Penn State.

Doing their job meant waking up early, getting themselves to the camp site, planning activities for the day, setting up equipment, and being responsible for 10-15 campers each.



"A big part of what the coaches get is just the experience of being an employee. Suddenly you have to show up on time because people are counting on you, you have responsibilities that no one else can take for you, and not doing your job is not acceptable," said Program Director Katharine Cunningham.

**"Being held accountable is a really, really important experience for a young person. It's the first time they think, 'I'm in charge and if it fails then I'm the one accountable.' "**

Coaches paired up to make the most of each session through teamwork. Makihra (age 17) learned the value of co-operation, as "some of my weaknesses were my co-coach's strengths."



Our site partners took notice: after camp ended, the president of Germantown Soccer Club offered five of our coaches part-time jobs in his fall programs.

Coaching in Starfinder's summer camps is a crucial part of the leadership opportunities the Senior Leader Program offers participants. Coaches improve their communication skills, gain valuable work experience, and increase their self-confidence.

**"This camp has given me a louder voice," said Ahmed (age 17).**

While Starfinder's Senior Leaders gained work experience, they also provided a valuable summer activity for kids, according to Katharine.



"This is an opportunity for the kids during summer when they don't have access to a lot of structured activity," she said. "It's a safe place to play and exercise for kids who might not otherwise have that."

# Our Volunteers

## Alumni Return as Coach-Mentors

We're excited to welcome two Starfinder alumni as Coach Across America volunteers for the 2015-16 program year! They have started the year recruiting high school students from across the Philadelphia area to the Senior Leaders Program, then they will serve as coaches and mentors to our Senior Leaders participants.

**Luc Toussaint** graduated from Starfinder in 2011. This spring he will graduate from West Chester University with a bachelor's degree in philosophy.

*Why did you decide to be a CAA?*

I want to work with kids in the future as a teacher or counselor. This experience will give me a head start for my career. Also just for the chance to be at Starfinder again. Being here is just great!

*What do you hope to accomplish this year as a CAA?*

I want to serve as a role model for the Senior Leaders, to show them there are so many different paths they can go down in the future and to help them realize not everything is going to work out perfectly, and that's ok. I want to be able to share my story to give them something to relate to.

*What challenges will you face during your year of service?*

I've never worked with high school aged kids. I did work as a summer camp coach but that was with younger kids. I think it will be a balancing act to work with kids so close to my age but it's good because I can relate to them.



**THEN:** Luc attends coach training for our 2011 Summer Program



**NOW:** Luc sits at his new desk as he prepares for the upcoming season

**Abdul Sule** graduated from Starfinder this past June. In August, he became a freshman at Bryn Athyn College. Along with Luc, he's spent the past few weeks travelling to local high schools to recruit participants.

*Why did you decide to be a CAA?*

Being a coach is a way for me to give back to Starfinder.

*What do you hope to accomplish this year as a CAA?*

I want to affect kids' lives in a positive way. I want to be someone that the kids can look up to.

*What challenges will you face during your year of service?*

The challenges will be in the beginning, as I'm a recent graduate of Starfinder. It'll be getting everyone to respect me as a coach and setting those boundaries.



**THEN:** Abdul speaks at his 2015 Starfinder graduation ceremony



**NOW:** Abdul helps with Starfinder's recruiting efforts

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To find out how your company can partner with Starfinder, contact Heidi Warren: 215-779-9426 or heidi@starfinderfoundation.org

## Hello, Goodbye

This summer, we said goodbye to the Americorps volunteers that have strengthened Starfinder with their year of service. Coach Across America (CAA) volunteers **Casey Stewart** and **Mykola Lyakhovolsky** (Starfinder '13) spent a year helping program staff deliver one of our best program years yet. Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) **Ciara Trainor** helped us substantially grow our fundraising and communications efforts.

Casey has started a new year of service as a VISTA at Up2Us Sports. Ciara is moving on into the workforce, and Mykola has joined a few members of his Starfinder graduating class at Penn State's main campus. We will miss all three of them but their work will serve Starfinder for years!

We're now joined by CAA volunteers **Abdul** and **Luc**, and VISTA **Sarah Norcini**, a recent graduate of the University of South Florida. Welcome to the team!

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