



The Children's Institute

Amazing Kids. Amazing Place.

## Child and Family Services

### Project STAR at The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh

Project STAR's mission is to promote the right of all children to grow in a safe, nurturing, lasting family. Founded in 1985, Project STAR offers adoption, foster care and intensive family support services for children with special needs. We provide the highest quality of service to children and families, especially those with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities. Project STAR provides three areas of service: family placement, family preservation and family enrichment. The overarching goal of all three services is to establish permanency in the lives of the children we serve.

#### Family Placement Services

Children are placed with Resource Families who care for children who cannot remain with their birth families. Depending on the circumstances, children may stay with Resource Families for a few days, several months or permanently through adoption. Project STAR educates Resource Families before a child is placed in their home so they are prepared to care for the child physically and emotionally. As issues or needs arise, continuing education and support is also available to families throughout their involvement with Project STAR.



#### Family Preservation Service

Birth families are provided with the tools and information necessary to care for their children in their home. The goal is to ensure that each child safely remains with, or is returned to, his or her birth family.

#### Family Enrichment Services

Special programs are offered to help bring families closer together, including post-permanency services and educational and enrichment events.

Project STAR  
has a 93%  
preservation and  
reunification rate

To learn more about Project STAR, please contact Dr. Patricia Saunders-Madison at 412.244.3055, or [pma@the-institute.org](mailto:pma@the-institute.org).

## Family Visitation

Family Visitation through Project STAR is distinct, and adheres to a framework that includes expertise, continuity of care, advocacy, research and a family-centered focus. Through Family Visitation, we offer enhanced opportunities for caseworkers to provide support services to families as well as a homelike setting for supervised visitation between children and their parents. The Family Visitation Center in Squirrel Hill **was the first of its kind in Allegheny County.**

Project STAR provided services to over 2,200 clients last year, including:

- Special needs adoption
- Foster care
- Medical foster care
- Respite for families/caregivers
- Recruitment and education of foster and adoptive families
- Family preservation
- Family reunification

Project STAR is licensed by the Department of Human Services as a private adoption, foster care and children and youth social service agency.



## The Right Support Helps Strengthen Fragile Families

Nicole led an erratic life as a single mom of two boys with special health care needs. The Westmoreland County Children's Bureau stepped in and called on The Children's Institute's Project STAR. When fragile families are in danger of coming apart, Project STAR works to help these families rebuild.

When Project STAR permanency specialist Jen Ambrose met the family, she saw that Nicole's eldest son, Dakota, had an ostomy bag that needed to be changed more frequently to prevent infections. His diet was inadequate and his failure to gain weight had made it impossible to reverse the ostomy procedure. He was also prone to behavioral outbursts. Nicole's younger son Aaron had health problems, as well. He couldn't speak, but had never been diagnosed with anything that would explain this developmental delay. In addition, his feet turned in, making it difficult for him to walk.

Jen began by coordinating formal supports for the family. For Dakota, this included physical and mental health services. For Aaron, an evaluation led to a diagnosis of autism along with a treatment plan. Jen worked with Nicole on parenting skills, and gradually, the family became stronger.

Dakota gained enough weight to reverse the ostomy procedure, and his behavior began to improve dramatically. Aaron was making excellent progress — he began to speak, learn numbers and letters, and his walking became normal.

Nicole is a better mom than she was when Project STAR entered the picture. Says Jen, "She's attentive to the boys' needs, she is caring and compassionate and she has learned to become an advocate for Dakota and Aaron."

Nicole agrees, and is thankful for the services her family received through Project STAR. "It's been nice to have a caseworker who actually cares. I've learned so much. Now I know how to be there appropriately for my kids."