



# ST. CHRISTOPHER'S 2022 IMPACT STORIES

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**WE EMPOWER YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO BE WHOM THEY WERE MEANT TO BE...**

**Welcome to St. Christopher's**, a safe and nurturing, Residential Treatment Center for children and youth with special needs, ages 12-21. Our young women and men—typically placed with us by School Districts—come to us with a range of educational and developmental disabilities, significant emotional issues, and/or psychiatric and behavioral difficulties. Many have multiple

diagnoses and medication regimes, and have experienced childhood trauma, such as physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Typically, they arrive here after less restrictive settings haven't worked out for them and their behavior in the community has been unsafe for themselves and others. **In turn**, our highly experienced and caring team uses evidence-based, therapeutic approaches to help them: pursue their studies, interests and passions; move beyond past traumas; and begin creating happy, healthy and meaningful futures. **In sum, we empower them**



**with the same social-emotional coping skills and strengths we want our own children to have**—at campuses in Dobbs Ferry and North Castle, New York. There, we harness the power of the human-animal-nature bond via healing gardens and animal-assisted therapy—with donkeys, chickens, peacocks, emus and goats (like Clark!)—to help our youth get in touch with their caring natures. And we use the therapeutic and healing arts—dance, writing, visual arts, drama and music—to help them build self-awareness, self-esteem and social skills, and in time, become their best selves.



**NOW**, we need your financial support so we can help even higher-needs children with autism become their best selves, too. Please read on to learn why you should *join us to help them*.



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AT ST. CHRISTOPHER'S, EVERY FIBER OF OUR BEING IS FOCUSED ON EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO UNLOCK THEIR FULL POTENTIAL...

Yet we cannot unlock our own, full potential as a human services agency without your support and sponsorship. Why? Because there aren't sufficient public funds available for the specialized training, equipment and facilities upgrades we need to expand our services to—and positively impact the lives of—a segment of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) population that is most vulnerable and underserved: severely cognitively-impaired children, many of whom are nonverbal and have high sensory needs. Our goal is to strengthen their: verbal and nonverbal communications skills; adaptive



(practical, everyday) living skills; social/emotional coping skills; and ultimately, job and community living readiness. To raise the necessary funds we need to meet this largely unmet need in the Lower Hudson Valley of New York State, we've launched **ETTA'S FUND**—named for our founder, Etta Wheeler—with a 2022 fundraising goal of \$150,000. With these funds, we pledge to deliver a high ROI on our donors' investment in these children's lives.

Make a secure donation today to St. Christopher's at <https://bit.ly/2KJFLaI>. Explore other giving options by contacting Dennis da Costa at 914-357-6182 or [ddacosta@sc1881.org](mailto:ddacosta@sc1881.org). Thank you for your support!





**"THERE ARE TWO VERSIONS OF ME: WILLIAM BEFORE & WILLIAM AFTER"**



**William's Mom, Theresa**, spent a lot of time worrying that her son would end up in jail. Then she turned to St. Christopher's and from his arrival to his graduation, "everything kept going up and up!" He credits his daily interaction with our farm animals—part of our animal-assisted therapy program—with helping him control his anger and rediscover his caring side. William now attends community college, has a full-time job, and is well on his way towards "a successful life."

- [Click this video link for William's story.](#)

**OUR RESIDENT CELLIST HITS ALL THE RIGHT NOTES WITH HIS IONA ACCEPTANCE!**

Before **Joshua** came to St. Christopher's, he loved playing the cello. But he didn't love the way his life was panning out. He felt hopeless and certain he was destined for failure in whatever he attempted. But with the help and dedication of his counselors and lots of hard work on his part, Joshua developed a positive, can-do attitude, and learned to accept himself and others. He has become a role model on campus, interns as a home health aide, and is focused on improving his own health, as well. Joshua looks forward to graduating in June because he has been accepted to Iona College, a highly-accredited, four-year college. We're very proud of Joshua.



- [Click this video link for Joshua's story.](#)

**"I AM HERE TODAY BECAUSE OF MY PARENTS' LOVE AND ST. CHRISTOPHER'S"**



Today, **Frances Gonzalez** is a noted expert on vegan wines, and an entrepreneur who founded and owns Vegan Wines.com. But 30-plus years ago, at age 12, out of desperation her mother had her placed at St. Christopher's. Frances believes her four years with us helped save her life and launch her trajectory towards entrepreneurship. "The staff believed in me more than I believed in myself. They let me take chances, but were always there to support me. And that's why I've been bold in my life and career." We're thrilled Francis returned to campus in 2021 and shared her journey.

- [Click this video link for Frances' story.](#)



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### BILLY'S NEW APPROACH TO LIFE: "INHALE THE FUTURE, EXHALE THE PAST"

At age 15, **Billy** was struggling with low self-esteem, illiteracy and learning disabilities—all of which led to truancy. But three years after arriving at St. Christopher's, he's greatly matured and no longer gets hostile with others with whose views he differs. In fact, he's a role model for his fellow residents, fully cooperates with staff, and his gold-level, behavior status enables him to work at an off-campus job. Plus, Billy is an honors student, all set to graduate in June with a Regents diploma. In preparation, he's spending much of his free time now planning his post-St. Christopher's life, including possible college majors and career paths. The future looks bright for Billy.



### "YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND THE SUN WITHIN YOURSELF IF YOU WILL ONLY SEARCH"



For her first few months at St. Christopher's, **Sofia** continued her pre-St. Chris pattern of being quiet, withdrawn, depressed and isolated. But she soon began integrating with her peers as she immersed herself in our healing garden, cosmetology program, and ultimately, an on-campus job in recreation. Finally, Sofia had found and embraced her true self. And when she graduated in 2021, she channeled her newfound confidence into securing a job helping children with special needs—"because I want to give back"—and will likely pursue an audio production degree. Meanwhile, we continue to support her through clinical and case management services. We can't wait to see what's next for Sofia!

### "THE CARING STAFF HERE HELPS US GET BACK TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE CAMPUS"

Engaging with our herd of donkeys, goats and chickens at *Jennie's Farm* enabled **Tristan** to better control his anger, learn to deal with different personality types and find his life purpose of ensuring the health and well-being of animals. A multiple, first-prize winner at 4H competitions, he was also very active in the creation and operation of our signature, *Seeds of Hope Healing Garden*. Last year, he transitioned to a group home and aims to pursue a veterinary technician degree. Ultimately, Tristan wants to return to St. Chris to pick up where he left off in caring for his beloved herd. The animals love him and we do, too!

- [Click this video link for Tristan's story.](#)



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