

STAVROS 
2021-2022
Strategic Report

2020 made all of us pivot.

It made us reconsider what is possible, what needs to change, and where we want to go. It gave us a new perspective as to who our allies could be or should be. It is no longer people with disabilities asking for better access to health care, the internet, housing, education, infrastructure, or transportation. Is no longer us vs. them; it is us, together.

For over forty-five years Stavros has been fighting for equal access for and with people with disabilities. As an organization founded in the principle of “Nothing about Us, without Us” more than half our staff are people with disabilities who live, and confront inequities daily. However, 2020 shined a spotlight on those inequities. It forced us to confront discrimination in new ways while at the same time opened doors we never thought possible.

As we look forward as an organization we are calling on legislators, to make sure enough funding is available to fight hunger, to increase affordable housing, to appropriately fund education, to give access to health care for all, to remove institutional biases that take away our ability to gain and maintain wealth like the Medicaid Estate Recovery process, and others. People with disabilities have lived in poverty too long and that divide was evident during the pandemic where all these factors increased our chances of dying. People with disabilities living in nursing facilities died more often than people in the community. As advocates we will continue to form partnerships with like-minded organizers to improve access for all.

Besides our renewed commitment to advocacy work, we are making internal changes to improve our services to the community. Last year as we pivoted to work from home, we

made a significant investment to go paperless, we upgraded computers and added cameras to our conference rooms to be able to have virtual meetings. We will continue to wear masks and keep social distance so that we can protect the health of consumers with disabilities and our employees and when possible offer telephonic or virtual visits. We are investing in social equity training and we are reviewing our internal and external processes to increase access to a racially and gender diverse community.

In January 2022, Stavros will no longer be the Fiscal Intermediary for Personal Care Attendant Services. We will be losing a third of our staff. We are working hard to help our staff find jobs elsewhere, while at the same time preparing for the economic impact this will have on our other services.



Services like the Independent Living, which helps people with disabilities to obtain or maintain their independence are woefully underfunded. These services lift people with disabilities out of poverty and help people realize their goals.

We are in the process of overhauling our Personal Care Services to provide timely evaluations, and support to our consumers. We are working on creative ways to offer youth with disabilities the help they need to plan for their futures, for example: we are providing virtual driving lessons.

There is so much that we are working on... We hope that you join our employees and people with disabilities in creating a path forward where we all have equal access to the community that we love.


Angelina Ramirez,
CEO

Mission

Our mission at Stavros is to help persons with disabilities and Deaf people develop the tools and skills they need to take charge of their own lives. We accomplish this through programs and services designed to meet the needs of persons of any age or disability as they work to achieve the life goals that are important to them.

Real independence also means a community free of barriers, and we work as advocates throughout the Pioneer Valley, across the state, and nationally to bring an end to discrimination--whether it's rooted in a set of stairs, prejudice about employment, limited access to health care, or anywhere else.



Core Values

- We are all advocates and we are all part of a historic movement that seeks to change the world—one life at a time.
- We are committed to respecting one another and the people we serve.
- We are dedicated to improving access in our communities and in our workplace.
- We are committed to providing our consumers with exceptional, high-quality, consumer-friendly services.
- We believe that self-determination is a basic civil right for persons with disabilities.

Independent Living Philosophy

Independent Living Services enable people with disabilities to live in an environment that encourages and supports the rights of people with disabilities to achieve and maintain a sense of autonomy in their lives. Our advocates accomplish this by providing counseling, skills training, general encouragement, and support to people with disabilities in need of such assistance.



The Basics

For persons with disabilities, life can be like a crazy reality TV show: you get past one obstacle, and another one pops up. But unlike television, the obstacles are real and dangerous. Most of our advocates are persons with disabilities themselves, and they know from firsthand experience the importance of getting those obstacles out of the way.

Income

For many persons with disabilities, the chance of finding a job – and the income that comes with it – may be somewhere in the future. Yet securing an income through assistance programs, such as Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance, can be very difficult. Our advocates know the rules, the paperwork, and how appeals work. They can help people get the stable income they need to build their lives.



Health Care

Getting the right medical care can be a challenge for anyone, but people with disabilities face denials of basic coverage, services, and equipment on a regular basis. Stavros advocates understand the rights of disabled people and their protection under the law, and they know how to fight to get the right care.

Housing

Finding an accessible, affordable, decent place to live is one of the biggest barriers to a life of independence. Our advocates provide housing assistance in a number of ways. View our Housing Section.

Getting Out of Nursing Homes

Everybody says it: nobody wants to live in a nursing home. But that doesn't mean that lots of folks aren't stuck in them, or in chronic care hospitals, rest homes, and other institutions. Stavros has a special Nursing Home Team that works closely with anyone who wants to get out, and helps them find housing, home care (including PCA services), equipment, and support.

Independence in the Home

Having your own home means you should be able to get in and out when you want to, take a shower or a bath without any trouble, and get around your kitchen just the way you like. Stavros helps people find ways to make their homes accessible. Check out our Home Sweet Home Program.



Last year was hard for all of us, especially people living with disabilities. We are the Board of Directors at Stavros Center for Independent Living—many of us who live with disabilities ourselves—and we saw first-hand the struggle, the hard choices, and the resilience of our community.

From all of us on the Board, we want to give our heartfelt thanks to everyone at Stavros, staff and volunteers alike.

Stavros never closed. During the worst days of the pandemic, Stavros was open to the public, in person and on the phone. Staff were answering questions, providing resources, giving information, and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities to have access to health care, transportation, employment, education, and much more.

Thanks to your commitment, and that of our donors and volunteers, our work did not stop.

We are genuinely awed by all you did for the disability community while juggling your own personal challenges. You fought for equal access, delivered food to people in need, built ramps, helped people out of nursing homes, made sure Personal Care Attendants were paid, helped people get mental health services, helped young adults learn how to drive and navigate remote schooling. You helped people find or keep their jobs, helped people find apartments, and fight eviction.

As the pandemic raged on, you raised your voices, and joined forces with other organizations and the disability community to make sure people with disabilities

had access—to health care, COVID testing, masks, vaccines, Personal Care Attendants, and the Internet. You fought for the right of people with disabilities to continue to live in the community and to avoid long term care facilities. If our consumers needed it, you were there to work to make it happen.

You adapted to the challenges our community faced, and the community is forever grateful.

We know that your work isn't done. As the world starts to reopen, there is a risk that people living with disabilities could once again be left behind. We understand that there is no going back to the way things were. Looking forward, our employees will become the leaders who make sure that people with disabilities are always at the table when decisions are made. For all the work still to come, we thank you.

Stavros' mission is to empower people with disabilities to take charge of their own lives. That mission comes to life when we provide accurate and current information and services that help people with disabilities assert their rights and achieve their personal goals. This year you did so much more than that. You helped our community survive!

Once again, to all of you, we are deeply grateful for your dedication and commitment.



Glenn Hartmann,
President of the Board



Youth Services

At Stavros, we want children and youths with disabilities to have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We aim to do this through ensuring they have the best home care and supports available. We also work with young adults and their families to create Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that reflect what they need to learn and grow in their educational environment.

Stavros' Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP) helps young people with disabilities figure out their future in a way that feels the most comfortable for them. This program is aimed at individuals with disabilities ages 14 through 22 who are still in high school. Stavros is dedicated to giving young people the decision-making tools they need to help them create the life they want.



Increase the number of youths involved in our programs

...such as events, groups, and outings. This will in turn increase the opportunities we are able to provide to youth with disabilities. This will be completed through the creation of outreach materials to schools in the Stavros service area, along with other agencies including DCF, DDS, DHM, etc. We will also participate in various events to educate the community on the services Stavros offers.

1

Expand the involvement of youth within the community

We will create community events for youth involvement. Examples include community service projects such as diaper drives, pet supply drives, and area clean ups, to name a few.

2

Provide more resources and support for parents

Parents and caregivers often need advice or support to ensure they adequately provide for their children. The creation of a group for parents and caregivers will give the support they need from each other. These groups can be specific to their needs and can incorporate different speakers including young adults with disabilities.

3

Inspiring passion for advocacy issues that impact their lives

Young adults with disabilities face what may seem like unsolvable challenges. To inspire them to action, to advocate for themselves and others, we will offer learning opportunities, and the ability to take steps that lead to change.

4

Home Sweet Home

An essential part of independent living is the opportunity to live at home. This is exactly what the Home Sweet Home program at Stavros does. This program collaborates with local community resources, volunteers, and donors to help our neighbors in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties acquire safe, affordable wheelchair access ramps.

Thanks to your donations, Stavros' Home Sweet Home program has been able to build more than a thousand ramps for people with disabilities with limited resources.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, despite labor and supply shortages, Home Sweet Home was challenged to continue to provide ramps, and they did. They built seventy ramps and helped thirty-four people leave nursing facilities.

Within the next year, we plan to push past these obstacles and reach the following goals:

- **Build 115 ramps or home access modifications**
- **Help at least 35 individuals be discharged from nursing facilities by providing home modifications**
- **Secure additional funds to support the program when there is a shortage from other resources**



DME

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) is vital for the independence of individuals with disabilities. DME is any equipment used by individuals with disabilities for mobility purposes, or during treatment or home care, including such items as crutches, knee braces, wheelchairs, hospital beds, prostheses, etc. Stavros in partnership with DME REquipment maintains donated medical equipment, which is loaned free of charge for a specified timeframe, giving autonomy to people with disabilities.

Personal Care Assistance Management Services

Through the trials and tribulations of COVID lockdowns, Stavros' Personal Care Services worked hard advocating for flexibilities and adopting new practices to avoid gaps in PCA services for our consumers. The changes to the employment landscape during COVID meant consumers had a hard time finding Personal Care Attendants, and we had a hard time maintaining appropriate staffing levels. Through it all Stavros PCM service team persevered. We came together to restructure services, processes and practices that resulted in shorter wait times, excellent consumer service, and a renewed commitment to community living.

Goals for PCM Admin

- Give consumers and their families a consumer-driven experience, with timely and courteous service, increasing the likelihood of their remaining in their homes independently.
- Adhere to MassHealth regulations and changes, and communicate them to consumers and employees while advocating for consumer control.
- Continue our commitment to the environment while serving consumers. Accomplish this through the use of technology to increasing efficiencies, productivity and waste reduction.

"Stavros inspires me to continue to work towards providing good consumer care by coordinating with staff, other departments and other agencies when necessary. Keeping consumers safe in their homes is what we strive for."

Skills Trainers

During the pandemic we saw an increase of people with disabilities dying at nursing facilities. This has driven our resolve to educate consumers on how to best manage their personal care attendant services to improve their ability to remain at home. Using data-driven processes we are consistently improving the flow and the quality of our Skills Training services.

Goals

- Educating ourselves is fundamental to providing quality information and resources to our consumers. We are striving to provide group training for consumers and surrogates, in addition to our regular individualized sessions.
- Centralize Personal Care Management resources for consumers. During the pandemic we had an increase in inquiries regarding how to recruit and maintain PCAs. We responded via social media, our website and direct telephone calls. This demand drove our determination to centralize the information to increase independent access for our consumers.
- Re-commitment to team building across the agency. Our consumers' stories need to be told. Working together we can advocate, increase access, and educate our community on the importance of self-determination and community living.

Independent Living Services and Long-Term Services and Supports Coordination

As we saw the world close during the pandemic, people reached out looking for help. Our information and referral team were ready. We helped meet basic needs like food deliveries, transportation, COVID testing and PPEs, along with more complicated ones, like how to stay alive, by deciphering a maze of misinformation.

Our advocates and peer counselors called our consumers, offering peer support and skills training to help navigate the everchanging landscape. We listened to what they were experiencing and developed plans to fight for their rights, according to their needs. We set up new services and helped people transition from nursing facilities to the community.

We also provided virtual/telephonic clinics to help people with disabilities with: finding affordable housing, avoiding eviction, wheelchair clinics to help them avoid pressure sores, and options counseling to help them understand their options and make decisions for their future.

Our Goals

- Provide consumers with the information and resources they need to live independently in the community.
- Increase and enhance our peer counseling, advocacy, and skills training services to help consumers identify and achieve their life goals.
- Listen... We will be holding listening sessions to give people with disabilities, the community, and our employees the opportunity to shape the future of the organization.
- Engage for change... through work with organizations in our communities, we will identify community needs and advocate for change.
- Educate... Provide educational opportunities to consumers to enhance their quality of life.
- Improve... design a strategic plan to help improve our services to the community.

Systems Advocacy

This past year has been an eye opener to the flaws of our current systems. From healthcare, transportation, telecommunication, and education, the pandemic further highlighted issues that people with disabilities already live with every day. This crisis has provided an impetus to radically change and improve our systems, while at the same time shifting some of our focus areas.

At the peak of the pandemic Stavros submitted testimony on behalf of the disability community



with regard to medical rationing and the Crisis Standards of Care procedures. Our advocacy protected our community from unfair discrimination during emergency medical triage. Stavros advocated to support early voting and mail-in voting to ensure that our high-risk populations could still exercise their civic duty safely.

We are joining with others in the fight to bridge the gap in digital connectivity and literacy in western Massachusetts. The pandemic has shown us that without connectivity and literacy, access to tele-medicine, working from home and online schooling is impossible. We aim to increase access to the benefits of being digitally connected.

Our Goals for Systems Change Advocacy

Now more than ever it is extremely important for us to continue to advocate for systems change that will improve the lives of people with disabilities.

- Increase Funding for Independent Living Centers
- Expand accessible housing and employment opportunities to people with disabilities and seniors
- Access to voting ...Continue to advocate for a permanent system of mail-in voting and early voting so that our community can continue to have access in future elections
- Bridge the digital divide both through legislative advocacy and community education/networking
- Increase access to the community by supporting legislation on transportation,

qualifying interpreters for the Deaf and taking down systems that keep people in poverty

Bills we are supporting...

Housing and Unemployment:

An Act Building a More Accessible Massachusetts

An Act Relative to Expanding the Availability of Adaptable Housing for Consumers with Disabilities, Mobility Impairments, and Seniors

An Act Removing Barriers to Work That Discriminates Against Persons with Disabilities, Mobility Impairments, and Seniors

Transportation:

An Act to Increase Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth

Set a \$94 million floor for FY 22 to adequately fund RTA

Support Parents and Children:

An Act to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty

Lift families out of deep poverty by raising TAFDC and EAEDC benefits by 20% each year until 50%

Community Access:

An Act Providing for Early Voting / Vote by Mail

Establish Licensing for Interpreters and Oral Trans-Literators to Ensure Accurate and Effective Translations for the Deaf Community



Since 1974 Stavros Center for Independent Living has been at the heart of the Independent Living movement. We have worked hard to build on the drive for independence that led our founders to move from their parents' homes, nursing homes, and state hospitals to an old farmhouse in Amherst. Over these 47 years our staff has covered nearly every sector advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities. Housing, transportation, systems change, peer support, equipment; no matter what resources our consumers need to live independently, our staff is there to help them develop the tools and skills to do so.

This year Stavros CIL is facing new challenges to our mission, meeting the needs of all community members. Throughout the ravages of 2020, our staff continued to do amazing work. While the rest of the world closed their doors, Stavros stayed open. Our Home Sweet Home team worked to produce 87 home modifications, which included ramps, chair lifts and railings. In the 3rd Quarter alone our vocational rehab team served 49 new consumers by providing food, financial help with prescriptions/medical bills, and housing assistance. In total, our Independent Living team provided nearly 8000 hours of service to our consumers.

As a nonprofit organization, Stavros CIL could not exist without the support of financial contributors who share our commitment to a community free of barriers. With your support we are able to work as advocates throughout the Connecticut River Valley, across the state, and nationally to bring an end to discrimination—whether it's rooted in a set of stairs, prejudice about employment, limited access to health care, or "anywhere else, just not here." This year we, and other organizations like us, have seen a reduction in traditional financial support coupled with an increased need in our community. Now more than ever we need the dollars that our donors provide.

"The people at Stavros were there for me. They showed up when it felt like the world was getting smaller. This is who they are. This is what they do."

—Joyce V., Stavros Consumer

As a member of the Independent Living Community, we know you understand the challenges facing people living with disabilities. As you read through the goals of our various programs, we are sure you understand just how much work we still have to do. Along with raising an essential \$30,000 in individual donations this year, Stavros CIL needs to create sustainable funding for the strategic work we have planned. We are asking for your help. Please consider subscribing to monthly-based giving with Stavros. A gift of \$10 dollars a month—the cost of your average streaming service—provides our staff the funding they need to continue their crucial work. You can subscribe for monthly donations by visiting **stavros.org** and going to the 'Donate' page.


If monthly donations don't work for you, please consider making a tax-deductible donation online or by sending a check to:

**Stavros Center for Independent Living
210 Old Farm Road, Amherst, MA 01002**

We would love to speak with you further regarding how we can partner, and what the next year will bring for Stavros. As the Director of Development, I am here to talk with you about the work we do and to thank you for all of your support. I am asking you now to join with many others from our community and support Stavros Center for Independent Living today!

We can't do this without you.

With ongoing gratitude and appreciation,


Jason Montgomery
Director of Development



STAVROS 

2021-2022
Strategic Report

Stavros Center for Independent Living
210 Old Farm Road
Amherst, MA 01002