



# *Difference Makers*

**Celebrating 5 Years of High School Student College-Readiness via Academic Service-Learning at Susan Wagner, Tottenville, and Curtis High Schools.  
Director William Reisel, Ph.D. Professor of Management, St. John's University**

***New NFP Partnerships Welcome***



**Difference Makers** is a college-readiness program for high school students in the NYC Department of Education Community Schools initiative taught by professors at St. John's University. Students in the program are learning valuable leadership skills as they study and respond to social issues in the community and partner with active not-for-profit organizations. Students who go to college after participation in Difference Makers are persisting and retaining. We are always looking to work with new Not-for-Profit organizations. See for yourself by viewing the recording of the Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, [Vimeo Link](#). **Contact Dr. William Reisel, Director, [reiselw@stjohns.edu](mailto:reiselw@stjohns.edu).**



# DR. REISEL'S REFLECTION

## Difference Makers was fashioned out of student passions

St. John's University holds **service as a core value** and faculty can be found all throughout New York contributing in small and large ways. We do it because that is who we are. Five years ago, I visited Susan Wagner High School on 1200 Manor Road in Staten Island, NY to talk about leadership. I had a PowerPoint deck and went through the current characteristics of what it takes to be a leader. **One of the things that great leaders do is that they invest in their people and inspire them to excel as human beings, not just workers.** By accident, I asked the students in the groups I met, if they might like to do a college-type project with me to study real needs at real not-for-profit organizations. The signup sheet came back with 60 signatures and 60 email addresses out of 65 students. So began the Difference Makers in the fall of 2016 when we started meeting students after school to work on our very first Academic Service-Learning project. But what happened that year will never fail to amaze me. Students had come into the program with **transactional goals** to earn service hours. But by the time we celebrated the completion of their projects, they **had been transformed by the work.** The students partnered with the Central Family Life Center (CFLC), a Staten Island NFP, and studied after school tutoring for children at an underserved area of the Island. They designed a manual of on-line tutoring and raised \$847 to pay for a Skype-ready computer which was donated to the CFLC. You could see something exciting and new had overtaken the Falcons of Susan Wagner. I will tell you why I know that. We asked the high school teacher, Jennifer Brogan, who attended every meeting, to say a few words. I will never forget how tears came to her eyes and it took a moment before she got out the words to say how proud she was of our first 31 Difference Makers. What I saw then happens over and over in each of the five years Difference Makers have worked in the community. Difference Makers teaches our young future leaders how to take charge of complicated issues and by doing so they learn the gift of lifetime Difference Making. What I have seen tells me that the successes on Staten Island are just one bridge away from what could happen at 25 allied colleges and universities. After teaching 314 students over 5 years how to make a difference and to distinguish themselves for waiting colleges, the next step in our journey is the helping students get accepted to your institution.

Principal of Susan E. Wagner High School, **David Cugini**, presented the Keynote Speech at the February 8, 2021 Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, and was the recipient of the Difference Makers First *Educator of the Year Award*



*'The evidence of learning is in the application of that learning in the real world. Service-learning provides our students a competence to seek change and it teaches compassion and empathy. I think we can all agree that we need more humanity in the world. Many Difference Makers past and present have cited their involvement in the program as a defining element of their development and an inspiration to continue to make an impact during their lifetimes. The students showed passion and resiliency and were dedicated to serving interests greater than themselves. After seeing the students' impact in the community, they will not settle for less.'*

Students reflect on their experiences:

*'Being a 2020-2021 Difference Maker inspired me to help others around me who need support. Before Difference Makers, I felt as if I did not really have a role. After taking part in this program, I feel as if I made a difference by donating to and helping the not-for-profit organizations. I learned how to work with others and be collaborative in my group. I made connections with students who had the same inspiration for helping others. It was truly an amazing experience that taught me how to be involved in my community during this challenging time in the world.'*

**Tottenville High School Student Reflection February, 2021**





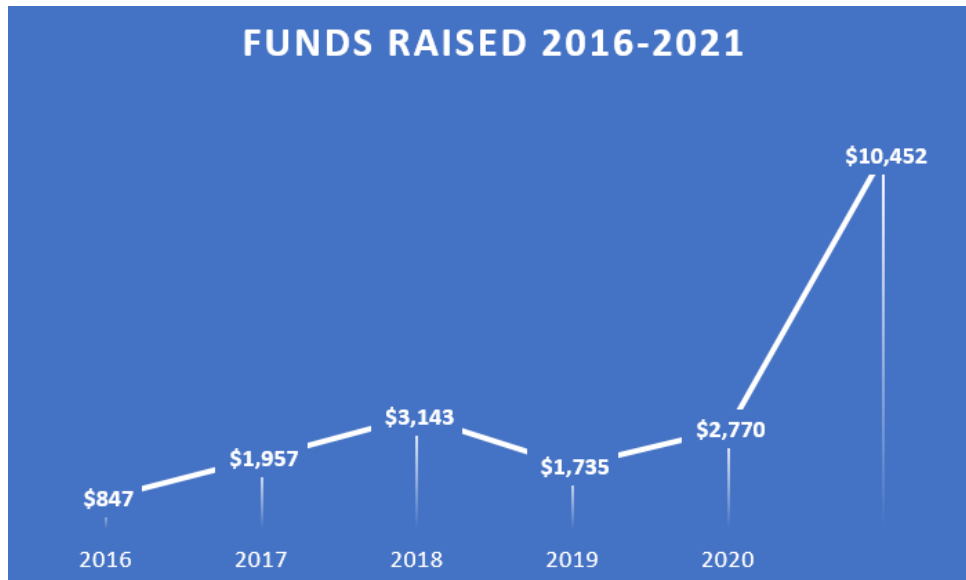
**Verrazano Bridge to the next 25 universities and colleges**

*'I want you guys to be aware of the inspiration you have been to the community, to me, and to your parents. I see you as the giants of this game just in the same way as Malala or Greta Thunberg. You are at the beginning of your careers of truly making a difference in your communities and beyond. I heard one student say it is the beginning of a lifetime of service and that is the right thing to do.'*



**Ron Banks, Curtis High School Teacher on February 8, 2021**

## Highlights 2016-2021: Certificates Conferred and Fundraising Totals



Difference Makers participate in fundraising and proceeds are donated 100 percent to the many NFP organizations that we partner with each year. The total raised and donated over five years is now \$10,452.

## Difference Makers Builds Character via Academic Service-Learning



### Academic Service-Learning: Our Nationally Recognized Pedagogy

The students are empowered to understand issues by taking on research projects that attempt to solve critical social issues in collaboration with primarily local not-for-profit organizations. Difference Makers have studied food insecurity with City Harvest and Meals on Wheels, immigration with Make the Road NY, pet rescue with Pluto Rescue, childhood development with Children's Aid, HIV orphan's education in Zambia with American Friends of Cecily's Fund, anti-gang violence with True 2 Life, children's cancer with St. Jude's Hospital and Sunrise Day Camp, and environmental stewardship with the Greenbelt Conservancy. Students decide from among up to five projects which one they will work on during the program which lasts from mid-fall to early in the following year (about 12 weeks meeting once weekly). At the meetings, students begin to construct visual presentations of their findings and suggested solutions. NFP leaders visit with the students to coach approximately 2-4 times with students working towards rehearsals and receiving final guidance. Difference Makers prioritizes student-led social action/service-learning projects that foster critical thinking, positive attitudes toward school, and increased civic engagement.<sup>1</sup> The culminating evening features the student presentations in front of the professors and college administrators as well as the high school teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and the sponsors. Because of the need to socially distance in 2020-2021, the entire program switched from a face-to-face after school program to a virtual (Microsoft Teams) program meeting after school electronically. The technology helped reduce NFP leaders travel commitments and afforded students the opportunity to view missed meetings which were recorded and posted on the Teams platform. The collaborative outcome was greatly enhanced through virtual technology and the best evidence of the program comes from viewing the February 8, 2021 Difference Makers Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, viewable on Vimeo: [CLICK HERE to VIEW](#).

The culminating requirement of the Difference Makers is for students to state in 100 words or less their experience *reflection* including what they liked or might like to improve. This *information* is studied so we can respond to the needs of our students. One Curtis High School student wrote:

*"Being a 2020-2021 Difference Maker has taught me that being connected and inclined with my community is important. Not only did I learn about different problems on Staten Island, but I also learned about children in Zambia, Africa. I learned to fundraise and put myself out there for a good cause. This program opened my eyes to see how I can help change the world, starting with my community. I made friends with people in different schools and even people I did not know in my own school. Difference Makers gives you the knowledge and awareness that no other program can."*

### TRAITS OF DIFFERENCE MAKERS RECRUITING COLLEGES VALUE:

Difference Makers were surveyed about their experience after going to college:

1. They expressed a life-long commitment to service.
2. They have developed strong leadership skills.
3. They are persisting in college to degree completion.
4. They are open to working with people of different backgrounds.
5. They have excellent collaboration skills.

## Two of our NFP Partners



**'Iron' Mike Perry, Director of True 2 Life Anti-gang violence program. Mike leads a team of violence interrupters on Staten Island modeled on the Cure Violence Initiative in Chicago. They "risk lives to save lives."**

*'I am extremely grateful. Thank you for your support! Thanks to the Difference Makers. We truly appreciate our friendship and partnership and are looking forward to continued collaboration.'*



**Sue Skaf of American Friends of Cecily's Fund congratulates Difference Makers on supporting the education of HIV Orphans in Zambia**

*'Your generous support will fund a program to deliver food to the villages because the schools are closed because of COVID where the students normally get their meals'.*





## Calling new NFP Partners

- Meet students virtually, 2-4 times during October to January semester
- Coordinate with Difference Makers Director on what topic you want students to study about helping an area of need in your organization
- Students research and prepare a presentation, you spend up to 2 hours providing inputs on their developing presentations
- You attend the dinner certificate ceremony that ends the program and receive the fundraising gift from the students
- Ask about Dr. Reisel, about becoming a NFP partner, reiselw@stjohns.edu

# PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS

Jennifer Brogan of Susan Wagner's Academy of Finance has worked 5 years with Difference Makers and received the Difference Makers Teacher of the Year Award on February 8, 2021



# FUNDING PARTNERS



 <b>conEdison</b> Everything Matters	 <b>nationalgrid</b>	 The Staten Island Foundation
 Richmond County Savings Foundation	 Northfield Bank Foundation	 NYC Department of Education

Con Edison, The Staten Island Foundation, Northfield Bank Foundation, Nationalgrid, Richmond County Savings Foundation, NYC Department of Education, St. John's Office of Academic Service-Learning, Joel and Annette Laitman Family, Office of St. John's Staten Island Vice Provost, and VISA Faculty Research Consortium Grant.

# BIOGRAPHY DR. WILLIAM REISEL

Dr. William Reisel is a full professor of management at the Tobin College of Business and is the Department of Management's **Assistant Chairperson**. He began working for St. John's in 1998 after receiving a Ph.D. in management and strategy from the City University of New York. Dr. Reisel is a world-recognized scholar about employee job insecurity, attitudes, and strategy. He has over 60 scholarly publications and conference presentations during his career with more than 1,440 scholarly citations to his credit. Dr. Reisel is a passionate teacher who uses Academic Service-Learning with his students. His work received the **2018 Presidential Academic Service-Learning Award**. In 2018, Dean Norean Sharpe appointed Dr. Reisel the **Tobin Director of Accreditation** and he led the successful AACSB Business Re-accreditation Report effort beginning in May of 2018 and ending in January of this 2019. Among his other roles, Dr. Reisel serves as the Director of the newly launched **MS in Entrepreneurship and Innovation** and he directs the annual **James and Eileen Christmas Business Plan Competition**. Dr. Reisel is a third-year **Vincentian Fellow** and presented a talk in April 2019 entitled "The Mission of Difference Makers." The talk focused on a high school 'college-readiness' program Dr. Reisel directs at three high schools on Staten Island that supports student credentials for college applications based on service-driven partnerships with not-for-profits in New York City. Multiple prestigious institutions have supported Difference Makers including the NY DOE End of School Day grant and from multiple private foundations: Con Edison, Staten Island Foundation, Richmond Savings Foundation, National Grid, and the Northfield Bank Foundation. Dr. Reisel was recognized by his colleagues with the **Tobin College Beta Gamma Sigma "Professor of the Year Award"** in 2019 and the **Beta Alpha Psi "Professor of the Year Award"** in 2018.

Dr. Reisel email: [reiselw@stjohns.edu](mailto:reiselw@stjohns.edu)

For more on Difference Makers, please see news coverage at the following Media weblinks:

<https://www.silive.com/news/2019/10/st-johns-university-collaborates-with-local-high-schoolers-to-make-a-difference.html>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2020-02-06/2019-2020-difference-makers-program-concludes-its-impact-continues>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2018-09-06/tobin-professor-receives-prestigious-award-academic-service-learning-work>

<https://www.torchonline.com/news/2018/10/03/professor-wins-prestigious-as-l-award/>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2018-02-06/difference-makers-completion-ceremony>

# COLLEGES ATTENDED BY DIFFERENCE MAKERS

 <p><b>ST. JOHN'S</b> UNIVERSITY</p>	 <p><b>Drexel</b> UNIVERSITY</p>	 <p>College of Staten Island The City University of New York</p>
<p><b>BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY</b> STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK</p>	<p><b>Baruch</b>COLLEGE</p>	<p><b>RIT</b></p>
 <p>SETON HALL UNIVERSITY</p>	<p><b>STEVENS</b> INSTITUTE of TECHNOLOGY THE INNOVATION UNIVERSITY®</p>	<p><b>HUNTER</b></p>
<p><b>Quinnipiac</b> UNIVERSITY</p>	<p><b>JOHN JAY</b> COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE</p>	<p><b>PENNSYLVANIA</b> COLLEGE of HEALTH SCIENCES</p>
<p><b>ADELPHI</b> UNIVERSITY NEW YORK</p>		

**SEE WHAT WE DO: WATCH OUR FIFTH ANNUAL CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION CEREMONY, FEB. 8, 2021**



Vimeo Link to the Recording	<a href="#">CLICK HERE to VIEW</a>
Invocation Patrick Griffin	2:25
Vice Provost Dr. James O’Keefe	5:00
Dean Norean Sharpe	7:30
Keynote Speaker Principal David Cugini	30:41
Not for Profit Partners	41:50
Students’ Project: Meals on Wheels Presentation	51:30
Students’ Project: American Friends of Cecily’s Fund	58:00
Students’ Project: The Greenbelt Conservancy	1hr:14
Students’ Project: True 2 Life	1hr:25
Certificates of Completion	1hr:33
Closing Associate Provost Dr. Robert Fanuzzi	1hr:40.45

**REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Community Schools (2014). Leading with Purpose and Passion: A Guide for Community Schools Directors, p. 31.



[https://www.instagram.com/stateniland\\_differencemakers/](https://www.instagram.com/stateniland_differencemakers/)

