



Uzma Mirza
Family Focus Participant
Comments at Family Focus' 2017 Anniversary Gala
May 25, 2017



My name is Uzma Mirza and I came to America from Pakistan 22 years ago with my husband. I am the proud mother of four children, one daughter and three sons. Our oldest, our daughter, is in college studying social work. Our next son is going to UIC upcoming fall other son is going to Northside prep High school, and finally my youngest is in 3rd grade. My daughter began working at Family Focus about three years ago and her experience was so positive that she inspired me to get involved.

I graduated from college in Pakistan, and am working as an assistant teacher at Chicago Public Schools' Volta Elementary. I believe families are the foundation for their children's education. Being involved with students has always been my passion. Volta is a Chicago Public Elementary school. It is a diverse school and many of the students and their families are going through the same experiences I went through when I came to America. I know many parents don't speak English and don't know how to help with homework. Many of my students have come to kindergarten without any preschool. But when their kids get home from Family Focus programs they have finished their homework. This gives parents peace of mind.

If their kids weren't at Family Focus, they'd be at home playing video games. Instead they're with us, learning. We are creating experiences. My first and second graders have learned about Arabic letters. Learning a second language helps them become more flexible thinkers. They have participated in the school garden, planting seeds and watching plants sprout, but they are also understanding how a garden can feed the community. They are playing with Legos to learn colors and shapes, and they're improving motor skills. But they're also learning to share and work in a team. They're learning to communicate and to be creative, skill they will need in the future. When they get to upper grades, Family Focus will help them write original stories to bring their own Lego creations to life.

(Continued on other side)

Uzma Mirza comments (cont.)

Our partnership with Junior Achievement led to an exercise where we talked with the kindergarten and first graders about the difference between *wanting* something and *needing* something. They thought they needed candy. Now they know that they *want* candy. They *need* water, food and education. If they are grasping this in the first and second grade, think of what their minds will be like as they get older.



Working at Family Focus gives me an opportunity to connect with parents new to the United States. I relate to them because I am an immigrant too. I know what it's like to learn to navigate a new system and learn a new language. I know their culture and can speak Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, so I can help parents translate at school. And when they need resources, Family Focus helps them understand their rights and connects them to legal services that can help them stay together and safe.

Those who are not familiar with the immigrant community should know that immigrants come here as hard workers and should not be expected to know the systems right away. It's a process to immigrate and live in a new community that comes with its own lists of barriers. Most parents don't have the resources or connections in a new community. Family Focus helps by creating events that allow families to meet others. We have field trips, pot lucks, Mother's Day gatherings, and parent meetings. By creating these events, this gives parents and their children a chance to be involved not only at Family Focus, but Volta as well. The important thing is to be involved in your child's schools and community.

It has been a wonderful opportunity to be able to join Family Focus and work with the students and their parents to further improve their educational and personal growth. Family Focus is doing great work and needs to be at every school. We all have an equal right to participate. By connecting us as a community to learn from, and share our best selves with others, Family Focus empowers each of us to be great. Great contributors in a community of engaged families, inquisitive learners and problem-solvers, and understanding neighbors. Even a kindergarten student can tell you that is the kind of place they'd want to call home.