



**FAMILY  
FOCUS**

*Nurturing children  
Strengthening families*

# **Strategic Plan Summary For FY12 to FY14**

## Introduction

On behalf of the board, staff, participants, and volunteers of Family Focus, Inc., it is our honor to introduce the strategic planning document that is enclosed in the following pages.

This plan is the culmination of nine months of intensive work by staff, board members, and volunteers. During that period we conducted surveys and focus groups and received insights from nearly 300 stakeholders. We learned from board and advisory board members, partner organizations, staff, volunteers, and many participants. The discussions were stimulating and intense, and everyone we asked returned to the fundamental theme of how we can best support and strengthen the families in our neighborhoods.

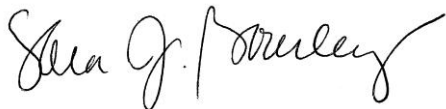
The steering committee, comprised of community and family support experts, then looked closely at our strengths, vulnerabilities, and trends, including demographic and funding. After prioritizing our goals, the following plan was developed.

The enclosed plan provides a framework not to determine, but to surpass a standard of excellence in programs, and to continue working at the frontline of family support with innovative practices that drive the movement into the foreseeable future. Additionally, the plan seeks to inspire partners and stakeholders to share their knowledge and resources with Family Focus. The plan also recognizes that to implement innovative programs, the agency must broaden and strengthen its funding base. In order to accomplish the goals envisioned in this plan we will create yearly operating goals with benchmarks and specific staff responsibilities.

This plan was developed in partnership with our families and communities and thus is firmly rooted in our mission of working with families and community agencies, rather than for them.

Thank you for your interest in the future of Family Focus, Inc. We're looking forward to an exciting next several years!

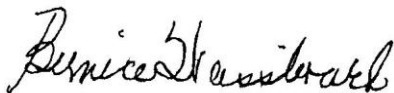
Sincerely,



Sara J. Gourley  
*Chair, Family Focus Board of Directors*



Merri Ex  
*President and CEO*



Bernice Weissbourd  
*Founder and Chairman Emerita*

## **Mission**

Promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening their families in and with their communities.

## **Vision**

Family Focus envisions a future where: all children, from birth, have the benefit of nurturing families; parents and other primary caregivers are accepted as a child's first and most important teacher; all families have the support they need to grow stronger; and all communities support families in the healthy development of their children.

## Premises of Family Support

1. Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.
2. Assuring the well-being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.
3. Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.
4. Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents' understanding of child development and of their children's unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions and mores.
5. Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children.
6. The developmental processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.
7. Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities.

## Principles of Family Support

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members – adults, youth and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance and administration.

## About Family Focus and the Family Support Philosophy

Founded in 1976 by Bernice Weissbourd, a leading scholar and educator in child development, the agency was created out of the simple but powerful idea that happy, healthy children are raised by competent, confident parents. Two fundamental principles serve as the framework for all our programs: 1) the family is the primary source of a child's development and 2) all families need and deserve support from their communities.

Bernice and the family support movement are credited with focusing national attention on the critical first three years of life and the need to provide support for young children and their families. Research confirms that parents have a profound influence on their child's development. The emotional nourishment that comes from the right kind of attention is critical because at the earliest stages of a child's life, care, love and learning are intimately interwoven.

As an agency, Family Focus embodies the larger family support movement: programmatically the family support principles are embedded in every service we provide to families in and with communities; and systemically we engage in community, regional and national dialogues to promote the primacy of families and parents as a child's first and most important teacher, and encourage families' participation in the public policy decision-making arena.

Over the last 35 years, Family Focus has grown significantly, opening new centers and developing new programs in response to changing communities. Today, there are eight Family Focus direct service centers throughout the greater Chicago metropolitan area. Our centers are located in the Chicago neighborhoods of Englewood, Hermosa and Lawndale and the nearby communities of Aurora, Bensenville, Cicero, Evanston and Highland Park, with outreach services which extend into surrounding communities.

From a single drop-in center in Evanston, Illinois, Family Focus now provides holistic family support services to over 37,000 individuals, including 20,000 parents and children enrolled in center programming and an additional 17,000 people helped through outreach, short term, and crisis services. We provide afterschool programming in 40 area schools and collaborate with many community agencies and health care providers to offer participants access to a full range of services.

Family Focus helps participants build confidence in their own abilities, enabling them to overcome challenges, raise healthy children, succeed in school and fully participate in the life of their community.

## Core Priorities

### 1. Extend the field of Family Support.

From the ground breaking Principles and Premises of Family Support developed in 1976 that inspired the national family support movement to the 35 years of experience in implementing those standards, Family Focus has always been a leader in the movement. Over the next three years, the agency will focus on implementing a knowledge exchange for leaders in the region and nationally to share ideas and strategies. Through establishing an annual symposium and quarterly newsletter, Family Focus will exchange the lessons learned over time and engage in dialogues with other agencies not only to ensure that the most innovative strategies are incorporated into programs for the benefit of families, but also to ensure that the family support approach is internalized in wider public policy systems.

### 2. Ensure a continuum of high quality services.

One of our founding principles is that children do not grow up in a void and in order to help the child, one must partner with the family and the community. Therefore to provide a meaningful impact in a child's life we need to fully engage with families and communities to ensure the appropriate services are offered in our neighborhoods and that families are connected to these services. We will begin through conducting a community needs assessment in each of our eight neighborhoods. Based on our findings we will establish programs or partnerships to meet the greatest need. Priority areas to be examined include programs for teen mothers, doula services for first time mothers, birth to three programs, father support groups, services for the growing Latino community, education programs (after school and adult education), and assistance for unemployed participants.

The new and existing programs and collaborations will be monitored through a reenergized cycle of program improvement. With assessments, recommendations, and trainings alongside a documented integration of the family support principles, services will continually be refined to benefit families.

### 3. Broaden and diversify the funding base.

To support the mission and goals envisioned in the strategic plan, Family Focus will concentrate on acquiring stable, broad based, financial, and nonfinancial resources. This will be accomplished through strengthening the infrastructure to support a fully functioning development department that offers a continuum of donor opportunities. Benchmarks include a minimum of \$200,000 raised from annual special events, an increase of 10% yearly raised from individuals, and securing \$3 million of the annual operating budget through private sector philanthropy by FY14.

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The following resource was invaluable in creating this plan: Allison, Michael and Jude Kaye. Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations. San Francisco: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2005.