Family Focus Announces 2018 Gala Honorees and Event Chair

Family Focus is pleased to announce the recipients of this year’s Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support. The Anniversary Gala on May 15th, 2018 will honor three Chicago individuals and institutions that have played a pivotal role of support in our programs and services:

**Bryan Samuels** is the Executive Director of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and formerly the Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF). Mr. Samuels has over twenty years of experience in child welfare and is a champion for child welfare systems.

**Sidley Austin** is a leading Chicago law firm that devotes more than 120,000 pro bono hours annually to serve those most in need. Sidley Austin has been a dedicated supporter and friend of Family Focus. Sara Gourley, a partner, has been on Family Focus’ Board of Directors for many years.

**The Irving Harris Foundation**, a private family foundation, promotes equity of outcomes for all children by enabling access to comprehensive, high-quality care in nurturing environments for pregnant women, very young children and families. Irving Harris was responsible for the founding of Family Focus with Bernice Weissbourd.

The 2018 event chair is Scott C. Smith, President, Illinois of PNC Bank. PNC Bank is a partner of Family Focus and we are thrilled to welcome his leadership and support for this annual event.

Celebrating the Holidays with Community and Corporate Partners

Family Focus centers celebrated the 2017 holiday season with help from several corporate and community partners. We are especially thankful for the support of our participants.

Family Focus DuPage hosted its annual parties for program participants. With help from volunteers from Kohl’s Department Stores and many local businesses that provided donations of food, gifts, and party supplies, the DuPage community celebrated the holidays in the communities they serve. This year the center also partnered with Chicago-based design firm Equator which donated gifts for home visiting participants.

Family Focus centers in Lawndale and Englewood partnered with the Chicago Tribune to provide gifts for students involved in the afterschool programs at Dvorak School of Excellence, Foster Park Fine & Performing Arts Magnet Cluster School, Oliver Wendell Holmes Elementary School, Carrie Jacobs Bond Elementary School, and Charles R. Henderson Elementary School.

Children participating in the early childhood programs at Family Focus Lawndale also received gifts donated personally from local community members and from Cradles to Crayons, an organization that provides children’s goods to social service providers that serve Chicago families.

Hitachi Consulting Group also supported Family Focus’ afterschool program as part of a longstanding partnership. Hitachi staff personally delivered holiday gifts to students at different schools in the Cicero and Hermosa communities.

Reserve your space at the 2018 Annual Meeting:

The 2018 Annual Meeting is March 7, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. at Jones Day. Read the Q & A with keynote speaker, Dr. Kimberly Mann, on page 3.

Contact Kelsey at kelsey.miklos@family-focus.org or 312-777-1918 to reserve your space.
FAMILY FOCUS CENTER UPDATES: HOLIDAY EDITION

EVANSTON

Family Focus Evanston held its annual Kwanzaa celebration at the end of December. Each of the seven days of the holiday celebrate a different principle of Kwanzaa, a holiday that honors African heritage in African-American culture, and is marked with colorful decorations, candles, and fresh fruits.

DuPage

DuPage celebrated the holidays with a large party held for participants in Elgin with special appearances by Mr. and Mrs. Claus (played by President and CEO, Merri Ex). Individual donors and local businesses donated gifts and local restaurants provided food for the festivities.

LAWNDALE

In partnership with the Family Focus Associate Board, Family Focus Lawndale hosted their annual Feed the Community event at the Homan Square Center. Approximately 250 community members were treated to a free Thanksgiving meal with food and catering donated and served by volunteers. Attendees also had the chance to win frozen turkeys for their own Thanksgiving meals.

Spotlight on: Grandparents

Beverly Jones, a Child Development Specialist at Family Focus Lawndale, shares information on the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program.

“Grandparents raising a child often think, ‘I have to do this all over again—at my age.’ I have a grandparent in my group who is 81. Her grandchild was three when she got custody. These grandparents have to focus on changing their lifestyle from the time the raised their own children.

“They can have difficulty getting information from teachers because the school does not recognize them as parents. Family Focus can go with them to the schools and help them talk on behalf of their child and their needs. We have facilitators come to our grandparents group to discuss grandparents’ rights and trauma. We bring in doctors to answer questions on medication for children diagnosed with ADHD and questions about their own medical health.

“Many grandparents are concerned about wills and insuring that they can make arrangements so if they die, their grandchildren don’t start over in the child welfare system again. We can refer them to legal aid services and get their plan in place. Our grandparents group is a supportive resource. They embrace each other and often can offer advice from their own experience as caregivers to other grandparents in the group.”

Mutual of America Foundation to Honor Power of Fathers Program at Chicago Luncheon

Participants and staff from the Power of Fathers program will be honored on March 15, 2018 at The Metropolitan Club for receiving an Honorable Mention from the Mutual of America Foundation Community Partnership Award. The Power of Fathers program is a collaboration with Children’s Home + Aid, Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities; Family Focus; and Metropolitan Family Services. The program was chosen as finalist for the national award in spring of 2017. This Chicago celebration comes after Family Focus staff traveled to New York City in November for the national award announcement and banquet.
Family Focus’ mission is to promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening families in and with their communities.

Volunteers from EY Give Family Focus Highland Park a Fresh Coat of Paint

In October, Family Focus Highland Park welcomed more than 40 staff members from EY as part of its annual “Day of Service.” With supplies generously donated by EY and the Highland Park Home Depot they painted the offices and program spaces of the center.

EY staff volunteers met Highland Park participants and learned more about Family Focus Highland Park programs. The center administers three programs: the Parent/Child Drop-In Center, a bilingual enrichment and socialization program where parents can network while interacting with their children; Right from the Start, a Spanish-speaking early childhood program; and the After School Activities Program, an enrichment program that offers after school programming for working families in the Highland Park community.

Safe Babies Court: Q & A with Dr. Kimberly Mann

Family Focus interviewed Dr. Kimberly Mann in anticipation of her keynote speech at the upcoming 2018 Annual Meeting. To read the full interview please visit our website.

Q: What is the Early Childhood Court Team (ECCT) experience like?
Dr. Mann: First, the ECCT has a shared interest to tackle the broad array of needs that a family in the child welfare system is struggling with and to approach the needs holistically. This elevates the family’s experiences and inspires more curiosity about their situation rather than judgment. It makes everyone on the team wonder what other hardships are affecting that parent. Secondly, parents aren’t treated as an object going through a hostile system. Hopefully this increases the feelings of safety and respect so parents open up and will share more details about their family’s experiences.

Q: In what other ways is this different from traditional court?
Dr. Mann: A significant area of emphasis is the need to use court testimonies to convey pieces of the family’s story. In this model you’re not always having a traditional experience of testifying; it is conversational. This greater level of collaboration helps keep a parent engaged with interventions. One of the core features of the baby court model is the monthly Child and Family Team meeting. These team meetings bring 8 to 10 participants, such as caseworkers, attorneys, community support and clinicians, to a single table. It eliminates isolated decision-making made by the parent. Different parties can hear the same information and it will inform them of how to best help the parent (e.g., drug and trauma counselors) and coordinate their individual care strategies.

Q: Part of the mission of Safe Babies Court is to increase awareness about the impact of trauma on children. How does the ECCT do that?
Dr. Mann: By gathering the entire court team into one room each month, it increases their involvement so they can see first-hand the parent’s struggles instead of only seeing them every four months at a court appearance. In addition, this format deals with not only the child’s trauma but addresses the parent’s as well. A mother can’t understand her child’s trauma if she doesn’t work through her own history, and members of the ECCTs are now better able to see how that can affect a family.

For more information please join us on March 7th, 2018 at Jones Day from 5:30 p.m.—7:00 p.m. for our 2018 Annual Meeting.

Thank you to our staff for celebrating many years with us!

In December Family Focus held its annual staff benefits meeting and appreciation party where recognized staff who have been with us for many years. Thank you to all staff:

10 years: Bobbie Hinden, Contessa Green, Carmen Diaz, Carrie Brown and Shaquita Booker
15 years: Cathleen Hamilton, Loretta Espeut
20 years: Terry Beem and Martha Ortiz
32 years: Joann Avery
Event Spotlight: Family Focus Open House

In the fall Family Focus welcomed community members to the Lawndale center to provide a comprehensive tour of our programs and centers. Staff from each center attended and led event attendees on tours to share firsthand what their work with Family Focus entails and their passion for programs. Attendees heard stories, examples of programs, and how our services benefit participants from the staff that work at our centers each day. Center staff also showcased their own individual projects, like the Foster Street Garden at Family Focus Evanston, prenatal classes in high schools from Family Focus DuPage, and learning STEM through robotics at Family Focus Highland Park.

William Blair

Special thanks to William Blair for sponsoring the event, and to all who attended. If you’re interested in attending the 2018 Fall Open House, sign up for email updates on our website: www.family-focus.org.

Clockwise from left to right: Merri Ex speaking to the crowd, Carrie Brown from Englewood presenting on the 21st Century program, Nora Barquin and a participant from Highland Park sharing robotics, Colette Allen showcasing the Evanston garden, and Rosaura Realegeno educating an event attendee on prenatal classes.