Power of Fathers Program Receives National Award

The Power of Fathers collaborative was awarded the 2017 Mutual of America Community Partnership Award Honorable Mention. The award features one final winner and two honorable mentions from hundreds of nationwide applicants. The award announcement noted that “The committee was blown away by Power of Fathers and the strength and commitment of our partnership to support low-income fathers and their children, not only in Chicago, but in other communities of need through the creation of a replicable and scalable model.”

Four Power of Fathers partners (Children's Home + Aid, Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities, Family Focus, and Metropolitan Family Services) received a $467,000 grant from the Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation to invest in the program. In November, program leaders will travel to New York City to attend the awards dinner for the official announcement of the award by Mutual of America. The Mutual of American Foundation will also host a community celebration in Chicago.

Family Focus is honored to be recognized as part of the Power of Fathers collaborative. For Family Focus, the fatherhood program began as a fathers group for men returning from prison at the Family Focus Lawndale center. It then formalized into the “Mission Men” program in 2011. It features a 12-week curriculum with topics on healthy child development, parental roles including discipline and punishment, relationships with the child’s mother, conflict resolution, custody and visitation guidance, and resolving personal barriers, such as for housing and employment.

Evanston Families Go Back to School Shopping with Target

Through a generous partnership between Target and the United Way’s Neighborhood Network Initiative, children from Family Focus Evanston were treated to $100 gift cards to shop for school items at Target. Evanston Cradle to Career, a longtime partner of Family Focus, is Evanston’s Neighborhood Network partner of the United Way.

Community representatives joined families, including Mayor Steve Hagerty, former Alderman Delores Holmes, and Evanston Skokie School District 65 Superintendent, Paul Goren, who provided the school bus to help transport the families to and from Target.

The Neighborhood Network initiative is a collaborative effort to help neighborhoods solve their most pressing problems. In Evanston, it is focused on advancing equitable outcomes for the community’s children.

The Target event advanced that goal by ensuring the children have the essentials needed to start the school year off right.

DACA—Questions and Answers

Are you informed about the impact of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)?

Who is impacted? Can current recipients renew applications? Should they travel? Will recipients’ information be shared with immigration?

Keeping families together is a priority for Family Focus. Visit our website at www.family-focus.org/DACA for answers to frequently asked questions and resources available in our community.

Follow us on social media: 

Facebook: Family Focus, Inc. 

Twitter: @familyfocus_org 

www.familyfocus.org
**FAMILY FOCUS CENTER UPDATES**

**EVANSTON**

Evanston Family Focus participants saw the success of their community gardening project take on added meaning when produce from the garden was donated to the local food depository to provide fresh vegetables for community members.

**DuPAGE**

The DuPage Center has announced a fall 2017 partnership with Addison High School to offer prenatal classes for high school students.

**ENGLEWOOD**

Englewood has been nurturing young entrepreneurs in the community by helping them establish and promote small business ventures such as jewelry and soap making.

**HIGHLAND PARK**

Family Focus youth participants in the camp program learned how to make and test the robotics they created.

**Dr. Kimberly A. Mann Announced as 2018 Annual Meeting Speaker**

Family Focus is privileged to announce Dr. Kimberly A. Mann as the keynote speaker for the 2018 Annual Meeting to be held in March of 2018. Dr. Mann is the Deputy Director of the Office for Child Well-Being for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Dr. Mann has more than 20 years of experience in social work. Before becoming Deputy Director in April, Dr. Mann was the Project Director for the Illinois Birth-3 IV-E Waiver, also known as IB3, and the Safe Babies Court Team Initiative, also known as “baby court.”

**The Early Childhood Court Team (ECCT)** is a therapeutic dependency court, often referred to as Safe Babies Court, that utilizes judicial leadership informed by the developmental needs of infants and toddlers ages zero to three. Baby court aims to reduce the adversarial nature of court processes by increasing communication between caregivers and court leadership.

The court prioritizes the well-being of very young children that have been exposed to early life trauma. The Safe Babies Court helps to lay the groundwork that will support healthy relationships and ultimately strengthen families.

**Roots Aurora 2017**

Family Focus Aurora presented its fifth **Roots Aurora**, a multicultural festival that celebrates the diversity and heritage of the city. Aurora residents Viola Moldovan, Josette Smith, and Prakasham Tata received awards for their work in enriching the city by sharing their cultural heritages.
Family Focus’ mission is to promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening families in and with their communities.

21st Century Program Wins Statewide Award

Family Focus Lawndale was awarded the Best Practice Program Award at the Illinois Afterschool Network (IAN) Spring Conference in April. IAN is an affiliate of the National Afterschool Association. The award recognized the innovative programs and quality work executed by the 21st Century Lawndale Team, including Loretta Espeut, Tina McKinney, Taisha Britten, Martha Ross and Irving Scott.

The Lawndale team also gave a spectacular “Be Creative Storybook Cooking” workshop at the conference. The team taught the model which engages youth in culinary and arts activities projects while building reading, writing and public speaking skills. Other Family Focus 21st Century teams also had exhibits including its cheerleading team, parent engagement programs and the Kidz in the Biz entrepreneurship program.

Financial Update from President and CEO Merri Ex

This summer Family Focus experienced an unexpected cash flow crisis. Due to the Illinois State Budget impasse, Family Focus was owed more than $2.7 million in payments for services rendered through state contracts. The Illinois State Comptroller was able to release enough of the funds to allow Family Focus to avoid announced layoffs and to continue providing services with no interruption. We are grateful to the Comptroller, state officials, and community for advocating on Family Focus’ behalf to continue serving our participants.

Now that the crisis has passed, Family Focus is looking toward the future. We have replaced more than $600,000 in our reserve fund, and are beginning to develop our next three-year Strategic Plan. It will re-energize a planned giving program and endowment.

I was personally gratified by the outpouring of support from donors, politicians, foundations and state public official during the cash shortfall. Family Focus’ board demonstrated its commitment and leadership by its willingness to lend cash to ensure our staff could be paid on time. They know that Family Focus is well-managed and that the shortage was due to the State’s backlog of bills for reimbursement. We are privileged to be part of the Chicago region’s generous philanthropic community.

Warm regards,

Merri Ex

Family Focus Welcomes FY2017 Board Members

The 2017 Fiscal Year was a time of growth for the Board of Directors of Family Focus. Since June of 2016, the board welcomed five new members. Family Focus continues to seek additional civic and business leaders with passion for our mission to represent the diversity of Chicago and our participants as board members. If you would like to know more about the Board of Directors please contact Steve Majsak at 312-777-1923 or steve.majsak@family-focus.org.
“I came to America from Pakistan 22 years ago with my husband. I am educated as a teacher. I believe families are the foundation for their children’s education. I work as an assistant teacher at Volta Elementary for first and second graders. They have participated in the school garden, 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, but they’re also learning to share and work in a team.

Working at Family Focus I relate with parents new to the United States because I am an immigrant too. I know what it’s like to learn to navigate the new systems and learn the new language. I know their culture and can speak Hindi 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.

Those who are not familiar with the immigrant community should know that immigrants come here as hard workers. They should not be expected to know the systems right away in a new community that comes with its own lists of barriers. Family Focus events allow families to meet each other. This gives parents and their children a chance to be involved not only at Family Focus, but at school as well. Together we can create a community of engaged families, inquisitive learners, problem-solvers, and compassionate neighbors. Even a kindergarten student can tell you that is the kind of place they’d want to call home.”

Uzma’s Story

Uzma Mirza is a Family Focus parent, teacher and volunteer who shared her perspective earlier this year at our annual gala. To read her full comments, visit our website at www.family-focus.org