FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Our Anniversary Gala is Family Focus’ biggest event of the year. Beyond its role providing critical contributions to fund our family support services to more than 17,000 community members, this special evening is our homecoming event, our alumni reunion and our birthday celebration. The gala brings together those who share a common commitment to our mission: nurturing children by strengthening families. It provides an opportunity to publicly thank individuals and companies whose impact has dramatically moved our efforts forward. The video unveiled at the event gave a direct view into the communities we serve and the personal growth made possible when we come together in a community-based approach to engage, educate and empower people in an environment of cultural respect.

This newsletter shares highlights of this year’s celebration with you. Special thanks to Scott Swanson, President of PNC Illinois, who served as our 2018 Gala Chair and made this event so successful. I hope you will join us for next year’s event, and take a center tour if you have not seen our programs in action. A recurring theme of this year’s event was the phrase, “I’m Family Focus.” As you read these pages, I hope you will experience the magic of the evening. You’re Family Focus, too. We appreciate your belief in what we can accomplish together, and we are grateful for your sup-

NEW VIDEO PREMIERED AT 2018 GALA

The new Family Focus video sharing comments from participants at our centers is now accessible on our website at www.family-focus.org.

“I’m Family Focus!” These words were spoken by Family Focus participants of all ages sharing their stories at multiple Family Focus centers. Kelsey Miklos, Marketing and Development Coordinator explained, “Rather than follow one story, we decided to bring the camera into the centers to capture activities taking place.”

(Story continued on page 2)
NEW VIDEO (continued from page 1)

The video features a Latina mothers’ support group, after-school activities at various centers, a teen mothers’ support group, art projects, homework assistance, and a music and movement program for children. The video includes comments from program staff about the impact of their work in the community.

Excerpts from Shantel Smith’s Family Focus Participant/Staff Gala Speech

“I came to Family Focus when I was 17. I was going into my senior year of high school and I was pregnant. I babysat before so I knew how to change a diaper, feed and burp a baby so why did I need to go to Family Focus? But I was totally wrong. I was clueless. You look at stats like ‘90% of women who have children while still in high school end up on welfare, don’t graduate on time, don’t go to college, and end up working retail.’ It’s like the future is planned for you and it doesn’t look bright.

But at Family Focus it was so different. Family Focus embraces you for who you are. You're not another application or another case number like you are at other places. They see your individuality. They want you to succeed. I was told, ‘Yes, you have a baby now but you can do it. You can be successful. This is not where you will remain.’

Being a Resource Coordinator at Family Focus means that I’m now part of the team. I learned a lot about how to be a staff member from being a participant first. I’ve been where these parents are. I’ve stood in line at the aid office. I’ve been in line at unemployment. I’ve struggled in school. I know what it’s like when you’re looking for someone to help you. That’s where I come in. I bring these resources to make life a little bit easier. You can always move forward.

If someone asked me why they should support Family Focus, I would say ‘Look what happens when you DON’T.’ A young girl is out on her own with a baby. She doesn't know what to do. She doesn't know about labor and delivery. She doesn't have support. She doesn't have a doula. She has to go through all this on her own - the pain, the crying in the middle of the night, learning as you go. Then on top of that having classwork you barely understand. You’re trying to do it all but you have no clue how to do any of this. Nobody warned you, nobody is coaching you along the way. It is the same as a student at school that’s ignored in the back of the class. Nobody talks to them, nobody walks by to check if they’re on task. They just fail.

When they have the support, that student is successful. He participates. He raises his hand. He gets the right answers. Look back at where I was, and look where I am now. That’s how I know the future that I want is attainable. Because of Family Focus, I learned to lead. Now, I provide. I educate. I am an asset to the community. I’m Family Focus.”

To read Shantel’s full speech, visit www.family-focus.org.

View the video at www.family-focus.org.
Comments by recipients of the 2018 Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support

Bryan Samuels
Executive Director, Chapin Hall, University of Chicago

“My mother placed me and my two older brothers in a boarding school for kids from broken homes, so she would have time to get her life together, get the treatment that she needed and ultimately to engage in our lives in a constructive way. I was seven years old. It was a difficult adjustment. I felt abandoned. I was angry that my mother didn’t work harder to get me back. I was frustrated that I couldn’t get the other adults around me to give me what I thought I wanted.

For most of us, we can identify one or two moments in our life where we made a decision that changed the direction and ultimately led us to be the people we are today. It was thirty years ago, and it happened when I walked into a Family Focus program in Lawndale. More than anything else, Family Focus embodies Bernice Weissbourd’s humanity and her commitment to the well-being of all children. What I realized by the end of the summer was that the childhood experience I had had the benefit of giving me some insight into the adversity and the trauma that many of the families that lived in North Lawndale were experiencing.

There are plenty of children in Chicago that feel abandoned, or angry, or feel frustrated or disappointed, just as I did. And there are plenty of mothers like mine who struggle to give them the love and the care that they deserve. Just remember, those same kids can be motivated, purposeful, and have determination. For all of the families that are supported by Family Focus, for all the staff, administrators, board of directors, and donors—the work that Family Focus does changes lives. I know that firsthand. It changed my life, and I’m eternally grateful.”

To read Bryan’s full comments, visit www.family-focus.org

Sidley Austin
Accepted by Sara Gourley, Partner

“Family Focus has been such a joy for me in my life. Lawyers are people too. I’m very proud of the contributions Sidley Austin has been able to make over the long term. I have seen the difference—the real difference—Family Focus has been able to make. My team has seen that turn into better outcomes for families and opportunities children to thrive. My partners and colleagues believe in trying to make that progress in Chicago and around the world. Bernice, you inspire and continue to inspire us. You provide the spark that makes us want to make a difference.”

Irving Harris Foundation
Accepted by Joan Harris and Phyllis Glink

Joan Harris, President
“This is a wonderful evening. I've heard a lot about great institutions, and what Family Focus has done over these many years. Bernice, not to honor us but to honor you once again, and for all of you in the room I want to Pay tribute because of the two people who are not here tonight. One is Irving Harris, the other is Barney Weissbourd. Thank you for this award.”

Phyllis Glink, Executive Director
“I have been blessed and privileged to work with the Irving Harris Foundation. Irving Harris was an incredible man, a visionary leader, a strategic philanthropist and a warm, funny and caring human being. Driven by equity and social justice, he invested in leaders and he relied on relationships with others to guide him in philanthropy. It was no surprise when he partnered with Bernice Weissbourd and her husband on Family Focus. Bernice, for 23 years, you have been a mentor and role model for me. You envisioned and then created the Family Support movement, driven by the vision that all families should have service rooted in their community and responsive to their needs. Family Focus has remained true to your original mission. Family Focus is committed to whole family support and engagement and diverse leadership development. It is more relevant today than it has ever been and we have been proud to be partners with you for all of these years. So Bernice, thank you for your visionary leadership, and our friendship.”
Special thanks to our 2018 gala sponsors:

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SIDLEY
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Sharad Kapur

For more gala photos, visit www.family-focus.org.