

### Annual Summer Institute Held for All Staff

To kick off the new fiscal year that began July 1, the Family Focus Program and Quality Assurance team hosted its annual Summer Institute. Due to COVID-19 precautions, the conference was held virtually with staff participating from home or in offices with social distancing.

This year’s theme was Beach Staycation and featured team-building tropical themed games and trivia between workshops and professional development seminars. Topics staff could explore included personal empowerment for better mental health, adjusting to change, and strategies for communication and connection to build trust with colleagues and participants. Program staff could also attend workshops specific to their job function, such as helping students navigate troubling current events, and how to approach program work with a social-emotional learning lens.

Leadership Team also used the time to share organizational updates, including revisiting our new mission and vision statements, an overview of new policies that were instated since the merger, and a workshop on financial literacy.

Family Focus hosts two all-staff institutes annually. Each meeting is a two-day conference that allows staff from all 12 locations to gather, even virtually. Family Focus hopes to gather for the next Institute in person.



Screenshot of President & CEO Dara Munson addressing staff at the kick-off of the Summer Institute.

### Return to In-Person Learning Means More Engaging After School Programs



Staff at Oscar DePriest Elementary School welcome back students for a brand new year of in-person learning.

The first day of the new 2021-2022 school year brought joy to staff and students after coming through the challenges of engaging students in virtual after-school programming. “Virtual programs were hard. Students were already fatigued by being on their computers all day for school, or parents didn’t want their kids having even more screen time, so it was hard to keep kids and parents engaged,” said Carrie Brown, Program and Center Director for Family Focus Englewood.

Despite the challenges of hosting programs remotely, last year’s virtual programs tried to mimic regular curriculum topics as closely as possible: homework help, activities to support social-emotional learning, activities such as cooking or arts and crafts, and projects themed around issues such as civic rights and equality for Black men and women and people of color.

For schools that work with Family Focus Aurora, after school staff dropped off packets of materials each week as they were not able to facilitate the program themselves due to privacy issues. A teacher from the school would do each day’s activity with the students. “It was challenging. Sometimes a student needed help and we couldn’t see their work to support them,” said Jorge Cabadas, Community Resource Coordinator.

As schools reopened in August and September, most Family Focus after school programs began in October.

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**This year each newsletter will focus on one of our core program areas: early childhood education, youth development and family support. This edition focuses on youth. ENJOY!**  
**- Dara Munson, President & CEO**

## Youth Programs Support Communities Facing Violence

After spending most of the 2020-2021 school year doing only virtual meetings, Family Focus staff were thrilled to welcome students to in-person youth development programs this summer. Unfortunately, safety concerns resulted in lower enrollment numbers for programs and parents struggled not only with COVID-19, but also with neighborhood violence concerns.

To maintain proper social distancing, most activities took place outdoors. At Wentworth Gardens Park, located nearby Guaranteed Rate Field, gun violence resulted in the summer programs being cut short for some of our Southside centers.

“There was a shooting every 2-3 days, resulting in death for people that grew up and lived in [our students’] same community,” said Valerie Moore, Mentor Program Supervisor for Family Focus. “Our youth cannot play outside like before, can’t even go to the neighborhood gas station. Traveling through communities to get to and from school can sometimes mean that they will travel through neighborhoods that can be very dangerous for them.”

For Family Focus Evanston, the violence and the systemic practices that have led to the divide in crime, wealth, access to health care, and more for Black people and others of color have been talking points for programming. JoAnn Avery, who leads after school and summer camp programming, focused the 2021 summer camp curriculum on such topics. Students studied the “lesser known” Black leaders in American history and community advocacy work by creating a presentation to bring a new library to the 5th Ward in Evanston. In between yoga, outdoor activities, swimming, and other fun, students brought their presentation to local organizations for support and will be presenting their idea to the Evanston Public Library in the near future.

*Pictures (right) from summer camp at Family Focus Evanston*



# Return to In-Person Learning Means More Engaging After School Programs *(continued)*

Because centers serve different school districts in different cities across NE Illinois, after school programs operate differently from location to location. However, they all share a common goal: engage children during hours immediately after school when participation in risky behaviors is higher due to lack of supervision. This time is filled with activities to supplement learning that happens during regular school hours, as well as provide a safe space for students.

But after school programs are more than just homework help. Many of our programs also engage parents or caregivers as a key participant in their child's learning. Involving the whole family is a key goal for our Sustainable Schools, Community Schools and Parent Mentoring programs and has been shown to increase children's school participation, grades and attendance. Community partnerships also provide more resources for students and parents. Relationships with food depositories provide a healthy snack each day, health organizations help parents make sure that their child is up to date on all immunizations and checkups, and referrals to other social service agencies provide resources for parents.

**Cooking and Healthy Eating:** Students learn about healthy eating and cooking, and then are encouraged to take their recipes home and cook with their families. Cooking promotes math skills, following directions, and building positive family relationships through teamwork.

**Entrepreneurship Projects:** The "Kidz in the Biz" project had students research, test, and create their own products and work together as teams to market them at a mock business fair.

**Media:** With the popularity of YouTube, programs are using it as a tool to teach about media. Students learn about video production and how they can tell their own story or spotlight issues they care about using visual media.

**Technology:** To support STEM practices, students have had the chance to play with drones and virtual reality. Virtual reality has been used for students to take virtual field trips, like into space to see our solar system.

**Mental Health:** After such challenging previous two school years due to COVID-19, many schools are zeroing in on mental health care as part of the 2021-2022 after school curriculum. Activities include meditation and yoga, as well as other mindfulness activities.

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Though it may sound similar to mental health activities, SEL is a framework to help students learn how to manage their emotions, build quality relationship skills, develop healthy identities, show sympathy and empathy for others, and make caring decisions. Examples of SEL frameworks used in our after school programs are mindfulness practices, encouraging a supportive atmosphere, sharing feelings and creating a safe space for students to honor their big feelings, life experiences, and stimulating discussions. All activities are designed to be age appropriate.



Note: Pictures of participants not wearing masks were taken prior to March 2020.



# FAMILY FOCUS

Family Focus invests in strengthening families and their children in Chicago and NE Illinois so they build social capital and achieve upward economic mobility through high-quality innovative programs and services, grounded in anti-racism and social justice.

## Teladoc Fills Backpacks of Supplies for Students



On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, during Teledoc's national conference in Chicago, executives from across the country worked together to fill 1,500 backpacks with school supplies - all donated by Teledoc to give to Family Focus youth participants.

"Every child wants to start the first day of school ready to succeed. For parents who find buying a new backpack and supplies a challenge, this gift levels the

playing field, giving our youth participants the same tools and opportunity to be an equal part of the school community," said Steve Majsak, Senior VP External Relations. "Special thanks to board member Andrew Turitz and the team from Teledoc for making this possible!"

## Consider Family Focus for your Planned Giving

### ***Build your legacy of compassion and caring for children and families!***

Over the years friends have made gifts, large and small, through their will or trust that support children and families served by Family Focus. These gifts have been used for immediate critical needs or planning for emerging needs of the community. As our logo shows, you are part of the village community surrounding our families with care and compassion!



One long-time friend left a bequest for Family Focus. She lived to be 103 years old and her entire adult life was dedicated to helping children and families by volunteering at Family Focus and other Chicago institutions. Her son told us, "My Mother wanted to keep giving and helping children, even after she was gone. She felt it was important to leave a gift through her will for a cause she loved her whole life."

Another friend of Family Focus passed away recently and we learned of her bequest. Her niece emailed to give us the sad news. She said her aunt "has Family Focus in her will. She loved Family Focus, your mission and all the wonderful people associated with your organization."

If you have included Family Focus in your estate plans - *Thank You!* It's easy to add a bequest in your will; contact us for specific language or ask your financial advisors.

To receive more information, please contact:

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