Nurturing children. Strengthening Families.

40+ YEARS STORIES

FAMILY FOCUS

Nurturing Children • Strengthening Families

YEAR	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
FAMILY FOCUS	Irving Harris Bernard and Bernice Weissbourd **1976:** Family Focus incorporated June 30, 1976 with funding from **Bernard Weissbourd and Irving Harris. Bernice Weissbourd** is the first president and executive director. Delores Holmes **1976**: Family Focus opens at the Miller School in Evanston. Delores Holmes is the first center director.	**1977: Family Focus Woodlawn** opens in conjunction with the **University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration.**	**1978: Family Focus Lincoln Park** opens with the support of the **Junior League of Chicago.** **1978:** ***Creating Drop-In Centers: The Family Focus Model*** by Bernice Weissbourd is published.	**1979: Family Focus Evanston** receives a grant from the **City of Evanston** to renovate a facility near Evanston Township High School to serve as a drop-in center for pregnant and parenting teens.	**1980: Family Focus Our Place** opens in Evanston.	**1981:** Family Focus hosts the first national **Family Support Conference** which becomes the **Family Resource Coalition of America.** Walter Mondale **1981:** Family Focus celebrates its fifth year anniversary with keynote speakers **Walter Mondale** and **Dr. T. Berry Brazelton.**	**1982: Family Focus West Town** opens with support from the **Junior League of Chicago.** **1982: Family Focus Lawndale** is established at the invitation of **Farragut High School's** principal.	**1983: Family Focus Aurora** opens, the first agency in this community to offer comprehensive family support programs for Hispanic families. **1983:** ***Deep Blue Funk and Other Stories*** by Dan Frank is published, sharing stories of Family Focus pregnant and parenting teens.	**1984: Family Focus Evanston** opens in the Foster school building in Evanston and networks with other service providers to assure access to a wider variety of educational opportunities in a central location.	**1985:** ***Working With Teen Parents: A Survey of Promising Approaches*** by Bernice Weissbourd is published. **1985: Family Focus West Town** is renamed **Nuestra Familia ("Our Family").**
World Events	Apple II introduced 	Jimmy Carter becomes 39th President 	Best Picture: Annie Hall 	Three Mile Island nuclear accident 	John Lennon shot by a fan 	Ronald Reagan becomes 40th President 	Alice Walker publishes *The Color Purple* 	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day becomes official holiday 	Macintosh computer launched 	"We Are the World" recorded

YEAR	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
FAMILY FOCUS	 **1986:** Family Focus' day-long symposium, ***America's Children: Who Cares? Who Should?*** airs on public television and is telecast nationally.	**1987:** Family Focus launches **Kids PEPP** (Public Education and Policy Project) in partnership with the **Ounce of Prevention Fund.** Maureen Patrick **1987:** Family Focus appoints **Maureen Patrick** executive director.	**1988: Family Focus Lawndale** home visiting program becomes one of four pilot sites of the **Prevention Initiative of the Illinois State Board of Education.**	 Adele Smith Simmons **1989: Adele Smith Simmons**, President of the **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation,** addresses Family Focus' public education event.	**1990: Family Focus, Inc.** business office moves from Evanston to downtown Chicago. **1990: The Family Focus Training Division** opens to train professionals in the family support movement.	 Senator Jay Rockefeller **1991: Family Focus' 15th Anniversary Celebration**, featuring **Senator Jay Rockefeller** and honoring **Dr. James Comer** culminates in a year-long program of special public education and training initiatives.	**1992:** ***The Fabric of Family Resource Programs: A Training Manual*** by Bernice Weissbourd is published.	**1993: Family Focus Aurora** celebrates its 10th anniversary.	**1994:** Family Focus, **Kraft Foods,** and the **Governor's Office** join forces to expand **Project Success** programs for at-risk youth in eight Chicago community schools.	**1995: The Family Focus Training Division** closes due to lack of funding. Individual training continues wherever possible.
World Events	Space Shuttle Challenger accident 	Reagan tells Soviets, "Tear down this wall!" 	CDs outsell vinyl records for the first time 	George H. Bush becomes 41st President 	Nelson Mandela released from prison 	Anita Hill testifies at Clarence Thomas' Supreme Court nomination. 	Bobby Fischer beats Boris Spassky 	William Clinton becomes 42nd President 	U.N. International Year of the Family 	O.J. Simpson case—opening arguments.

40+ YEARS STORIES

OUR MISSION

OUR MISSION is to promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening families in and with their communities.

CENTERS

Aurora
DuPage
Englewood
Evanston
Family Network
Lawndale
Nuestra Familia

PROGRAMS

After School Programs
Doula Services
Early Literacy
Family Advocacy Centers
Fatherhood Initiative
Healthy Heart and Families
Home Visiting
Immigration Services
Parent Leadership
Trauma Support for Young Children

40+ YEARS STORIES

Dear Family Focus friend,

I have the honor of presenting Family Focus' "Forty Years + Forty Stories." We have thousands of stories about how Family Focus changes families and communities. On the occasion of our 40th anniversary year, we've compiled forty of our favorite stories that reflect the impact of Family Focus on those we serve, as well as the communities where we work.

One of those stories is mine. In 1980, my husband Mitchell and I were living in West Lincoln Park when we had our first baby. At the time I had been the executive director of Erie Neighborhood House for five years and thought I knew something about raising children. However, when Abigail was born, I learned quickly how much I didn't know. She was colicky, didn't sleep much and I was at a loss. I had heard about Family Focus through the neighborhood grapevine. At six weeks old, I put Abby in the stroller and walked to my respite, Family Focus. Immediately, the director asked to hold the baby, introduced me to other moms, gave me a cup of coffee, and for the first time since the birth I felt supported. I then took parenting classes, made friends, learned about nursery schools and was launched as a more confident mother.

Over the years, Family Focus has grown and evolved to connect with communities throughout Chicagoland, but we still strive for that moment when a new parent has the same realization I had–that support is there. Last year we provided support to 18,500 children, parents, and caregivers. It happens one at a time, face-to-face, and person-to-person. Together, we nurture children by strengthening families.

Warm regards,

Merri Ex
President and CEO

1

Bernice Weissbourd, Founder

How can I pick my favorite story from 40 years at Family Focus? It's like asking me to choose my favorite child! They are all special. Seeing lives transformed as young children get the right start has been incredibly rewarding.

What I can share is how much has changed. When we started Family Focus four decades ago, there was little awareness of the importance of the first three years of life and of the significance of supporting the whole family as the key to nurturing children. Today this information is common knowledge, and has influenced legislation and policy decisions regarding children.

Family Focus has been a major player in this process—as a trusted resource for information, as a convener of national conferences, and as a leader in what became known as the "family support movement." This is far beyond anything I even dreamed of when we started our first center in an Evanston schoolhouse. I remember we planned it for 50 families, and within a month had 350 families. Clearly, a family resource center fills a need! Every step of the way, we have had great staff. I'm sorry I can't mention them all, but our foundation was set by our first center directors, Delores Holmes and Blanca Almonte, and we have had great friends at our side, Edward Zigler (founder of Head Start), Julius Richmond (surgeon general) and T. Berry Brazelton (famous pediatrician and author). Always devoted and guiding us were Irving Harris and my husband, Barney.

The power of Family Focus is the power of a community grounded in equality and respect for each other, bound by a deep commitment to a mission. We have come a long way, and over the years have garnered the strength to continue this journey until support for children and families is an integral, unquestioned aspect of our society. All new parents, gazing at their newborn, make a promise to give their baby a life of opportunity. By sharing what we know, providing support, and advocating for families, we can help make that a reality.

2

T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.

I met Bernice Weissbourd when Irving Harris brought her onto the board of ZERO TO THREE, and I fell in love with her immediately. We worked together, sharing ideas, and learning from each other.

Bernice and Family Focus led the way to help us realize how important it is to give family support and education. Everyone knows how critical it is to involve parents to support children now. At Head Start, as soon as we got parents involved, everything changed. Bernice had that impact, over and over.

Most educators tell parents what they're not doing, and then see the parents fall apart. Family Focus is different because of the emphasis on how parents can learn for themselves. Not teaching them. Letting them learn. They ask the parents, "What do you want to do?" and the parent blossoms. If you can learn a baby's behavior, you can see how to nurture them. The baby will lead you to becoming an experienced parent. Family Focus gives parents a sense of empowerment and self-importance that is passed onto the child, too. Bernice has used her resources and her brilliant mind to push and do what she wanted to do—and we're all damn lucky!

3

Alisha Garcia Flores

Director of Community Schools and Youth Initiatives

I've been with Family Focus now for almost four years. In that time I have had the privilege of working alongside a devoted staff that is passionate about serving children and families. In the past five years alone, our community schools programs have reached about 10,000 children and families in 15 communities. From our STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs to our healthy cooking and financial literacy programs, children are receiving quality hands-on learning experiences. I'm proud that our afterschool programs are engaging students to become inquisitive learners, problem-solvers, effective communicators, collaborators and self-directed learners. They are having fun and learning! Our partnerships with parents, teachers, administrators and other partner organizations also creates a plethora of resources for families and a collaborative learning community that has a life-long positive impact. It's really exciting to hear the stories of how our students are improving in school and how families are better connected in the community.

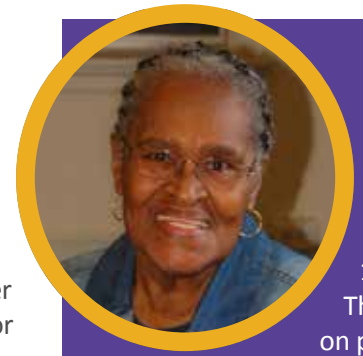
Anne Touhy 4

Chairman of the Board, Ounce of Prevention Fund

In 1978, the Junior League of Chicago and Family Focus founded Family Focus West Lincoln Park to serve a then ethnically and economically diverse neighborhood of Chicago. Chris Ronneberg was our first volunteer coordinator. We incorporated an innovative volunteer model with 30 trained volunteers from both the community and the Junior League of Chicago serving as staff associates.

Blanca Almonte, the center's first director, was great at helping volunteers recognize both their ability to be role models for other young women and to listen to and learn from the families with whom Family Focus works. When some moms were certain they could not teach their children, Blanca asked them to share what they did know—and got a surge of examples of paper flower crafting, dancing and cooking. What joy on the mothers' faces when they were told they had just taught both their children and us new things.

The staff's great ability was in helping mothers who thought they had no skills recognize the tremendous strengths they already had on which they could build. One opportunity led to another as Family Focus both grew its outreach in opening community-based centers and in starting a national family support movement through its partnerships. Each decade anniversary has presented an opportunity to celebrate the depth and breadth of Family Focus' impact.



5 Delores Holmes

Former Center Director Evanston

We opened the first site at the Miller School in 1976. We thought we could serve 50 families. The first year we served 350 families. We focused on parents with children 0-3. It caught on like wildfire. Our goal was to reach lower-income families, but we got a huge response from middle- and upper-income parents who needed support.

Somehow, we were hitting on what was missing. So many parents need to fill the void of family connections. We stood out and said, "Everybody needs support. Come in." It was a place you could bring the kids and have someone to watch your children while you interacted with other parents facing similar things.

The thing that makes Family Focus different is just the whole idea of being at a place. We could be a listener, helping parents through partnerships. Parents could connect with others and still have a relationship with Family Focus. We'd be the "someone" right by their side.

6

Joy, Participant, Lawndale

I was living in Nigeria with my husband and four children when my husband converted from being a Muslim to the Christian faith. That was a death sentence from a radical Islamic sect in Nigeria. When they broke into our home and left a knife as a threatening message, we moved to Chicago.

Living in a homeless shelter, I was suffering from panic attacks, and my husband had post-traumatic stress disorder. Family Focus became our safe haven. When my son Jayden first came there, he would scream if anyone came near. He was developmentally delayed due to the trauma. The shelter doesn't allow guests, but they had worked with Family Focus, so twice a month Chontrale from Family Focus visited us. The first day she brought a toy for Jayden. He grabbed the toy and ran back. But soon, they began playing and eventually Jayden came to her. He wasn't speaking and she got him speech therapy.

Family Focus transformed my life. They were the shoulder I needed to lean on. When I was losing it, they gave me hope. They gave me food and resources when I needed them most. They took my kids on field trips with other kids. They had nutrition classes and exercise programs. I joined my first yoga class. When I looked at myself in a mirror during a makeup class, I found myself again. Family Focus said, "We are going to walk with you," and they did. They gave me that support, and a push, and I took off.

7

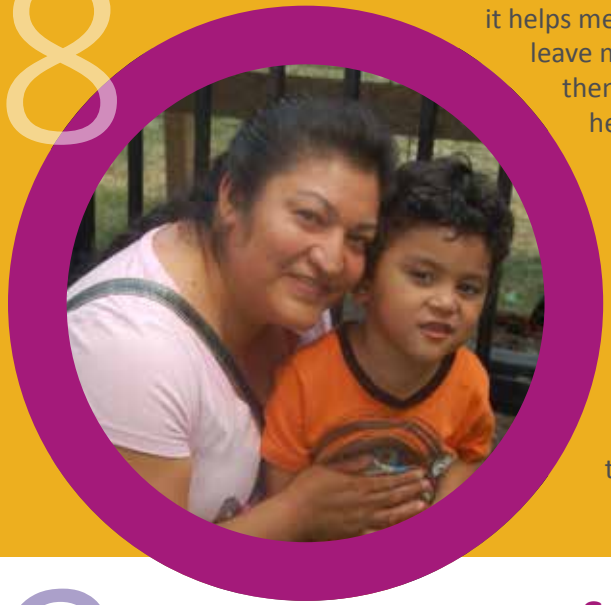
Donna Barrows, Former Board Member

Thirty years ago when our first child was an infant, my husband and I met Bernice Weissbourd at a reception for Family Focus. We fell in love with her on the spot. Everything she spoke about resonated so deeply with us. Bill was a pediatrician and I was a social worker interested in social policy, so what we heard about the importance of the zero-to-three years reinforced much of what we knew already. But as new parents, the idea that every parent needs support really connected with us on an emotional level. Despite our professional training, nearby family, good health, and comfortable home, we still had those "deer-in-headlights" parenting moments. And if we often wondered what to do, how much harder was it for parents with far fewer resources? Clearly a Family Focus center was needed on every corner! I joined the board a short time later.

Family Focus pioneered what came to be known as the family support movement. One of its principles is that all families have strengths, and that by building on their inherent abilities all parents and all children can grow and thrive. How empowering for a family to be treated this way; not as a problem to be fixed, but as capable parents and guardians who, with support, can raise capable children. Over the years, programming at Family Focus centers has grown and changed in response to changing demographics, community needs and culture, and empirical research. What has remained the same is the commitment to supporting families in and with their communities. This respect for individuals and communities as true partners always has been and continues to be a core Family Focus value.

It has been a privilege to be part of the Family Focus family for the past thirty years. Congratulations to Bernice and to all those who, for forty years, have contributed to helping each parent and each child realize their potential. And thank you to all who are ensuring that Family Focus continues its success into the future.

8 Laticia, Participant, Nuestra Familia



I'm so proud of being a part of Family Focus because it helps me a lot with my kids. Before I couldn't leave my son because he'd start to cry. But then once I participated in Family Focus, he's able to say, "Bye bye, Mommy!"

Family Focus supports the whole family. My son had a surgery last year and it was so hard for me but they were there. They supported me with the emotional part. He had a tumor and had a 14-hour surgery. He is still in physical therapy and Family Focus is still there for me.

9 Suzanne Kerbow

Program Director for Education
Polk Bros. Foundation

The Polk Bros. Foundation admires and values Family Focus' leadership in Chicago's Community Schools movement on behalf of our students and families. Its expert staff engage children and their families in a myriad of programs and activities at their schools that enable them to overcome obstacles to learning and build skills needed for success at work and in life.

10 Dujon

Participant, Evanston

Family Focus is where it all began for me. From the summer programs to the after school programs during the year, this center has helped to mold and motivate me into the man that I am today.

JoAnn Avery saw something in me many others did not. Her belief in the man that I could become has helped fuel my passion to become more than what society might have expected for a single parent child growing up in the 5th ward of Evanston. After my time at the center, I have been able to travel, work, and study in over 33 countries on five continents, allowing me to develop strong intercultural communication and leadership skills.

I have completed my Bachelor's of Science Degree in International Business with minors in Accounting and Nonprofit Management at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. I am the co-founder and chief executive officer of a mobile application start-up in LA and I secured a full-time job offer working at Deloitte LLP in London with their U.S Corporate Tax Group.

Anything is possible if you believe in yourself and you surround yourself with people who believe in you. I want to thank Family Focus for igniting the flame within me.

11

Eric, Participant, Evanston

When I was three years old, my mom was addicted to drugs and was living with a physically abusive man. When he burned down our house, we lost everything and were homeless. My mom worked hard to give her kids the basic necessities. Family Focus filled in the missing pieces for us. It was the crutch she needed—the father, husband, grandparent, and psychologist we all needed to fill the void.

For many kids who go to Family Focus, life is about survival. Some live in emotionally and physically abusive homes. Some have been abandoned. Family Focus is life-changing and its impact is generational. It's literally changing lives. Family Focus gives hope. Without hope, you don't have an appreciation for life and a zest for living.

Most people who have walked in my footsteps end up in jail, addicted to drugs, or dead. My destiny changed because of places like Family Focus and the people who came into my life. Your circumstances don't define who you are.

Over thirty years ago, I walked into Family Focus needing their help and they were there for me. For the last 15 years, my clients and I have raised over $300,000 for children in need and the homeless. We are the bridge between the fortunate and the unfortunate. Family Focus has taught me that I can make a significant difference in someone's life if I am willing to give a little time, energy and love.

12

Blanca Almonte, Former Center Director, Nuestra Familia

In 1978, I was interviewed by Bernice Weissbourd and Junior League volunteers for the director position at the new West Lincoln Park center in a former parochial school. Soon, we were seeing many professional women who lived in the area with their children. They were parents accustomed to achieving success in their educational and professional lives. However, when confronted with a new baby, often without any family in the area, they sought the family support offered by Family Focus.

We provided them with information about parenting, a place to meet other parents and develop a community of support. As the neighborhood gentrified, it became more difficult to access funding, so we decided to open a new center in the growing Hispanic community of West Town in Chicago in 1982. We entered into a partnership with Erie Neighborhood House, and when it expanded to a new location, we were included in the new site plans. We thrived in the new location and created an advisory council which functioned as a leadership training program. The parents decided on a new name for the center—Nuestra Familia (Our Family). The mothers were sponges, eager to learn about child development from our staff and each other. It was a very exciting time—to create a new center with colleagues, supporters and parents.

13 Veronica
Participant, Englewood

Veronica shared her story in a feature in the Chicago Reader. She and her four children were walking home when they heard gunfire. A man had been shot in a drug deal gone bad, and his car, which had crashed, was in flames. Veronica said, "All the kids and me were shaking." She knew her kids needed counseling. She found support at Family Focus Englewood. "Just to have somebody listen to you and not judge you—that's golden. We built strategies to figure out the best parenting skills I needed to help my kids recover from trauma and dysfunction."

14 Pat Garza
Former Foundation Program Officer, Former Participant
Lincoln Park

I was a Family Focus mom at the Lincoln Park location. Working in philanthropy at Kraft, the thing that always set Family Focus apart was its ability to meet each community where they are. Family Focus pays attention to the specific needs of each community. They are very culturally relevant. Their staff is bilingual and bicultural. They are attuned to the communities they serve. It's a model that works. It can be replicated anywhere because the hallmark of the program is Family Focus' commitment to define what the community needs.

15 Judy Langford
Former Staff Member

Of course I got connected to Family Focus through Bernice. I was a contributing editor at Redbook and was asked to investigate a story on family resource programs in 1981. That story was never published, although a later cover story in PARADE gave me a chance to use the information. Bernice and I stayed in touch. Then Irving Harris and Bernice hired me to develop strategies to generate awareness and support of Family Focus from the state. I met Bernice at the Family Focus office which then was in a closed school in Evanston. I had to bring my own desk! I was asking myself, "Why am I doing this?" when I came the first day.

And then I saw it. In the open space that we walked through to get to the office, there were parents talking while kids ran around. Some parents were gathered in a circle—you couldn't really tell who was a parent and who was staff. It was exactly what Family Focus was all about. This wasn't the kind of intervention or service anyone usually thinks about. Family Focus was developing a community of people to provide a network of support, with shared leadership. This is the thing that has stayed true for Family Focus all these years.

This small network around families is essential for all families to be the parents they want to be. A solid network influences every part of our lives—our perspective on parenting, our political perspective, the decision to be an active community member. Service organizations are usually set up to support individuals: a child, an adult, a client, a patient. Family Focus honors the powerful connections we already have that define our culture and identity and expands the circle of support families feel.

16

Mariana Osoria

VP of Centers, Aurora, DuPage and Nuestra Familia

Why does a recent immigrant bundle up three little kids and make the trek in the snow to Family Focus? It's because she can count on a hot cup of coffee, a warm welcome in her own language, and a chance of seeing someone from her own country. Her children are cherished here, and she is celebrated for making an incredibly bold decision—to actively support her children's early childhood development as well as her own to succeed in a multicultural society.

We help by affirming and strengthening families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities in their journey navigating the US systems—in particular, education systems. We support our families throughout the continuum of their lives from early childhood programs, school age services, family support, adult education, and leadership and development. Our work is not to provide every resource for families, but to support families as they become resources for themselves, their families, and their communities. We are often the gatekeepers to accessing critical support because not enough social service organizations provide bilingual services. When I asked a mom what Family Focus meant to her, she responded, "Family Focus saved my life." She literally said it saved her life. We do not realize how much of a role we play in people's lives… how important an open door is for folks that may only see closed doors.

17

Kate Goetz, LCSW

Infant Mental Health Specialist, Englewood

One of our participants was a 16 year old teen mom with a one year old baby. The young mom had grown up with caregivers struggling with substance abuse, mental illness, and poverty, and had experienced multiple, severe forms of trauma in her own childhood. She was struggling to have any positive interactions with her baby.

As he grew into a toddler and continued to be exposed to violence and conflict in his home, he exhibited symptoms of significant disturbance—developmental delays, severe tantrums, aggression towards others, and self-harming behavior. Our therapist helped the young mother understand how both she and her baby were impacted by the violence around them, and start making decisions and accessing resources to keep them both safe.

Now she has graduated high school and was the first in her family ever to enroll in college. They moved into a supportive housing program that provided a safe, peaceful environment, and she enrolled her child in a high-quality preschool. The little boy is helpful, inquisitive, and playful. His preschool teachers have not identified any delays or concerns regarding his learning or his emotional-behavioral functioning in school.

18

Ramona
Staff and Former Participant, Lawndale

My daughter was one year old when I started with Family Focus. I thought she had a speech impediment, but a developmental screening showed it was visual. She got glasses at two and everything changed. If we didn't do the screening, we wouldn't have known how to help her. I attended the parents' groups, then became a home visitor and a case manager. I enrolled in school and now I'm graduating with my master's degree.

Family Focus is the place you can get guidance. Sometimes you need a push. I can help moms who are struggling because I was in the same situation they are in now. My life experience is what I can give them.

19

Dr. Dana Suskind
Author, *30 Million Words: Building a Child's Brain*

Family Focus does things that are incredibly powerful. If we have any chance of moving the needle in early childhood development, the ages zero to three is where we need to start. I love what Family Focus does. By helping parents understand the impact they are making by engaging with their children from birth, they are laying a solid foundation for learning. This is where change happens.

20

Elizabeth Tisdahl, Mayor, City of Evanston

My favorite Family Focus story is about the family of my son's grade-school friend. They suffered a great tragedy—the death of a son to cancer. We became friends, and years later, the mother called me to say her family was being evicted. I said, "What do you want me to do?" and she said, "Come sit with me." I sat with her on the street with all her belongings and asked, "What do you want me to do now?" "Take the boys," she said. Her three boys lived with me for a few months. Years later I was telling Delores Holmes, how wonderful it was that the boys were doing well in spite of the circumstances.

Delores explained, "It's all the early childhood development. They're all Family Focus kids." The family used all the opportunities available at Family Focus – particularly when they were young—to make their kids resilient.

Family Focus is amazing, and essential in the Evanston community. It's located exactly where it should be. It's personal. So often you hear other organizations talk about the numbers. Family Focus talks about the individuals.

Working with Family Focus has deepened my understanding of the kids in our community. They want something to do. They want after-school activities, and they want to be active. Kids want action, and they'll find it—good or bad. Many kids who have grown up in Evanston bounced back and forth between the Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center and Family Focus. It's a great way to grow up.

21

22

John W. Rogers, Jr.
Chairman and CEO
Ariel Investments, LLC

From the time I was a child my parents took my education very seriously. They were very passionate about having every educational opportunity available to me. I became involved with Family Focus because I believed deeply in their mission of early childhood education. I wanted to embrace the importance of starting young and was inspired by the impact that Family Focus was having on young families.

JoAnn Avery, Senior Staff Program Coordinator, Evanston

We had a young participant who was 14 years old and pregnant. She talked to me all the time, so she knew she could come to me. I told her for this to work, I needed to tell her mother. As upset as her mother was about her daughter, she knew that she needed help being a grandmother. That's Family Focus. We don't just advocate for the kids. We advocate for the whole family. She asked if she should talk to her daughter, and I said the same thing I tell everyone, "You should always talk to your daughter." I got the mother into the parents group. She needed help processing that her daughter was having a baby—and even that her daughter was having sex at all. She had no idea. Today, they're living in another city. The daughter is doing well. She has a good job in the legal field. Her daughter has graduated and is getting a master's degree. When all this happened in Chicago, they thought they could not get away from it. It did change. But it changed for the better.

It makes me feel overwhelmed when a Family Focus kid comes in and says, "Because of YOU I got my master's. Because of YOU I'm a doctor." What we do at Family Focus mattered to them. What we say puts them on the right track. I had one participant come up to me and say, "Do you remember the spelling bees? Sometimes I was the first one sitting down, but I never gave up." And I said, "I admired you for never giving up." She knew. Now her son is coming here after school every day—just like she did to get the same tools.

Nancy Shirer
Former Director of Illinois Policy, Ounce of Prevention Fund

23

I began working with Family Focus in the 80's when the Prevention Initiative was funding early childhood development block grants in Lawndale. We had a million dollars then funded by the State Board of Education–the program has grown to more than $40 million today.

Two things stood out about Family Focus. The first was the focus on family strength. No one else was doing that. The second was that the Family Focus staff came from the community. Participants could relate to them because they had similar backgrounds.

24

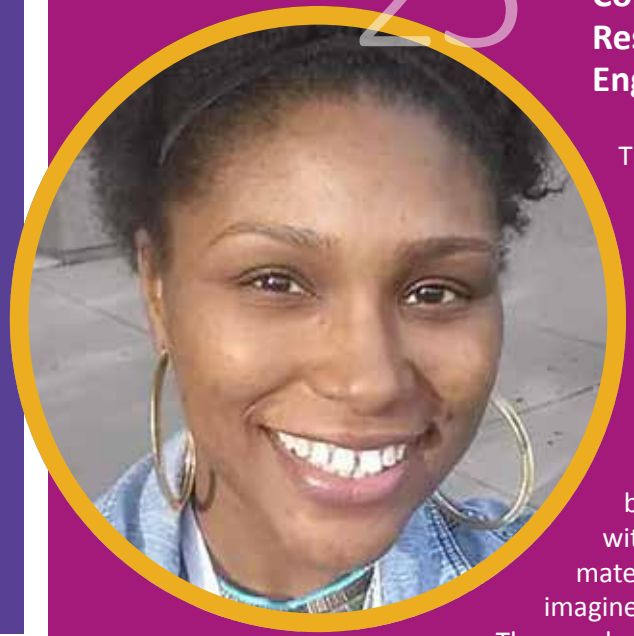
Neil Hughes
Chair, Board of Directors

When I think of my memories as a board member, it all goes back to our mission to nurture children by strengthening families. It's something I really believe in.

The personal challenges I have been faced with in my life, especially the loss of siblings, were made bearable because I have a large extended family. Their presence stabilized my life. I think about those who don't have that kind of nurturing support to count on, and it makes an organization like Family Focus even more critical in our community.

25

Shantel Smith
Community Schools Resource Coordinator, Englewood



The 21st Century School program is not just sitting in class with pencils and paper. We're a hands-on experience. Our students are getting messy. They're building structures with high-quality materials they never imagined they could do. They are learning dance and experiencing a live production of "The Lion King." We are turning the school into a place the community can come for the resources to grow and succeed.

When I was a student, I remember seeing TV shows with students in a science lab. That never happens at my school. When we bring the sciences into the classroom, when students conduct the experiments themselves, we give them a voice in their world and the confidence to be inquisitive learners.

The program is not student-centered. It's family-centered. Ours is an open-door program where parents come and share experiences too. We're giving these parents access to things that were not available to them as children. These shared activities build families. Parents can see the impact on their child's progress, and the parents become our advocates. In so many traditional classrooms, the teacher gets involved when a student does wrong. We give teachers a way to interact with students when they're doing great.

26

Martha
Participant, Family Network

I came to America from a small town in Mexico. For three years here I was a stranger with no friends and no family. I was struggling with depression at the time. Isolation destroys a family. With depressed moms, kids suffer. I had no contact with the world. In my mind, I was still in Mexico. It was like I was living outside my life. Family Network really helped me to connect with a community. Coming to Family Network changed my life.

I began coming when my eight year old was a baby. At the time, he didn't talk. No one I knew could help me. Family Network evaluated my son, brought in a speech therapist and found a school with a therapist. He is speaking now.

This place has become my other home. After I started classes at Family Network, I felt like I could have a life here. Every year, they are offering more programs. The fatherhood curriculum is great. My kids are getting a good education. They're taking classes at the art center. They love to read. They love to go to school.

Sharad Kapur
Treasurer, Board of Directors

I've been on the board for 27 years. It is a fulfilling experience to know that we are making a difference in the young lives of community members with limited resources. We are their advocates. We serve them as a board by (1) focusing on creating a strategic outline with objectives to achieve our mission, (2) revisiting and clarifying the strategic tools that will deliver those objectives, and (3) identifying pathways to measure our progress.

This process is done with vigorous financial oversight. It often takes bold steps in fundraising and financial management. Seeing the programs change lives makes all the work worthwhile. Since the beginning, the board made sure that the value Family Focus put on the frontline through our programs is matched with an equal dedication to ensure that these critical resources will be there for future participants.

27

28 Carol Emig, President, Child Trends, Former Consultant

When Family Focus was planning its 10th anniversary, I had the great opportunity to produce a briefing book, *Caring for America's Children,* to accompany a nationally-televised symposium sponsored by Family Focus. In the process, I had the even greater opportunity to work closely with Bernice Weissbourd, Judy Langford, and Harriet Meyer. I learned so much from these amazing women, who continue to this day to influence my work and my thinking in deep ways.

Two things distinguish Family Focus for me. The first was its early and consistent message that parents are critical to children's development, and therefore deserve society's support. The second is its positive focus on building strong, nurturing families to promote children's well-being. We all know there is much to be done to prevent and address negative outcomes–because we hear it all the time. I'm glad that Family Focus is around to remind us that there is also much work to be done to promote positive outcomes–work that begins with strong, nurturing families.

Over the decades since that 10th anniversary, Harriet, Judy, and I moved on to other organizations. As Family Focus turns 40, it can count among its many accomplishments the large network of people who began or advanced their careers there, and then took what they learned into the world. Count me among the many proud Family Focus alums.

29 Humberto
Participant, Family Network

My wife and I are very grateful that Bertha Chavez from Family Network assisted us before and after the birth of our child. She told us about a class to prepare for our child's birth. She taught my wife how to eat during the pregnancy and how to react during birth. She also taught my wife her rights at the hospital, and her rights to our child. She taught us everything we needed to know. Once our baby was born she showed my wife how to breastfeed, what we needed to do to keep our baby healthy, and exercises needed for a healthy environment. We are grateful she was there to help us.

30 David Hiller
President and CEO
Robert R. McCormick Foundation

We have the honor of sharing history with Family Focus. More than 20 years ago, Irving Harris, the great Chicago philanthropist, told the McCormick Foundation directors, "Invest in our youngest children," and we have been following that advice ever since. That direction led us to Family Focus, which was founded by the legendary Bernice Weissbourd. It has been a superb friendship and partnership, and we have been proud to invest more than $1 million in Family Focus over these years.

At one Family Focus event, I met Jesse, who was involved in Family Focus' Fatherhood Initiative, and learned the story of his struggles to gain custody of his two children. His passionate testimony about how the Fatherhood Initiative helped him deeply moved me, and we had the opportunity to hire him as an employee at Cantigny Park in west suburban Wheaton.

Family Focus helped Jesse navigate the difficult family court system and create a safe and loving environment in which to raise his children. Thanks to the program, he persevered and won custody. Today, thriving in the same household with his children, Jesse serves as a wonderful testament to how truly special Family Focus is to thousands of families across Chicago.

31

Dr. John Struck, Advisory Board, Aurora

In life, you always strive to do something where you can give back. I've been involved with Family Focus for 36 years serving on the advisory board. Every step of the way, Family Focus has always given back to me more than I could ever do for them.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, as principal of a large junior high school on the east side of Aurora undergoing demographic shifts of student enrollment, we faced many challenges. New immigrant families moved into our school community, stretched our existing services, and accentuated the need for more and different services. We were challenged with new cultures to learn, communication issues, language and program gaps, immigration issues, and many transitional challenges to providing a "safe harbor" where students can learn, grow, and be productive.

Family Focus came to the rescue! Together we built a strong community—not just good citizens, but engaged productive leaders. I have witnessed young children become productive citizens, community leaders and parents as a result the services provided by Family Focus. My association with Family Focus has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my 45 years in education. It's been a glorious journey! Congratulations on making a difference.

32

Antonio
Participant, Family Network

We get some points from the other guys to help us make better decisions—how to react to different situations. I enjoy it a lot. We have a better life with better decisions, and a better time for our kids. Even with my wife now, we discuss different ways to resolve problems. It's good for all of us.

[About the experience of his son hugging him at the Fatherhood Initiative graduation] It felt good. He said, "I'm proud of you, Papi." My daughter is nine years old and she knows there's a difference, too. I try to listen to their problems. I help them with their school projects, and I take time to go to their school. I never did that before.

The guys in the class and I still get together. Now we're out inviting other fathers to take the next class. It has given us a better life. That's the point of the class—to get help from other fathers to have a better life for their kids. We're working on it.

33

Adriana
Participant, Family Network

I came to this country in 2000 with my son Javier. I didn't speak English. I was lonely. I received a lot of help from the Right from the Start program. As the name says, they help families from the beginning.

They provided me with free transportation and childcare so I could learn English. My daughter, Tanya, was also learning while she was in childcare. In 2007, my third daughter Jessica was born with serious health problems and required heart surgery. Thanks to the support of the program, I was able to cope with all the stress. The center's activities helped Jessica socialize, and improved her language skills so she was ready for preschool. Today my life is very different. THANK YOU.

34

Arne Duncan
Former United States Secretary of Education

Empowering children begins with creating safe, supportive environments that create pathways to success. Family Focus understands this on a fundamental level. They have reinvented tools to support early childhood development in the home, in the school and in the community. Bernice Weissbourd and her team have done this with great vision and a deep personal commitment to helping the entire family grow together.

Research shows that children do better in school and are less likely to drop out when fathers are involved. Engaged parents can strengthen communities, mentor and tutor students, and demonstrate through their actions how much they value their children's education. Family Focus is the teacher, coach, cheerleader, and mentor every step along the way.

35

Steve Friedman
Board of Directors
Former Participant, Lincoln Park

In the 70's we were all newcomers to Chicago when I became a participant at Family Focus. Chicago was growing at a dynamic pace. We might know a family on the block or next block, but Family Focus became our way to meet other parents facing the same issues. Many of the fathers bonded over basketball games together. We created a babysitting co-op. Some of those friendships made nearly 40 years ago are strong today.

People like us who found Family Focus would have found a way, even if Family Focus was not there. We had churches and synagogues, neighborhood organizations, work places, and social resources. But for others with fewer connections and resources, the changing face of our communities has made the need for Family Focus' social services a critical necessity. A shockingly critical necessity.

Our center model is effective because each center offers a place where people can go to engage with their community members, and not be singled out as a patient or a case. It looks like a community center on the surface, but the Family Focus educational and parenting programs are critical points of intervention for struggling families. We need to break the cycle of poverty with good parenting. That's where it starts.

Olivia
Participant, Lawndale

36

I was homeless at 18. My best is only what I've seen and what I've seen isn't really good at all. I was doing the same that was done to me. And I was trying to change, but you can't really unlearn behavior unless you learn something new. A counselor suggested I take parenting classes at Family Focus.

My daughter Sydney was really challenging. She was diagnosed with ADHD. They wanted to put her on medication. I wasn't ok with that. She needed something different. Because I was able to talk to the people at Family Focus with the right resources, I was able to get my daughter into private school.

She did a "180." She's a math whiz. If I wasn't able to focus on her, and be responsible as a parent, I would never have known it. So I would have medicated my daughter for no reason. It's embarrassing to say, "I don't have this, my kid is doing this," and have somebody judge you and judge your kid on that.

My daughter surprises me all the time, and I believe that it all started from me being able to come here, being able to get what I needed as a mother, for her to be able to get what she needed as a child so that I could be better for her. I had to learn new things to make me the best. And so I was able to get that here.

37

Linda Glew
Advisory Board
Evanston

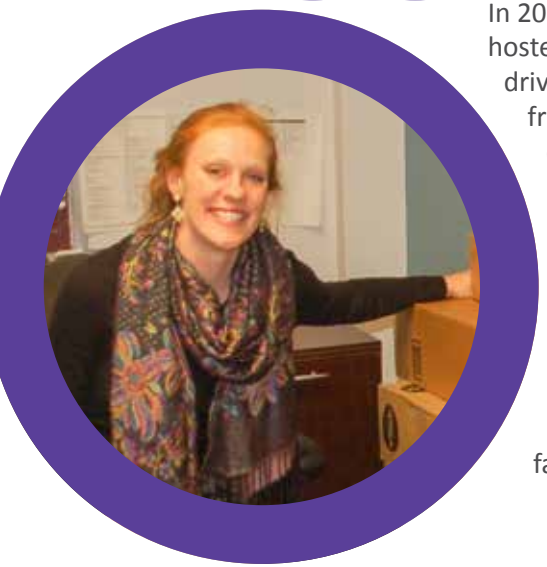
I took a tour of Family Focus with JoAnn. I was so impressed with the program. I started donating items from my house, and when I came in I saw the kids working on their homework and getting tutoring at Family Focus. Over time I could see just how much someone like JoAnn could do to make a difference in the lives of these children. Soon I joined the Family Focus advisory board.

Working with Family Focus has made me more empathetic to the needs of children. How the things they lack are things me and my kids take for granted. I'm more aware of the small things that can help. Time. Effort. I'm more appreciative of what my kids have.

The thing that is different about Family Focus is that they know what's going on with every child. When I ask the staff, "What do you need?", they know. They are very specific about what they need. For many of the children at Family Focus, JoAnn may be the only one who says, "I believe in you. You're smart. You can do this." Having someone like that in our community creates amazing experiences. You save one, you save many.

38

Hillary Presper
Grants Manager



In 2015, the Family Focus Associate Board hosted our second annual holiday toy drive. With the incredible generosity from members' networks, we received over 250 gifts in five weeks. While it was both chaotic and inspiring as my office transformed into Santa's Workshop, the true joy came from knowing our Family Focus parents would experience the joy of seeing their child open gifts during the holiday season. In a small way, we had the opportunity to offer family support.

39

Daniel Fitzgerald
Deputy Director of Affirmative Action at Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

We brought the concept of DCFS-created Family Advocacy Centers to fruition so we could intervene with families to help prevent them from entering the DCFS system and to strengthen families so they could leave the system, I immediately thought of Family Focus. I knew of their outstanding work in the Chicagoland area. When I think of Family Focus, the things that come to my mind and my heart is the spirit of excellence they bring. When I visit and see families in action, and the healing process going on for the most needy of individuals, I know it's due to Merri Ex's leadership and the quality she expects from her team. We are stewards for Illinois taxpayers. The family support provided by Family Focus in partnership with DCFS strengthens our families for the benefit of all Illinois.

40

Edith, Participant, DuPage

Edith remembers her life before starting the home visits with Family Focus. "I was still in high school and I was doing bad stuff, getting very bad grades, partying and drinking a lot and with no purposes or goals in my life; plus, I was sick because of the pregnancy and I skipped school a lot. After the visits, my visitors helped me to identify ways to grow as a mother and the importance of finishing high school and setting goals for me and my family. Little by little, I was able to balance my life as a teenager, a mother, and later on as a wife."

Edith recognizes how the program has helped her in building a strong relationship with her husband, teaching her how to become a better listener and to solve their differences with respect and open communication. "I am so proud of myself. I think I am more mature and responsible now compared with my peers."

YEAR	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
FAMILY FOCUS	Family Focus Aurora **1996: Family Focus Aurora** opens its doors at a new facility. Expanded programs include GED preparation, English as a Second Language instruction, family literacy and job readiness in addition to early childhood development programs.	**1997: Nuestra Familia** joins a three-year initiative, **Community-Based Asthma Prevention in Pregnant Women** with the **Erie Family Health Center.** **1997:** Evanston's **Family Focus Our Place** expands to include programs in the schools in **Evanston/ Skokie School District 65,** where services include social support and literacy activities. **1997:** Family Focus appoints **Barbara Bates** executive director.	**1998: Family Focus Lawndale** announces a partnership with the **Shaw Company, Rush-Presbyterian -St. Luke's Medical Center, and the YMCA** with plans to create the **Homan Square Community Center.**	Thomas Tonniges, M.D. **1999:** Family Focus presents **Dan Soles of WTTW-TV** and **Thomas Tonniges, M.D.** of the American Academy of Pediatrics in ***"Children and Television: Is Even a Little Too Much?"*** a forum exploring television and young children.	**2000:** The **Family Focus Our Place** building is renamed the **Weissbourd-Holmes Family Focus Center**, after Family Focus founder Bernice Weissbourd and first center director Delores Holmes. Kevin Limbeck **2000:** Family Focus appoints **Kevin Limbeck** executive director.	**2002: Family Focus Lawndale** moves into the new $30 million **Homan Square Community Campus Building** facility with the Lawndale Christian Health Center, Chicago Park District, North Lawndale YMCA, Robert Crown Health Education Center, Homan Square Electronic Center and the Homan Arthington Foundation. **2002: Family Network** merges with Family Focus to serve Highland Park and Highwood.	**2002: Family Focus Nuestra Familia** opens a branch in **Cicero** in St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church. **2002:** Family Focus opens in **Englewood** in **St. Bernard's Hospital** and begins a pilot ***Safe Start*** program in collaboration with the Chicago Health Department for children exposed to violence.	**2003: Family Focus Nuestra Familia** moves from West Town to **Hermosa,** a primarily Latino community near **Humboldt Park** in Chicago. **2003: Family Focus** creates the **Midwest Learning Center** to train staff. **2003: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren** program selected by Governor Rod Blagojevich to receive the **Outstanding Agency Award for Grandparents and Senior Programs.**	After School Program **2004: Family Network** begins offering after school programming for grade school children.	Hug-a-Book **2005: Hug-a-Book** joins Family Focus. The early childhood literacy initiative includes parent and teacher workshops and consulting services. **2005:** Family Focus takes on a major role in the federal **21st Century Community Schools** program, offering a full schedule of before and after school programming in more than ten schools in and around Chicago.
World Events	Steve Jobs' NeXT bought by Apple 	Princess Diana killed in speeding motorcade 	Europeans agree on the Euro 	School shooting in Columbine 	Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez reelected 	September 11th World Trade Center attack 	Jimmy Carter wins Nobel Prize for Peace 	US invades Iraq 	Tsunami destroys Asian costal communities 	Hurricane Katrina

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
2006: Family Focus Aurora expands to three sites to broaden its reach in the community.	**2007: Family Focus Lawndale** celebrates its 25th anniversary of programs in Lawndale.	**2008:** Following a pilot event in **Lawndale, Midwest Learning Center** and **Strengthening Families** host the first Family Focus -sponsored **Parent Cafés**, providing informal gatherings for parents to discuss parenting challenges. **2008: Midwest Learning Center** inaugurates **HomeFocus,** a post-permanency program for guardianship support for foster families, in a venture with **Children's Home + Aid.**	**2009:** Family Focus expands **after school programs** to 30 elementary and high schools. **2009:** Family Focus volunteers join other community groups from **Englewood** and collaborate with **Woods School** to build a new playground in Englewood.	**2010:** Family Focus merges with **DuPage** nonprofit **Lifelink** and starts providing home visiting services to young Spanish-speaking DuPage families. The DuPage center operates as a satellite of **Family Focus Aurora.** **2010: Nuestra Familia** establishes a new center at **St. Charles Borromeo** School in Melrose Park, where 6,000 children under the age of five had no bilingual, bicultural programs.	**2011:** Symposium, ***"Why Put Families First? Family Support in the 21st Century"*** was presented in collaboration with the **University Of Chicago School of Social Service Administration.** Merri Ex **2011: Merri Ex**, a former Family Focus participant, begins as President and CEO. **2011:** Family Focus launches a new **website** and **logo.**	 Bernice Weissbourd **2012:** Family Focus creates the *Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support* and awards it to Ms. Weissbourd at its 35th anniversary gala, chaired by **John W. Rogers, Jr.** **2012:** Family Focus became a participant in the new federal **Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting** program.	**2013: Barbara Bowman** receives the *Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support.* Barbara Bowman **2013:** Family Focus creates **Emerging Leaders,** a professional staff development program with monthly meetings with experts from human services disciplines. **2013: Family Focus Englewood** center moves to 67th and Western Ave.	 Family Focus DuPage **2014: Family Focus DuPage** moves to its Glendale Heights location. **2014:** Family Focus launches **Early Head Start** with 50 new home visiting families. Harrison and Lois Steans **2014: The Steans Family** receives the *Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support.*	 Delores Norton, Ph.D. **2015: Dolores "Dodie" Norton, Ph.D** receives the *Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support.* **2015:** Hug-A-Book early literacy program expands to all seven centers.	 Dr. Dana Suskind **2016: Dr. Dana Suskind,** author of ***"30 Million Words: Building a Child's Brain"*** speaks at Family Focus' annual meeting. John W. Rogers, Jr. **2016:** John W. Rogers, Jr. receives the *Bernice Weissbourd Award For Family Support.*

US population reaches 300 million

Nancy Pelosi first woman Speaker of the House

Dow Jones drops 4% in one day

Barack Obama becomes 44th President

Blackhawks win Stanley Cup

Hilda Solis named U.S. Secretary of Labor

Mars rover lands on Mars

Bombs explode at Boston Marathon

Malala Yousafzai wins Nobel Peace Prize

Terrorists attack Charlie Hebdo in Paris

Family Focus celebrates 40 years!

FAMILY FOCUS

310 S. Peoria, Suite 301
Chicago, IL 60607
312-421-5200
www.family-focus.org