

## Increased Funding to Serve Families with Young Children

The transition from fiscal year 2019 to the current fiscal year 2020 shows a sizeable increase in public grant funding. Thanks to new and expanded government grants the revenue from public funders is increasing from \$11.7 million in FY19 to \$13.4 million in FY20 that began July 1.



Sherneron Hilliard and Merri Ex

Sherneron Hilliard, Vice President of Programs and Early Childhood Development said, “We’re proud of our accomplishments and our track record in connecting with children and parents to strengthen families. Increased funding from these sources is a vote of confidence in these relationships and the community’s trust in Family Focus as a valued partner in our shared commitment to early childhood development.”

Expanded income also enables Family Focus to support staff recruitment and retention, provide more competitive salaries to attract and retain staff, better support high-performing teams and improve data collection to enhance program quality advancement.

Separately, Family Focus announced that it has completed the FY 2019 fiscal year with a surplus of \$68,226 on its \$13,848,805 budget. President and CEO Merri Ex noted, “The board and staff have been diligent in stabilizing and growing Family Focus over a number of years. There are challenges ahead, but we are proud to solidify our financial foundation for a promising future.”

## Family Focus Launches First Summer Institute for 140 Program Staff



Family Focus hosted a Summer Institute for early childhood, youth development and family support staff. The 3-day training provided educational workshops and an opportunity for staff from our seven centers to share experiences and immerse themselves in the culture of family support while advancing their skills and knowledge related to their positions with Family Focus.



Each staff member had a customized schedule based on their training interests and attended both peer presentations and educational sessions. Workshops were led by

seasoned Family Focus staff as well as outside experts from the Ounce of Prevention Institute, Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, Harry S. Truman College, the Illinois Mental Health Collaborative, UCAN, and more.

Highlights from the week include workshops covering topics such as:

- Last fiscal year’s program data and outcomes
- Trainings on new curriculum
- Working with families experiencing hardships such as domestic violence, abuse, undocumented family members and trauma
- Taking STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) to the next level within classrooms and home
- Social emotional learning
- Mental health self care for staff, and more.

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For more pictures, please visit our Facebook page.

## Childhood Trauma Program Expands to Lawndale

A new grant from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois is funding the expansion of the trauma-informed behavioral therapy program. The program has been in operation at Family Focus Englewood for years and will now expand to serve Family Focus Lawndale participants as well.



**BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois**

A Division of Health Care Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company, an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

Last year, the Englewood program provided services tailored to the unique needs of 45 children and 80 parents exposed to trauma and violence. Mental health services include therapy sessions for both children and adults, child-parent therapy sessions and family therapy.

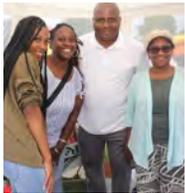
## CENTER UPDATES:



**Aurora**—Vice President of Centers Mariana Osoria was featured in a *Chicago Tonight* episode on immigration titled *What Illinois Offers Undocumented Immigrants*.



**Highland Park**—Tammi Griffin, Katia Carranza and Highland Park Center Director Bobbie Hinden greeted the community to spread the word on early childhood development programs at the Highwood Gourmet Days festival.



**Englewood**— On Saturday, August 17th, Family Focus Englewood sponsored the 57th annual Englewood Back to School Parade. This is the city's second-oldest black-led parade.



**DuPage**— In June the DuPage center held its annual summer picnic as part of the monthly educational meetings. More than 150 parents and children attended

the event at Cantigny Park. After discussing Positive Discipline and Anger Management, families played with slime, bubbles, and enjoyed face painting and socializing with other families.

## Summer Institute (cont.)

One of the favorite team building activities of the week was the “Swag and Brag” wall. Staff had the opportunity to write nice comments about their coworkers and themselves and post them to the wall.

Our favorite brags and swag compliments included:

**Brags** (edited for clarity):

*“I got chosen to present at this training. I work well under pressure and with participants dealing with a lot of obstacles. I don’t give up on people and see potential in everyone.”*

*“Waking up to my doula [participant] phone calls in the middle of the night!!”*

*“It was really satisfying when a participant walked in to tell us that she ‘got the job!’ because of a resume we helped her with.”*

**Swag Compliments** (edited for clarity):

*“Englewood is full of wonderful people and I’m proud we stick together. My team is the best!”*

*“Shout out to Loukessa for being a great Parent Educator co-worker.”*

*“Since day one my Nuestra Familia Chicago coworkers have felt like part of a family. They are very hard working and there for each other.”*

*“I am so proud of the Healthy Families team in Aurora. We worked very hard a few months ago to receive our credentials for the program. Our outcomes were very good and we did it as a team.”*

### Spotlight: Highland Park Marches in Independence Day Parade



On Sunday, September 15th staff and participants marched Waukegan’s annual Fiestas Patrias Parade and Festival.

The parade celebrated the Independences Days of Mexico, Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela and Belize.

## Run BeCAUSE Raises \$17,500 for Evanston Center’s After School Program



Run BeCAUSE committee members with Joann Avery from Family Focus

Run BeCAUSE, a community effort from students at New Trier High School and the North Shore Country Day School, raised \$17,500 for Family Focus Evanston’s after school program. For the fourth year, Run BeCAUSE organized a Charity Mile race that ended in child-friendly activities.

Colin Glew, part of the 18-member organization, nominated Family Focus as the beneficiary. “I’ve been going to Family Focus events with my mom, who has been a volunteer for many years. It’s been awesome to see the work that Ms. Joann has been doing with kids and improving their lives year after year. I’m a young adult now and it was time for me to make a contribution on my own. We’re glad to see the money go to them and increasing awareness about what they do for our community.”

Evanston Center Director Collette Allen said, “This gift will fund tutoring and homework support for 3rd through 8th graders, including STEM and arts activities, gardening, nutrition, mental health, social emotional learning and woodworking. The biggest impact was watching as the committee shared information about Family Focus with parents, neighbors and friends.”

*Family Focus' mission is to promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening families in and with their communities.*

## Community Gathers to Thank ASAP Program for 15 Years

In June, more than 100 families gathered at the Sunset Park Pavilion in Highland Park for a community event to say goodbye to the After School Activity Program (ASAP) team from Family Focus and to thank them for 15 years of service.



Current and past parents, alumni children participants and current and former staff members were on hand for the Celebration. They brought photo

collages of favorite memories of the program. The after school program that Highland Park created in 2004 is ending after the school district chose not to renew the contract for the 2019-2020 school year and chose a Colorado-based company to run a new program.

Participant Anibet Apaez Rodriguez said, "I'm a working mom, so it was important for me to have a place to go where my children were safe. ASAP got them off the phone and away from TV with other kids where they could be out of trouble."

Alumnus Cecil Sigele Boy, now in college, said "I always got my homework done at ASAP, because the teachers knew the answers to what we were working on, and they helped us, instead of just sending us off to do homework on our own. My favorite part were the science experiments." Christy O'Brien, former Family Focus ASAP Manager added, "At ASAP, every child had a playdate. They were there as a community."

Highland Park Center Director Bobbie Hinden said, "We're going to miss working with these families and great staff team as we improve and expand our dual-language early childhood development programs to serve the community."



Past and present Family Focus ASAP staff

## Evanston Participant Chayse Johnson Wins in City-Wide Writing Competition



Chayse receives her award from ICAHV representatives

Chayse Johnson was a Blue Ribbon Winner in the Student Voices Contest presented by the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence. Chayse's entry was selected from hundreds of entries as the most powerful and well-executed piece in her age group. The award was presented at Catalyst Ranch in Chicago.

Chayse was accompanied to the award presentation by her mother, Shanika Thomas and writing teacher, Beth Jacobs. Ms. Jacobs has been mentoring the Evanston participants on writing programs and activities for 13 years. She is the author of *Writing for Emotional Balance: A Guided Journal to Help You Manage Overwhelming Emotions*. Beth said, "The focus on the skill of writing is really about giving power to the voices of Family Focus members."



Beth, Chayse and Shanika

To read Chayse's winning entry, visit [www.family-focus.org](http://www.family-focus.org).

## Roots Aurora Celebrates its 6th Year!

Gospel artist Barbetta Neil, and Reuland Food Service restaurateurs Jeff and Cindi Reuland were honored as 2019 Cultural Champions at the event.



For more photos, please visit our Facebook page.



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**Did you know?** Donors can make **tax-free donations** from their IRA to Family Focus starting in their early 70s. Visit [www.family-focus.org](http://www.family-focus.org) for more information.

## Celebrating National Breastfeeding Month



In 2011 the United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) declared August **National Breastfeeding Month** to celebrate and educate families on breastfeeding. This month is dedicated to promoting the empowerment of parents making their child's feeding choices and advocating on behalf of breastfeeding as well as normalizing it in the workplace and life. The month also features Black Breastfeeding Week to address the higher rates of infant mortality, diet related diseases, lack of diversity in the lactation field, and cultural barriers to breastfeeding for African American mothers.

In honor of National Breastfeeding Month the centers attended community events dedicated to breastfeeding education, such as "The Big Latch" held by the Kane County Health Department. Though Family Focus understands that breastfeeding may not be feasible for all participants, staff encourage parents to participate as much as possible due to the health benefits of the specialized nutrition from mother's milk and the reduced risk of diseases for babies and mothers who breastfeed.

Aurora participant and new mom Dayana, shown to the left with two month old baby Marco, encourages others to educate themselves too by saying "Breastmilk does the body good!"