

PRESS RELEASE

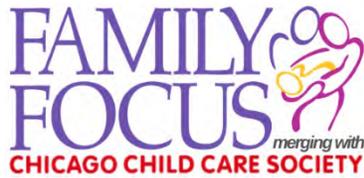
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Immediate Release
Vice President of External

Chicago Child Care Society and Family Focus Merge Organizations Under the *Family Focus* Name.
**Combined Effort Will Increase Response to COVID-19 and Deliver
Critical Family Support throughout the Greater Chicago Region.**

Two renowned Chicago human service agencies providing early childhood and family support programs are combining more than two centuries of experience to better serve families across Chicagoland and NE Illinois. Over a year in planning, as of January 1st Chicago Child Care Society and Family Focus have merged organizations under the Family Focus name as its programs expand to reach additional communities on Chicago's south side. This timely merger will provide urgently needed support at the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- In March, 61% of Family Focus participants reached had lost income and were in crisis due to COVID-19.
- By August, almost half of families were still in crisis despite the lifting of stay-at-home sanctions.
- Family Focus has secured and distributed \$900,000 in direct emergency support providing food, clothing, and supplies from grants awarded to address immediate needs.
- In September, the organization was awarded its largest grant ever -- a \$5.4 million dollar grant to support housing and utility costs, job training and health navigating for those affected by COVID-19.
- These emergency actions were completed at the same time both organizations restructured ongoing social services to maintain critical services and contact with participants via virtual platforms.
- The need for this emergency response is critical in the communities served by Family Focus. The Harvard Research Blog reported that Blacks and Latinos are four to nine times more likely to be infected by COVID than whites, even in our nation's top hot spots.

Dara Munson, the CEO of Chicago Child Care Society, who has been named the President & CEO of the combined organization said, "This merger has been in process for more than a year due to the outstanding opportunities for synergy around both organization's shared mission for providing early childhood and family support. In a crisis situation like we face now, our priority is keeping our families safe, healthy, in their homes and informed about the best way to respond to the enormous challenges they are facing. By combining resources, experience and outstanding staff, we are better prepared to address both the immediate and the ongoing needs faced by families in communities throughout the greater Chicago community."

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Bernice Weissbourd, the founder of Family Focus, welcomed the merger news. “I’ve met Dara. She’s passionate, energetic and a natural leader—the qualities needed for success. This is an exciting opportunity to expand and do more. I am pleased that the merged organization has embraced the *Principles of Family Support*. It’s what differentiates us as an organization.”

U.S. Senator Dick Durbin commented on the merger, stating, “I’m a lifetime fan of Bernice Weissbourd and her amazing work. I’m glad that these organizations will combine their strengths to better serve families throughout the Chicago area, many of whom are facing additional challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The new Family Focus will create an improved education pipeline for families with preschool-age children moving from home-based to center-based services. The new agency will also have expanded crisis response capabilities, including trauma-informed care, for those affected by life-changing emergencies such as the pandemic, loss of work, gang violence, loss of housing and immigration issues. It is committed to promoting equity and justice and a diverse organizational structure. Dara Munson, an African American, is serving as President & CEO; ninety-two percent of the Family Focus staff are people of color. Munson is a native of Detroit and past President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Detroit, past COO of Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan, and past Senior Director of United Way of Southeastern Michigan.

Family Focus was founded in Evanston in 1976 by early childhood and family service pioneers Irving Harris and Bernard and Bernice Weissbourd. Over the years, the success of its work led to centers in six other communities across Cook, DuPage and Lake counties. Today, programs include early childhood development, family advocacy, fatherhood, home visiting, health and nutrition, immigration and citizenship support, school and center-based youth programs, and trauma support for young children and families.

Chicago Child Care Society was founded 171 years ago as an orphanage during a cholera epidemic and has served Chicagoland through the Civil War, the Chicago Fire, the pandemic of 1918 and every war and crisis since 1849. Today CCCS is well-known and highly regarded for its early childhood education programs, two preschool centers, youth development programs and family support services in south side and south suburban Chicago.

For more information, please visit www.family-focus.org

Attachments:

- Family Focus Announcement Newsletter
- Meet Dara Munson
- Dara Munson JPEG photo

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