Olympic Athlete Seun Adigun Returns to Family Focus Evanston

Family Focus Evanston alumna, Dr. Seun Adigun, M.C. returned to her hometown of Evanston to speak to students as part of a Black History Month celebration. A track and field athlete, Dr. Adigun competed in the 2012 Summer Olympics representing Nigeria, for which she holds dual-citizenship. In 2018 Dr. Adigun gained notoriety by forming not only the first Nigerian bobsled team, but by being part of the first Nigerian team to ever compete in the Winter Olympics. When speaking to participants of the Family Focus Evanston after school program, she reminisced on her time with Family Focus:

“Honestly, I say every single day that being a product of Family Focus motivated me to be the woman who I am today. The community, the opportunity, the love, the resources, the encouragement were a lot of the things I used when I left here. That was the thing that kept me pushing.

There are a lot of opportunities that Family Focus puts together for you guys. They create things for you in spaces that wouldn’t otherwise be there for you. When I was 5 or 6 years old, I took Karate at Fleetwood-Jourdain. To this day, it is one of the single most important things I did to mold my discipline. I was able to learn how to maintain my anger and channel those things in ways that were appropriate.

Family Focus took us to Wisconsin for state double-dutch tournaments. That was an opportunity to work. It helped me with my time management. It helped me with responsibilities. It helped me understand what was important. I didn’t take those things for granted. Those are the things I still talk today about with other people.

Being able to sing in the Family Focus choir molded us. It created a family and a community. You had to lean on the next man to make sure your voice wasn’t over somebody else’s. Those are the values I took — to not only be a good team player, but to do thing that people didn’t think I could do. I am forever grateful to Family Focus and everything that they have done for me to make me the woman I am today, maximizing my opportunities.”

See Dr. Adigun speak live at our 2019 Anniversary Gala. See last page for more information or visit www.family-focus.org/2019-anniversary-gala.

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker Signs Executive Order at Family Focus Aurora

On Thursday, January 24th, Governor JB Pritzker held a press conference at Family Focus Aurora to sign an executive order supporting immigrant and refugee rights in Illinois.

The order would help expand access to the Illinois Welcoming Centers, a resource for new Americans to connect with health care, education, mental health, jobs and legal services. Family Focus is involved with three of the ten Welcoming Centers in the state of Illinois. The order will also require the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) to conduct a full review of appropriations, and calls on the DHS to coordinate with other state agencies to put together a “Know Your Rights” resource sheet.

“'I’ve been an advocate for Family Focus for more than a quarter-century.’” - Governor JB Pritzker

During the signing, Governor Pritzker reiterated his commitment for family support, “I want to make it clear from the beginning of my administration that we’re going to stand up for all of our children and families.”

Governor Pritzker was surrounded by local elected officials during the signing, including Representatives Linda Chapa-LaVia (D-Aurora) and Stephanie Kifowit (D-Oswego), and Senator Linda Holmes (D-Aurora). Representatives of many agencies involved in the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights were there too, including Mariana Osoria, vice president of centers for Family Focus.
Please join Family Focus in welcoming these community leaders to the Family Focus Board of Directors. Family Focus continues to look for new members to represent the diversity of Chicago and our participants.

If you would like more information about the Board of Directors please contact Steve Majsak at 312-777-1923 or steve.majsak@family-focus.org.

Introducing New Center Leadership Positions

Family Focus President and CEO, Merri Ex, announced the promotion of three Family Focus staff members to the new positions of Program and Center Directors at the Aurora, Englewood and Lawndale centers. These new roles will directly oversee center programs and center operations under the direction of the current Vice Presidents of Centers.

Carrie Brown will continue to support the Englewood center. Darren Harris, former Director of Family Services, will return to the Lawndale center where he originally started his career with Family Focus. Darrin Johnson will move from Englewood to the Aurora center.

In her announcement of the new roles, Merri also added, “They are outstanding long-term Family Focus professionals who have demonstrated commitment to our communities, mission and participants. These promotions recognize the qualities of creativity, teamwork, tenacity and leadership, and the new positions reflect our program growth and need to increase administrative and managerial capacity at the centers.”

Please join us in congratulating Carrie, Darren and Darrin on their new roles.

Nuestra Familia Center Holds Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony at New Center Location

On Thursday, February 28th Family Focus Nuestra Familia held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the brand new center space at 4878 W. Armitage Ave in Chicago.

Staff invited guests from the community to tour the new space and learn about the center’s extensive offerings of program and activities. Family Focus CEO Merri Ex, and Vice President of Centers, Mariana Osoria, cut the ribbon in front of the new space to celebrate the occasion.

For more information, please visit the Nuestra Familia page on the Family Focus website at www.family-focus.org.

Family Focus Welcomes Six Board Members

Please join Family Focus in welcoming these community leaders to the Family Focus Board of Directors. Family Focus continues to look for new members to represent the diversity of Chicago and our participants.

Dennis Abboud
ReaderLink Distribution Services LLC

Andrew Embery
Morgan Stanley

Bryan Samuels
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Raullo Eanes
Capaha Partners LLC

Joe McMullen
William Blair

Laurie Leibowitz
Career Coach
Family Focus’ mission is to promote the well-being of children from birth by supporting and strengthening families in and with their communities.

Aurora Staff Member Honored with Roseann Poss Spirit Award

Family Focus Aurora Community Liaison, Christina Campos, was recently honored with the Roseann Poss Spirit Award from Compañeros en Salud, a coalition in Aurora, IL that provides Hispanic and other diverse communities access to healthcare and social services. Family Focus Aurora was also honored with the organization’s Partnership Award in 2016.

The Roseann Poss Spirit Award honors an individual who advocates, supports, and continually strives to make contributions to Latinos and other diverse groups, thus embodying the namesake of the award.

As Community Liaison, Christina helps Aurora residents access community resources. She said, “What I LOVE about my job is when a participant comes back with a smile and says ‘thank you’ because we helped them during a difficult time. For me that’s priceless.”

Christina was honored at Compañeros en Salud’s annual Mission Awards Breakfast in December 2018, with other Family Focus staff in attendance to cheer her on.

Center Wish Lists

Can you help us identify a donor for these items needed at our centers?

- Air Conditioners
- Rugs
- Diapers sizes 1-6
- Unscented baby wipes
- Toddler and infant tooth brushes and toothpaste
- Baby formula (Enfamil Infant and Gentlease)
- Girls underwear sizes 2-4t
- Boys underwear sizes 2-4t
- Girls socks sizes 2-4t
- Boys socks sizes 2-4t
- Board books for babies, ages 0-3

Contact Kelsey Miklos at 312-777-1918 or kelsey.miklos@family-focus.org for info.

Join Family Focus for our Anniversary Gala On May 28th

Four Seasons Hotel, 120 East Delaware Place, Chicago
6:00 p.m. Reception | 7:00 p.m. Dinner

2019 Anniversary Gala Honorees and Special Guests

Senator Dick Durbin (pending any unexpected scheduling conflicts) will receive the Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support. Named after the founder of Family Focus, Bernice Weissbourd, this award is presented to an individual for their work impacting early childhood development. Senator Durbin has worked successfully for increased federal funding to prevent childhood asthma, increase immunizations, and has been a champion for Head Start.

ReaderLink Distribution Services, LLC President and CEO Dennis Abboud will receive the Outstanding Corporate Partnership Award. Mr. Abboud, who serves on Family Focus’ Board of Directors, organized corporate giving at ReaderLink, provided in-kind donations of Spanish-language books for participants, and engaged civic and business leaders to raise awareness about our services.

Featured Speaker: Dr. Seun Adigun, M.C. a former Family Focus Evanston participant, competed in the 2012 Summer Olympics representing Nigeria. In 2018 Dr. Adigun formed the first Nigerian bobsled team and was part of the first Nigerian team to ever compete in the Winter Olympics.

Introductory Remarks by Valerie Jarrett, former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama.

Master of Ceremonies
Rob Johnson, Anchor at WBBM-TV Chicago.

Sponsorship Packages and Ticket Information

Corporate and individual table sponsorships are available, as well as individual tickets. Program ads are also available independent of table sponsorships. Sponsorships are due by March 28th for inclusion in invitation mailing. Please visit www.family-focus.org/2019-anniversary-gala for sponsorship information.

Host Committee*

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Betty and Stanley Weinberger
Bernice Weissbourd

*As of 3/19/2019
At the ribbon cutting event for our new Nuestra Familia center space, two participants shared their stories:

“When my son, José, came to Family Focus, he didn’t want to leave my side. Now we get in the door and he says, ‘Bye-Bye, Mommy!’ Family Focus is doing more than just helping mothers and children who come to the center. You are helping us be better parents to all our children. You are helping us to share what we learn with our husbands, be better parents and a stronger family.”

- Leticia, Family Focus participant

“I didn’t know what to do [as a single parent]. I didn’t think we were going to make it. I prayed for an answer and Family Focus was there for me. The name says it. They helped me FOCUS when I couldn’t do it on my own. I wanted my beautiful daughter to have the best start. Coming to Family Focus has made her more independent and more confident. On her first day of school, she was ready to go. Some of the other children were crying, and Ariella said to me, ‘Why are they crying? This is FUN!’ I tell everyone about Family Focus. We are welcome here. It’s a home for us—a place for families.”

- Maria, Family Focus participant