Save the Date:
Family Focus
Annual Dinner
Thursday, May 19, 2022
At Four Seasons Chicago
120 E Delaware Pl, Chicago, IL 60611

Family Focus is excited to return to in-person events with our annual dinner on Thursday, May 19, 2022 at the Four Seasons Chicago. Awardees for the annual Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support and Dream Builders Award will be announced soon.

Building upon the success of the 2021 Virtual Celebration, this year’s in-person dinner will include a virtual component to reach a wider audience, including our families and participants.

Sponsorship information is available on our website at www.family-focus.org/annual-dinner. Your sponsorship will help us continue to provide critical support for families and children in Chicago and NE Illinois. Proceeds from the annual dinner will fund critical programming that supports the whole family. This includes early childhood development, parenting groups, trauma support, fatherhood initiatives, teen parent support, after-school activities, and immigration services.

For more information, please contact Kelsey Miklos at Kelsey.Miklos@family-focus.org.

How Home Visiting Impacts the Entire Family

Deana (right), a home visiting participant with her son, and her home visitor, Adriana, during a visit in 2019. Deana’s story was featured at the 2019 gala video and can be found on our website’s program page.

Home visiting is the largest program at Family Focus, with each center offering the service to parents in need. The curriculum offered at each center might be different based the program’s funder or geographic area, but each has the same goal: to help caregivers ensure their children reach developmental milestones during their first three years of life.

Why zero to three?

Birth to age three is the most critical time of brain growth in a person’s life. In the first 3 years of life, a baby’s brain will grow up to 80% of it’s final adult size! This time of massive growth is when a baby’s brain is most flexible and is the ideal learning stage of social, emotional and cognitive development for children. This time period is especially important for parents to engage with their child. Unfortunately, age 0-3 years old is also a time in which abuse or neglect can cause lifelong damage. Home visiting staff work with parents in the environment they are most comfortable in—usually their home—to learn about child rearing best practices, parent-child activities to stimulate the child’s development, and to gain confidence in their parenting skills.

How do home visits benefit the entire family?

Being involved with the home visiting program also brings parents outside of their home for parenting groups and meetups with others at Family Focus. Prior to COVID, participants had monthly outings. These group outings allowed caregivers to meet others, reducing isolation that can have a negative impact on a parent’s health. Visiting new, fun places was also mentally simulating for the children and helps parents build great memories.

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Holiday Parties have been tradition at Family Focus for many years. Programs host parties for participants in December, bringing in food, festive cheer, and donated gifts. Thanks to countless corporate and individual donors, hundreds of children get holiday gifts each year—and for some this is their only gift.

At Family Focus Highland Park, staff worked since September to collect gifts and gift cards. Charities and United Way of Lake County served as liaisons for the donations.

Donations were sent from a local pre-school, a K-3 school, and even families who send their children to a summer camp located in Wisconsin. Generous donors filled over three rented trucks with gifts to be delivered to participants this year. Staff sorted and wrapped so many gifts, it filled the chapel of the church that houses the Highland Park office (pictured top right).

The most heart-warming gifts came from individual families in the area. Most parents included their own children in choosing and wrapping gifts, teaching their young ones about giving and supporting their neighbors.

Three year old Riley, pictured right with the stack of gifts his family collected for the center, helped his parents pick out gifts.

“I am so proud of how he handled the whole thing.” Riley’s mom said, “He was never upset about the fact that the gifts weren’t for him. He looked so carefully for both boys and girls. And he even picked out the wrapping paper so it would be something the kids would like.”

In addition to parties for participants, each center held their own staff party to celebrate the end of another year. Family Focus Evanston (pictured bottom right) had a “Holly Jolly Holiday Celebration” organized by a staff planning committee. The “COVID safe” party featured a catered lunch, gift exchange, and even a costume contest. Staff member Cynthia won best dressed for her elf costume (shown on the far left in the picture).
Home Visiting (continued):

Home visiting benefits the entire family. Not only are goals set for the child, but the home visitor works with the parent as well. With support from their home visitor, and other resources that can be provided by Family Focus and other partner agencies, parents set goals like finding a new job, going back to school, improving relations with family members, and more. Caregivers have support for their own personal growth and changes that can improve their families lives.

Single mother, D, has been part of the home visiting program at Englewood for more than 2 years. She has only one child enrolled in the program, but has 2 more at home. All children are included when D’s home visitor works with her to learn about her children’s development. In addition to working on the childrens’ education, D’s home visitor has helped her create a plan to reach some of her own goals as well.

Recently she lost her job, and then had to vacate her home and most of her belongings due to a bug infestation. With no support from her landlord, her Family Focus home visitor helped D locate a safe new apartment, and acquire free furniture though a partnership with Furniture Barn and Family Focus. She was also able to find a new job with a higher salary, allowing her to change daycares for her youngest son to a place much closer to their home than before.

Thanks to the home visiting program, not only are D’s children benefitting from the parent-child activities D is learning, but D has been able to make positive changes in her own life to benefit her children. D’s home visitor says “The most important thing D has learned by being in the home visiting program is that she can do anything she puts her mind to!”

Preschools at Hyde Park and South Shore Provide Childcare for Working Families and Parents in School

Family Focus Hyde Park and Family Focus South Shore offer Head Start and Early Head Start daycare programs for children from birth to 5 years old. The programs promote school readiness, provide nutritious meals and access to free medical and dental screenings. The daycare services are done in partnership with the Start Early and Chicago Department of Family and Supportive Services, and are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Like all programs at Family Focus, the daycare services feature parent and caregiver engagement opportunities. The Parent Policy Council gives parents a seat on the Board Committee that oversees programs and services, and an active voice in their child’s education with oversight of the social and academic goals for the preschools. For families struggling financially, the additional services provided by the Head Start and Early Head Start programs support the overall well being of each child, and thus, the whole family. For more information about the preschool programs, please visit our website.
Since merging with Chicago Child Care Society, Family Focus is the longest operating social service agency in Illinois. We have more than 200 years of experience in helping children get their best start in life, and providing support wherever families need it.

While birth to age three is a critical period in development, interventions at any age benefits children and families who need some support. While we have the expertise to invest in children and families, we do need help of our supporters and community members to ensure we can support as many families as possible.

Make a donation today. Your gift will impact thousands of families across Chicago and NE Illinois, helping to run high-quality, innovative programs and services grounded in anti-racism and social justice.

To make your donation visit www.family-focus.org/donate