As night fell in New York City on April 27, the Teatro at the Italian Academy of Columbia University became a jazz club, bringing together friends of the agency to celebrate adoption with “Jazz at the Chocolate Milk Club.”

Lisa Gary, a wonderful vocal stylist, presented a set of finger-snapping standards, backed by an ensemble consisting of Patrick Kennedy on drums, Daniel Rutkowski on piano, and Matt Trinkwald playing bass. We were also treated to special selections by Joseph Rutkowski, our own official agency pianist and Ms. Gary’s former music teacher, as he accompanied his son Daniel, who switched over to trumpet.

The evening was created to raise awareness about the Family Focus Chocolate Milk Club. The philosophy behind the Club is that adoption is like chocolate milk: once that chocolate is mixed with that milk, they can never be separated.

With the money raised by membership dues, our agency has the freedom to provide things for the kids we work with, as needed and when needed, from lunch to toiletries to cell phones. This kind of freedom to access funds without a long and bureaucratic approval process allows us to normalize the children’s experience as much as we are able.

We are grateful to the artists who gave of their talent and time, and to all of the guests who joined us for this musical experience. And of course, to the members of the Chocolate Milk Club for their continuing support.

We are always glad to welcome new Club members. See our website for details and to join.
CERTIFICATION TRAINING:
For adopting families, adoptive families, and foster/adoption professionals. Check our calendar for upcoming dates.

RAD! Program update:
There are now 18 children in the RAD! Program from 10 counties: 5 living with families, 3 visiting, and 3 more matched.

Since Last Newsletter...
Step Meetings:
One child and maybe-family are on Adoption Step 5 (of 6)
One family is on Step 4, the child is on Step 5
Visiting:
Another child in our RAD! program has begun visiting with a family, and still another has agreed to meet a family.

Start making plans now:
NACAC Conference
Nashville, TN
August 4-6, 2016

The Chocolate Milk Club
See our website to join!
OR
give a gift membership!

See Jack’s blog archives!

GRANT FOR TRAINING & MEETING CENTER

Family Focus is the recipient of a substantial grant from The Hyde and Watson Foundation, to go toward the recent renovations to our Training and Meeting Center in Little Neck, Queens.

The Hyde and Watson Foundation has been generous to Family Focus many times in the past, and as always, we are very grateful to them for their vision in supporting the work we do, including making sure we have appropriate space for our staff, children, and families to meet and have training.

Special thanks and congratulations to Lisa Binder, one of our Assistant Directors, and our grant writer, for her diligent work in successfully presenting our grant proposal to the foundation.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHILD

Sometimes birthmothers or birth parents can be clear on their intent to place their baby for adoption. They may even meet with a family, and be confident about their decision, right up until the point when the baby is born. But sometimes after the birth, when faced with the reality of actually surrendering their son or daughter, they realize that after all of the adoption planning, they wish to keep their child.

Family Focus is in the “business” of adoption. But we would not be doing our job if we ever forgot that as joyous as an adoption is, it can never happen without there first being loss. When a newborn is surrendered for adoption, the birth parent or parents go through a tremendous loss, and so can the baby. Science has shown that even when a baby is placed with a new family immediately upon birth, they still can experience losing their birth parents as an abandonment, which could impact them in later years.

So it is sad for the person or couple hoping to adopt, who has bought a bassinet, and prepared to receive a new baby into their home and family. But we honor and respect a birth family who has decided that they can and will raise the baby to whom they have given life. And we celebrate for the child who now may never know that great sense of loss.
What do you do with a child who runs? And runs fast…

“What an experience!” said one of our Future Workers who just began working with “Kevin,” who at seven years old is the youngest child in our RAD! Program. “I definitely was questioning what to do as he challenged me,” she said.

Their fourth meeting began as the first three had. They discussed where to go to do their “future work,” decided on a playground, and followed their usual routine of strapping on their seat belts and setting the GPS. When they arrived, the Future Worker set expectations by telling Kevin she would give him the usual ten-minute warning when it was almost time to leave. But this time, when she gave him the warning, Kevin screamed, “NO!” and took off running toward the park bathrooms. When Kevin saw the Future Worker heading toward him, he ran into the bathroom, yelling, “You can’t catch me,” and “You can’t come into the mens room!”

The Future Worker could have gone into the bathroom to force him out, but wisely chose instead to wait him out. It would mean getting back to his foster home later than planned, but the tradeoff was that barging in and forcing him out could have been a frightening and traumatic experience for Kevin. We often don’t know our kids’ full histories, especially around an intimate setting like a bathroom. After ten minutes Kevin tired of his game, came out of the bathroom on his own, and headed back to the car.

Two weeks later was Kevin’s next meeting with his Future Worker. The meeting began in a positive way, as the previous four had. They strapped on their seat belts, and then came the discussion of where to go. Kevin wanted to go to the playground again. His Future Worker reminded him that they were not going to the playground this time, because the last time they “had some trouble.” Kevin replied, “It’s OK, we will just go to a different playground.” His Future Worker turned around to the back seat, looked him directly in the eye, and said three simple words: “No playground today.” He responded, “I know, I know. I didn’t listen.” No argument, no negotiation. The rest of the visit went very well.

If things had gone differently between Kevin and his Future Worker, there are several messages he might have gotten. That he is bad. That he is difficult. That he can run wild and nobody can do anything about it. But by showing remarkable patience and restraint, and deciding not to make it a power struggle, his Future Worker showed Kevin that even when he chooses to run, his safety is important. He is important.

“I know, I know,” he said. Kevin got the message.

(For more information about our RAD! Program, visit our website: www.familyfocusadoption.org.)

**SAFETY IS THE MESSAGE**

Agency News...

**Our Emerita at The Moth...** Maris Blechner, our Executive Director Emerita, was recorded live for The Moth, a podcast in which people tell true stories about themselves. Some are humorous, some are inspiring, all of them are entertaining. Maris talked about adoption, Family Focus, and the concept of “claiming.” We have heard some very positive feedback about the podcast, including from a woman who came to one of our INFO orientation meetings, saying that she specifically sought us out after being moved by Maris’s talk. You can hear Maris at The Moth at their website: https://themoth.org/storytellers/maris-blechner

**Conferences...** Our Executive Director and Executive Director Emerita both presented workshops in May at the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY, formerly New York State Citizens Coalition for Children) Conference in Albany. Both will be speaking at the next NACAC conference - see below.

**Nashville or Bust...** So many staff members at Family Focus were excited about going to the next conference of the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), to be held in Nashville, TN from August 3-6, that we decided to make it a road trip. In addition to three who are flying to the conference, eight of us will be renting a van, beginning the drive from Syracuse and Oswego, NY, heading across the state to Newburgh to meet with passengers from Albany, Lake George, and Long Island, and then heading south and west, with an overnight stop in Luray, VA, where we will tour the famous Luray Caverns. Some of us are bringing musical instruments to keep the mood lively, and there will, of course, be “van snacks”!
DONATIONS AND GRANTS:

Amazon Smile
Anonymous
Vivian Alexopoulos & Anna Brady
Deana Balahtsis
William Baer
Sandra Berenbaum
Michael and Donna Brennan
Rita & John Bodie
Jack Brennan
Sharon Cohen-Powers
Richard and Ken Buley-Neumar
Denise and Bill Callahan
Tony & Nancy Campo
D. St. F. Sherry & James Grant
Joan Ferrante
Jennifer & Myles Blechner - Happy Birthday Maris and Stewart Blechner
Gina DeCrescenzo
Tito Del Pilar
Pam & Bob DeMan
Nicole DiStefano
Constance Dougherty
Phyllis Elsky
Beverly Fiegelman
Joanne & Tony Ferrante
Maura Fitzgerald-Jainschig
Joel & Almarie Fridovich
Erin and Kevin Gibb
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Denise & Rob Pilgrim
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Roxanne & Clara Veneziano
Carol Vincent
Sharon Wennlund
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Ellen David Zeiger
CMC Donation Matches:
PSEG
AT&T/YourCause Employee Giving

DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF:

Helen Budington Trust IMO Ann Peel
Elizabeth & Daniel Case IMO Cyril K. Petrov

DONATIONS IN HONOR OF:

Jennifer & Myles Blechner - Happy Birthday Maris and Stewart Blechner
Gary Stoothoff IHO Tyler Stoothoff

CHOCOLATE MILK CLUB MEMBERS AND DONATIONS

Vivian Alexopoulos & Anna Brady
Deana Balahtsis
Sandra Berenbaum
Farica Bialstock In Honor Of Bill O’Keefe’s Birthday
In Memory Of Herman & Delores Binder
Lisa Binder & Joe Rutkowski
Maris & Stewart Blechner
Judith Brambrut
Leni Brawer
Ephraim Brennan
Jack Brennan
Rich and Ken Buley-Neumar
Denise and Bill Callahan
Tony & Nancy Campo
Sharon Cohen-Powers
Joe & Betsy Crandall
Betty Nordwind
William O’Keefe
Henrietta and Peter Pierce
Robert and Denise Pilgrim
Joshua Polenberg
Chris Pragman & Laura Blechner
Sheila Quinn
Dorothy Savarimuthu
Michael Stokes
Truist
Kathleen Wallace
Deborah Weatherbee
The Hyde and Watson Foundation
Stewart’s Foundation

(Donations are since publication of our last newsletter.)

End Quote:

“Oh yes, the past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it, or... learn from it.” – Rafiki, in “The Lion King”
Imagine you are moving over a thousand miles from your home.

You are a girl of nine and your brother is eleven. The two of you are moving from your home down south into your “not yet” family’s house in upstate New York. You are leaving behind all that is familiar to you: your school, your friends, the foster home you know, your bed, your backyard, even the warm weather to which you are accustomed.

You think: How am I going to make new friends? Will the kids like me? Will this new family like me? Will their dogs like me? What will they do when I do something wrong? What will they do when I do something right? What will I do if I get scared… or angry… or sad?

But… You do have a Family Focus Adoption Guide. Together you figure things out. As you become more and more comfortable, you are getting closer and closer to adoption.

As time goes by, you take gymnastics; you take dance; your brother joins a baseball team. You go on trips with this family. And you even get on the honor roll!

You feel safe, you feel wanted. You want to stay here… in this home. **You have decided you want to be adopted.** And so has your brother. You have your Family Focus Adoption Covenant Ceremony, and everyone celebrates!

Your “not yet” mom and dad are now your forever mom and dad.

**This is a true story of two siblings who, like all of the other children Family Focus places, were terrified, yet courageous enough to open themselves up to a new family.**

Your donations help Family Focus make it possible to give more kids the chance to feel **safe**, to feel **wanted**, and to feel **loved** – many for the first time in their lives.

**Please give as generously as you can.**

The Administrative Team

P.S. Please consider joining the Chocolate Milk Club. Annual dues of $300 does a lot of good for our children. Details on back.
What is The Chocolate Milk Club?

Adoption, we tell our kids, is like chocolate milk: once that chocolate is mixed with that milk, there is no way ever to separate them again.

The use of this metaphor makes tangible, and reassures our kids of, the forever nature of adoption. Simply put, The Chocolate Milk Club is a community of like-minded people who agree with - and have chosen to support through monthly membership dues - the mission of Family Focus Adoption Services:

“The mission of Family Focus is to create and provide the confidence building adoption services that we would trust and expect for our own families and our own children.”

The Chocolate Milk Club members become part of a community that is insisting on the needs of the children – no matter what it takes. Through CMC donations, we are able to provide things for the children we work with that would not otherwise be readily available through their foster agencies, group homes, or residential treatment centers. Here are some examples of how CMC donations have helped:

• When our workers have meetings with our children, it is often better to hold these meetings away from their homes or residential facilities. The CMC allows us to take them to our community “offices,” such as McDonalds or Dunkin Donuts, to hold these meetings.

• Sometimes in working with our children, the need arises for spur-of-the-moment items, such as notebooks and drawing supplies, special “lock-boxes” for their things, toiletries, even once an MP3 player. With CMC donation money, we don’t have to worry about who will pay for these small things that can mean so much, we are able to respond to the need on the spot.

• Young adults who are in our Relationships Are Decisions (RAD!) program may be missing out on some of the “normal” things that their peers have. The CMC allows us to provide them with cellphones, so they can keep in contact with their workers, friends, and any potential family they are visiting with.

These are just a few examples of how your Chocolate Milk Club dues help Family Focus do our work. We hope that you will consider joining the club!

Chocolate Milk Club dues are just $25 per month, or $300 annually. You can pay by check, or go to our website and sign up with your credit card or PayPal – then you don’t even have to think about your automatic monthly payment. You may also choose to make automatic payments from your own bank. Make your payments to FFAS Chocolate Milk Club.

For more details about the Chocolate Milk Club, visit our website:
www.familyfocusadoption.org
and click on the picture of the chocolate milk!
YES! I want to support adoption!

To save a stamp, make your donation online. Go to www.familyfocusadoption.org and look for the PayPal button.

To join the Chocolate Milk Club online, look for the picture of the chocolate milk!

☐ I am making a one-time donation to Family Focus in the amount of $________
   (If you would like your donation to go to the Chocolate Milk Club, check here: ☐)

☐ I am joining the Chocolate Milk Club with my dues of:
   ☐ $25 per month – please charge my credit card each month (see below)
   ☐ $25 per month – check enclosed, I will send a check each month
   ☐ $300 per year – check enclosed, I will renew next year

Mr / Mrs / Miss    Your Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

Email: ____________________________________ Phone: __________

☐ Enclosed is my check in the amount of $________
   Make check payable to Family Focus Adoption Services or Chocolate Milk Club

☐ Charge my credit card once in the amount of $________

☐ Charge my credit card monthly CMC dues of $25

Credit Card Type (circle one): American Express / Visa / Master Card / Discover
Card Number: ____________________________
Expiration Date: __________ 3 -or- 4 Digit Code

If you are giving a GIFT MEMBERSHIP TO THE CMC:
Recipient Name: ____________________________
Recipient Email (required): ____________________________

☐ Donation is in my name
☐ Donation is: ☐ in honor of ☐ in memory of
   Name: ____________________________
   Please Notify (Name): ____________________________
   Address: ____________________________
   Email: ____________________________

Make check payable to Family Focus Adoption Services or Chocolate Milk Club

Family Focus Adoption Services is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, tax ID 11-2869661.
Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Please consult your tax professional for full details.
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Melville, NY 11747