Our Executive Director, Jack Brennan, attended an Adoption Exchange meeting in Albany some weeks back. This is where county caseworkers in a particular area of the state meet to exchange information on children and families with the goal of making matches. When he reported back to us, we were shocked to hear about the sheer number of referrals of children surrendered years after their adoption finalizations.

It has taken us much time and experience to come up with such concepts as “Chocolate Milk” and “Authentic vs. Counterfeit Adoptions” (see our website for explanations). Both of these concepts have been incredibly useful for us in helping the kids we have worked with process the betrayals of their adoptive parents.

Naturally, the county caseworkers, working in the best interest of the children, want to make sure these kids are being made available for adoption once again. But… and it’s a big but… is this because these children are ready for another adoption? Or is it because the belief is that there is no other choice? When these children are placed into new pre-adoptive homes before they are ready, our experience tells us that the odds of it working well are not in the kids’ favor.

Intervention before adoption is the key for these kids.

At this point we are ready to declare our pilot RAD! Program (Relationships are Decisions!) an unprecedented success. It has now moved from being a pilot program to a permanent part of our agency. This work is something we should never, ever stop doing.

All of Family Focus’s public child programs are now being explicitly defined as Adoption Readiness Programs. We will continue our traditional family and child Empowered Transition, and our Adoption Certification Training that prepares adults to adopt. Now, parallel to our RAD! Program, we are adding our new program, which has an emphasis on healing the children who have been betrayed by counterfeit parents, and surrendered back into the system.

Our hope is that this program fills the need that unfortunately has proven to be bigger than anyone ever expected.
CHOCOLATE MILK CLUB MEMBERS:

NEW CMC MEMBERS:

Liam Irwin

CURRENT MEMBERS


NEW DONATIONS:

A Handshake Is Worth a Thousand Smiles

Sam is a sixteen-year-old boy who is in our RAD! Program. One Sunday afternoon his Future Worker, who meets with him twice a month, came to pick him up at his residential. When she arrived Sam answered the door, clearly looking forward to that day’s meeting. Once settled into her car, they headed out to their usual McDonald’s “office” to talk. Future Workers have a variety of different “work assignments” that they do with their “clients,” and today’s work involved the classic handshake…

Sam’s Future Worker explained to him that her supervisor, whom Sam knows, had asked her recently if she had done the handshake with him. She hadn’t, so the supervisor told her, “Well, handshakes are community behavior, and Sam needs to know about them.”

“Well, that’s it,” the Future Worker explained, “We have to do the handshake.” Wanting to give him time to think, she suggested, “We can practice the handshake in the car when we arrive at McDonalds, or after we go inside.” This gave him the entire ride to make his decision. Sam is not known for initiating conversation, so they rode in their usual silence to their “office.” Once they were parked, Sam turned to her and said, “OK, I guess we can try it before we go in.” His Future Worker responded by stressing that out in the community, it is important to have a good handshake, as that is what people do when they meet, go on a job interview, etc. She extended her hand, and Sam shook it. At this point, Sam broke into a big grin, and continued to smile throughout their entire handshake lesson. Sam’s Future Worker continued to practice with him, pretending various introductions to jobs, people and situations. After a number of handshakes, with Sam improving in confidence and strength with each one, not to mention smiling the whole time, his Future Worker congratulated him on his solid handshake, and told him to practice and keep up what he had learned. All in all, it was a very successful meeting, and very lively for a client who has claimed he doesn't like to talk.

After their next meeting, when Sam’s Future Worker was returning with him to the residential, she extended her hand. It was surprising to her that Sam’s handshake felt weak, so she decided dramatics were in order. “What are you handing me, a dead fish?” she exclaimed. To her surprise, Sam burst out laughing. An impromptu practice was called for, and there were handshakes back and forth, with Sam smiling the entire time.

Agency News...

It is with sadness that we announce the death of one of our long-term board members, Muriel Gladstein. Muriel was on the board for many years, and in her last years she would struggle to get into our Little Neck office, which is not handicapped-friendly, in her wheelchair and with her aide by her side. Our Executive Director, Jack Brennan, said, “Muriel was our kind of people - she listened, she was thoughtful, and she responded.” Although we haven’t seen her in a few years, her death is a loss to us. Muriel died October 24th at the age of 90.

Congratulations to our own Pam DeMan for being honored by the Sullivan County Democrat as one of their “Business and Professional Women 2014.” To read the article in the publication about Pam, go to http://issuu.com/scdemocrat and click the photo accompanying that title (Pam is on page 20W). We can’t help but to be proud that Pam belongs to us when we read that story.
There are many awards out there that recognize people for doing outstanding work. It’s always a wonderful surprise when you find out someone appreciates what you do, perhaps even work that you yourself take for granted.

At Family Focus, we realized that over the course of our twenty-seven years, there have been many people whose efforts have gone beyond the expectations of the job, having a positive impact on the work that we do. We thought, why not create our own award to recognize these “champions” in the field.

Family Focus is pleased to announce the creation of a new award, the Family Focus Adoption Services Child Advocacy Champion Award. We will give this award “for consistently fighting adversity in support of children and their needs, no matter what.”

The first very deserving recipient of this award is Alan Hall, Madison County Caseworker. We have worked with Al for many years, and have always found him to be not only cooperative, not just responsive, not merely efficient, but genuinely concerned, careful, and dedicated to the needs of the children from his county whom we have placed into adoptive homes. Al is always willing to go above and beyond to protect the best interests of “our kids.”

We can think of no better way to introduce this new award than with this presentation to Alan Hall. Thank you, Al, for all you do.

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**End Quote:**

“Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving us worthy evidence of the fact.”

- George Eliot
I have never made a lot of money. I have worked for non-profits my entire career and they just do not have the money to pay well. Or so I have always believed. You will understand, then, that it came as quite a shock to me to learn about salaries for some Executive Directors of some big non-profits who are earning hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Yeah, yeah, I know the stories of how valuable they are and how much money they bring in and what good they do for their agencies and so forth.

But these are non-profits.

It simply doesn’t sit right with me. I don’t think there is a charity out there that doesn’t have to appeal to the public regularly for donations. We all are happy to accept whatever money donations someone is able and willing to give to us. It can often be the difference between survival and closing one’s doors. But the money we give – and I’m one of them who gives – is to help the programs we believe in. We know that our money goes to rent, electricity, even salaries. That’s what it takes to run programs, and we get that. But hundreds of thousands of dollars in salary to one executive? I have trouble with that.

Real - serious - trouble.

At Family Focus, I expect everyone to carry their own weight and to always look out for the good of the agency. I don’t want to police people. I want to have folks work for us whom I can trust to be focused on our mission. We pay our staff for their seriousness about accepting responsibility for their jobs. In that light, when you really get down to it, no one’s job is more important than anyone else’s.

So, at Family Focus, each of us gets exactly the same hourly salary. Did you know that? If the agency wants to pay me $100 an hour – I should only wish – it has to pay every one of us that same $100 an hour, even part timers. Not much chance, then, of overpaying anyone, is there? Nor much chance then of disrespecting the value of that hard earned money that folks donate to us.

Your money is used for our mission of finding families to love and permanently commit to kids who – always through no fault of their own – have no committed parent in their lives. Period.

So, I am asking, as I do four times a year, for your financial support for our pretty unique non-profit. If you can afford to join our Chocolate Milk Club for $25 dues a month, it is our best support. (I myself am in the Chocolate Milk Club. Many of our staff and board members are.) But when we say that we will make the best use of any amount you choose to give us, any amount you can afford to give us, you can trust us on that.

We will spend your money – on our mission, of course – as carefully and prudently as we believe you would.

I promise you that.

On behalf of our Family Focus board and staff, I wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season.
Support FFAS With Your Donation

Complete this form and return with your donation or Chocolate Milk Club membership dues. If you are making your donation or paying CMC dues online, you don’t need this form.

**I am making a one-time donation to FFAS**

Check one: ( ) In my own name
( ) In honor of ( ) In memory of ____________________________

Send donation notification to: ________________________________ (name) ________________________________ (email or street address)

**I am joining the Chocolate Milk Club**

Your dues choice: ( ) $25 each month ( ) $300 each year

OR: ( ) I am making a one-time donation to the CMC, but not joining

Check one: ( ) In my own name
( ) Gift membership in the name of ____________________________

Send gift membership notification to: ________________________________ (name) ________________________________ (email address)

What is the Chocolate Milk Club? Visit www.familyfocusadoption.org and click the Chocolate Milk to find out!

**HOW TO PAY**

Please complete for check or credit card payment:

Name: ___________________________________________________________________
Email: ___________________________________________________________________
Street: ___________________________________________________________________
City: _________________________________________ State: _______ Zip: ____________
Phone number(s): (_____)______________________________________________________

Enclosed is my check for the total of $________
Please charge my credit card for the total of $______

Credit Card Type (circle one): AMERICAN EXPRESS / DISCOVER / VISA / MASTER CARD
Card Number: _______________________ Expiration Date: _______ Card Security Code: _______

To Make A Donation/Join the CMC Online by Credit Card or PayPal:
(You do not need to use this form if you pay online.)

1. You can use your credit card or your own PayPal account to make a donation. Both kinds of transactions are processed through PayPal.
2. First go to www.familyfocusadoption.org and click “Donate.” This takes you to the PayPal website for either kind of transaction. (Or go to your own PayPal account and make payment to “ffasjack@earthlink.net.”)
3. During your transaction you will be prompted for “notes.” Tell us if this donation is in honor or memory of someone else, and how you would like us to notify them (email or mailing address).
4. To join the CMC with your own PayPal account, go to www.familyfocusadoption.org and click the picture of the Chocolate Milk.

Family Focus Adoption Services is a not-for-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.