Very few things bring people together like the love of music. Family Focus has discovered this during our last two annual concert events.

This year we are turning the Teatro at the Italian Academy into a jazz club!

Vocalist Lisa Gary will be headlining this concert, along with several talented musicians.

Lisa is a versatile New York-based vocalist. Her unique approach to singing blends her many musical influences. Finding music to be boundless, Lisa uses her voice to emote songs written in various styles.

Growing up in a musical household, Lisa was surrounded by her father’s passion for jazz, and began studying classical trumpet under his wing when she was nine years old. She was also a student of our own official FFAS Musician, Joe Rutkowski, at Great Neck North High School.

Lisa studied Jazz Voice at McGill University’s Schulich School of Music in Montreal. Shortly after receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Jazz Performance, she was accepted into the highly prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition. Lisa was one of twelve semi-finalists selected out of hundreds of submissions from thirty-three countries.

After graduating, Lisa continued her jazz career while delving into the pop world, developing an original pop sound from her influences in jazz, folk, indie, funk and other styles of music. Her recent focus has been on honing her craft in the cross-over pop world, recording her first pop album with award winning, Grammy-nominated producer and arranger Rob Mounsey. The album features an incredible band that includes Mounsey on keyboard and the legendary Lew Soloff on trumpet.

Lisa can be found performing throughout the Tri-state area. She actively writes, performs, records, and possesses the perpetual desire to explore new music and projects.

We are delighted that we will have Lisa performing on behalf of Family Focus on April 27, 2016 at 7:30 at the Italian Academy. See our website for details and to order tickets: www.familyfocusadoption.org.
As Family Focus reaches its arms to embrace more and more of New York state, we are developing new spaces to serve our needs, and the needs of those we train and meet with: families, workers, birthmothers, and the children in our RAD! and Empowered Transition programs. But as we have expanded, with the construction on our original Little Neck location, and the opening of our permanent Castleton location, we have had to decide what to call these spaces. “Office” denotes that at any moment you could drop by to find folks at desks, answering phones and filling file cabinets. This is now taking place only at our Melville office - which has become Family Focus’s mailing address. With most of our files now “in the cloud,” and many of our staff spending more time working from home, the word “office” didn’t seem to fit. Sometimes the answer is obvious: since we train and meet at these places, we decided to call them our “Training and Meeting Centers.”

We have already had a couple of WCP (Waiting Child Program) Step Meetings in our Little Neck TMC. And the central location of our Castleton TMC has made it ideal for several meetings with families and county workers. In April, Family Focus will also be hosting the next Adoption Exchange meeting there.

The TMCs are only occupied when needed, so if you would like to see our new spaces, give us a call or send an email - we’d be proud to show you around.

**A REAL HANDS-ON TEAM**

Erin Gibb has been one of our Future Workers since the inception of our RAD! Program. So imagine how pleased we were when she decided to go back to school to earn her master’s degree in social work. This necessitated leaving her full-time position as a county worker, giving her some free hours in her day, which we were more than happy to fill.

So Erin was at our Castleton TMC, participating at our last monthly RAD! Meeting, when she was further initiated into the teamwork culture of FFAS. Six feet of newly-hung kitchen cabinets attempted to jump from the wall onto some of our staff. Erin (second from left) immediately joined staff member Camille Hehn, Future Worker Liam Irwin, Executive Director Jack Brennan, and other team members who all took turns holding up the cabinets until they could be safely removed.

No doubt about it, we are a real hands-on group!
In this age of texting, where we shorten everything to a string of abbreviations (LOL, IDK, BRB), and Twitter, where we must express whatever we want to say in a limited number of characters, it is easy to forget that something as simple as writing a letter is an important example of community behavior. From resume cover letters, to business correspondence, to a simple thank you for a gift, we feel it is still important to know how to write a letter.

Here are letters written by two children in our RAD! Program. As part of their work, their Future Workers wanted them not only to understand the obligation of writing letters, but also to experience the results of their efforts. Music is very important to Jennifer (age 15), and she was able to express her gratitude to the Chocolate Milk Club for an unexpected and much appreciated purchase of a replacement for her MP3 player. E.J. (age 17) made a very reasonable appeal, and was delighted by the positive result of his letter when Camille told him that our Chocolate Milk Club granted his request.

FFAS is grateful to the members of the Chocolate Milk Club, whose support makes both of these simple - but very important - lessons on community behavior possible for children in our RAD! Program.

**Agency News...**

_Hague Accreditation Renewal..._ It is time for agencies who were in the first wave of Hague Accreditations to begin the renewal process. FFAS has already submitted our preliminary application for renewal to the Council On Accreditation, and we are awaiting the next step in the process.

_The FFAS Tag-Team..._ A child from way upstate needs to visit a family from Long Island. Sound easy? FFAS is always up for a challenge. Recently “Joe,” a 15-year-old boy in our RAD! Program, needed to make the trip for his first visit to his “maybe-maybe family’s” home. So we got the cooperation of his county, and this is how the tag-team event took place: Joe’s county caseworker picks him up from his foster home and drives him to our Castleton TMC (2+ hours); FFAS Executive Director picks up Joe and drives him to Newburgh (1 1/2 hours); FFAS Assistant Director meets Joe in Newburgh and drives him to Hicksville, Long Island (2 1/2 hours); after three nights, the maybe-maybe father drives him all the way back to Castleton (almost 4 hours); Joe’s Future Worker picks him up and drives him all the way back to his foster home (2+ hours). Worth it? You better believe it - every minute! (*For an explanation of “maybe-maybe” see FFAS Newsletter #14 on our website.)

_Training - Jack and Maris..._ Our Executive Director and Executive Director Emerita will both once again be presenting workshops at the upcoming New York State Citizens Coalition for Children (NYSCCC) Conference in Albany, May 5-7. See the conference website for details. www.nysccc.org
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**End Quote:**

Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark.

-Rabindranath Tagore