“We finished, as always, with her answers to the three questions (which always seems to bring out a big Cheshire Cat grin from her), and she answered an easy yes to all three.” - From an Adoption Guide’s note after visiting his client child.

Sometimes it is the simplest things that have the most impact. For children going through transition toward adoption, beginning as early as the first few visits, we insist that children be given choices and be part of the decision-making process. And so, for as long as any of us can remember, at the end of each visit a child is asked three simple questions, and they are questions that make all the difference:

1. Do you feel comfortable?
2. Do you feel happy?
3. Do you feel safe?

These carefully selected questions are “door openers.” The answers indicate where the child is at with the family, giving them the opportunity to express how they feel without putting themselves at risk. We have learned that a child who has been through the experiences ours have can’t say “no” to protect themselves. So we would never ask them, “Do you want to keep living with Mr. and Mrs. Jones?” or even, “Are they being nice to you?”

Instead, a “no” to one of these non-threatening questions gives the child’s worker an indication that something might be wrong, and presents an opportunity to gently delve deeper, and together with the child, solve whatever the problem may be.

We find that these questions, which hold so much meaning at the beginning of a transition, seem to be used less and less as time goes by, and as the child feels more comfortable and confident living with the family.

For our Adoption Guide Program, the questions are printed on the “Orientation Card,” which is given to the child at the very beginning of the process, so they can keep these questions in mind even between their worker’s visits. For an explanation of how our Adoption Guide Program and all our other programs work, read about them on our website at: http://familyfocusadoption.org.
For years we have said that when children are betrayed over and over, they seem to lose something. We have been calling that elusive something “Vitamin Q.” But without knowing what this Vitamin Q is, how could we go about finding a way to build it back up?

During the course of developing our RAD! Program, we began to see commonalities in the relationships between the Future Workers and their “clients.” It doesn’t seem to matter the age, gender, background, or history of the child or the Future Worker, we keep seeing these commonalities over and over.

The Future Workers fill a unique role in the system that doesn’t conform to the expectations the children may have from their other relationship experiences. The Future Worker works to develop a consistent, protective, and supportive relationship with the child, focused - together - on the child’s future. And because the relationship grows slowly out of this place of safety and support, we are seeing the children relax overall, and their defenses becoming less and less automatic. This happens as they start to let go of the self-blame that keeps them from moving forward. Kids that are done with self-blame become comfortable in their own skins.

If the results of the RAD! Program are consistent, then we must be onto something. The Future Workers are supplementing the child’s ability to heal, to build confidence, and perhaps begin to gain back some of what they have lost. Perhaps we are on our way to discovering what Vitamin Q is, and how to help them get it back.

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.
ADOPTION ROARS INTO THEATERS IN LION

From an adoption professional’s point of view, the recent Academy Award nominated movie Lion, based on a true story of Saroo a 5-year-old Indian boy adopted by a couple from New Zealand, depicted many adoption “truths” in an accurate, respectful manner. The story is told from the perspective of the boy who is accidentally separated from his birth family. He endures harrowing experiences on the streets as he tries to find his way home, but ends up in an orphanage, and then adopted by a childless couple. Two years later, his parents adopt another boy from India who is overtly more troubled. The story then jumps ahead: Saroo is now a young adult who begins to explore his identity and lost connection to his birth family. This exploration culminates in his search for his birth mother back in India. While the story is movingly told from the adoptees perspective, the adoptive parents and birth mother’s perspective were also depicted with compassion and realism.

Several of the adoption themes in the movie resonated strongly. Saroo struggles with his fear that searching for his lost birth mother will be seen by his parents as disloyalty or a lack of gratitude. His adoptive parents grapple with how to emotionally support both of their adopted sons, even when they do not always understand their sons’ troubling behaviors. Finally, the birth mother shows deep gratitude to the adoptive parents for raising her son, despite the wrenching loss she experienced. In the work Family Focus does with families and children, we hear echoes of these themes. We hear it in our public program, placing older children from the foster care system with forever families. We hear it in our international program, where families and their children are often from different cultures. And we hear it in our domestic infant program, where even infants will one day face these issues of identity. It is testament to the strength of the movie that this one boy’s unique adoption story illuminates the stories of so many others.

A G E N C Y  N E W S . . .

30th On The 30th!... Don’t forget to save the date! Formal invitations will be going out this month for our 30th Anniversary Celebration, which will be held April 30th, 2017, at Antun’s Restaurant in Queens, NY.

We hope you can join us at this informal “friends and family” evening - don’t forget to bring your kids! We are going to have some fun, eat well, and enjoy each other’s company, while we honor Joel Fridovich, Family Focus’s Board President, for his many years of service. We are currently welcoming ads for our commemorative journal. For an ad form, see our website: www.familyfocusadoption.org, or email Rich at ffasrich@gmail.com.

Three to Present at NACAC... Executive Director Jack Brennan, Assistant Director Joanne Ferrante, and Associate Director Rich Buley-Neumar, will be presenting a workshop at this year’s North American Council on Adoptable Children conference. During the first hour of the workshop, Jack will discuss the foundational concepts of our RADI! Program, including how the program is filling the gaps in the child’s developmental needs, and the “One child - one worker” practice. The second hour will be a presentation by Joanne and Rich of the collaborative work that has been done on an actual case of an actual child who had an adoption dissolution, and then went on to have a successful adoption.
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