A few months ago we were contacted by a young man, “Bob,” who had been adopted as an infant through Family Focus. He requested whatever information we could provide to him about his birth family and the circumstances of his adoption. Because New York is a “closed records state,” our ability to provide information to an adoptee is very limited. We are permitted to give only “non-identifying” information. What does that mean? According to the NY State Department of Health, “non-identifying information does not include: the adoptee’s, birth parent’s or biological sibling’s first names or initials; the birth parent’s or biological sibling’s date of birth or astrological signs; the name of the hospital of birth, clinic, or doctor; a revealing occupation; any other information that in your good judgement would lead the adoptee to identifying information, i.e., your mother was the captain of the debate team, etc.” As you can imagine, finding something meaningful to fulfill an adoptee’s request is not an easy task.

Family Focus has always covered for this. When a baby is placed, right from the start we try to gather as much of this non-identifying information that we can, in case we need it some day. We record things like general appearance, traits (right- or left-handedness, glasses, etc.), likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests, talents and skills, religion, and general health. One of our staff social workers has the responsibility of reviewing our adoption records and writing a report for the adoptee.

As is our practice, we invited Bob to meet with a staff member to go over the information in person, and he welcomed the opportunity. Bob was a tall, handsome young man in his mid-twenties, very warm, with an open manner. He said that one of the reasons that had motivated him to look for his birth family was the fact that he was newly married, and he and his wife were expecting their first child. He had been told some information about his birth mother, but that information was very sketchy. He was particularly interested in the fact that he believed he had an older brother. Bob said he has two adoptive sisters, so having a brother means something special to him. He also told the worker that his parents had been “great,” and Family Focus had done a good job in selecting them. He seemed truly grateful.

When it was time to go over the written report with Bob, he listened extremely closely to every word. Fortunately, the worker who had met his birth parents wrote a very complete account of their meeting, even including a sentence describing how Bob’s birth father saw himself as “calm, attentive, sensitive and emotional.” When Bob heard this, he appeared very moved, and placed his hand over his heart, proclaiming, “That’s me.” He repeated the adjectives out loud – calm, attentive, sensitive, emotional – and said that they described him “to a T.”

In discussing the meeting among our staff a few days later, we were struck by the profound impact that the gift of these carefully recorded words, written twenty-five years ago, had on this young man. We are very grateful to the worker who wrote such a thorough report. And if you were wondering who that person might be, it was none other than our Executive Director Emerita, Maris Blechner!
See Jack's blog archives!

Agency News...

REFINING THE DEFINITION... The Family Focus Relationships Are Decisions (RAD!) Program was developed as an adoption readiness program, but what about those few children who have, or change to, a goal of independent living instead of adoption? After much discussion, we realized that the answer was staring us in the face. According to Dr. Bruce Perry and other trauma experts, the bridge to a child’s future is in building long-term, non-blaming, consistent, reliable, and predictable relationships. Our program got its name based on this idea. So we are refining the definition of the RAD! Program to acknowledge that it is primarily an adoption readiness program, but it is also a relationship readiness program. As an adoption agency, Family Focus is able to concentrate exclusively on relationship education and relationship building. We recognize that successful adoption, while of course the best and most hoped for result, is not the only successful outcome of the RAD! program. Learning to choose, build, and maintain relationships is a crucial part of a child’s future, whether that future includes adoption or independent living.

CONFERENCES... FFAS Executive Director Jack Brennan and Executive Director Emerita Maris Blechner have once again been selected to present workshops on Family Focus adoption philosophies at the NACAC Conference, which will be held this year in Las Vegas, July 18-20. Several staff will also be attending the conference, so that we can stay on top of the latest information in the world of adoption. For conference details visit www.nacac.org.

ORIENTATION WORKSHOPS BY REQUEST... Associate Director Rich Buley-Neumar presented a mini-orientation on adoption from foster care at the Long Island chapter of the Adoptive Parents Committee. The workshop generated a couple of calls from families who were working toward newborn adoption, but wanted to explore other options. Rich and other staff are always willing to present information workshops on the subject. Call our office at 718-224-1919 or email ffasrich@gmail.com for info and scheduling.

RAD! Program Update:
We have now had 36 children in the RAD! Program from 13 counties:
4 have moved on to independent living; 10 are living with families; 3 are visiting with families; 10 we are actively searching to find families for; and 3 are too new to the program.

Since Last Newsletter...
One child moved to Step 4, where his maybe-family currently is.
One child and maybe-family are doing a special 4-Step transition, and are on their third step.
One child and his maybe-dad moved from Step 1 to Step 2, and then moved again to Step 3.
Two sisters are on Step 4, and their maybe-moms are also on Step 4.
One child and her family had their Adoption Covenant Ceremony
Adoption Guide Program:
One boy and his family finalized their adoption.

CERTIFICATION TRAINING: For adopting families, adoptive families, and foster/adoption professionals. You must attend an INFO first. See our website calendar page for upcoming dates.

Like us on Facebook!
As you may have seen previously in this newsletter, the work that Future Workers do with their Young Decision Maker clients is varied, creative, and topical. When we see a case log about a technique that a Future Worker has come up with that we think could benefit our other staff, we add it to our Future Worker Handbook. Below is our newest addition, to give you an idea of how a strong personal relationship with one child can help a Future Worker tailor the work so that it has the most direct and meaningful impact for that child.

ONCE WE WERE SEATED, “Mitchell” asked if I had any future work for him to do. I told Mitchell that I had some ideas for new work, and asked him if he wanted to do future work that involved discussing baseball, basketball, or rock climbing. Mitchell looked both surprised and curious about this, and said that he would like to do future work about basketball.

I took out a blank piece of paper and a pen. I explained that I have not played basketball myself in a long time, but that I know Mitchell plays it often. I asked Mitchell to tell me the main goal of basketball. Mitchell answered that it was to make baskets to get points, and have your team win the game. I asked Mitchell to explain to me how exactly you “make a basket.” Mitchell, looking confused, told me that you dribble the ball down the court and throw the ball into the hoop for your team, adding that if it goes in, you earn points. I turned the paper I had taken out so it was positioned on the table horizontally. On the paper, I quickly drew a basketball court with a half-court line, and a backboard with a basket on each end of the paper. Next, I drew a stick figure near one end holding a basketball. Using the pen as a pointer, I confirmed that this player would move down the court, and throw the ball into the opposite basket to score points. Mitchell agreed that this was true.

I told Mitchell that I thought this was probably very easy and looked a little boring, adding that I remember playing basketball as being more difficult, so I found it wasn’t really something I enjoyed playing. Mitchell indicated that basketball is both fun and challenging. I pushed further, asking what was so fun about going down the court and throwing the ball into the basket, indicating that games must have really high scores. Mitchell told me that the challenge part is that there are other members of your team scoring as well. I added a few more stick figures on the court, indicating that it seemed even more boring because now, every time the ball bounced out of the basket a team member could throw it again, make a basket and score again.

I could see that Mitchell was curious about where I was going with this idea. Mitchell reminded me that there is another team playing against yours, and they are trying to get the ball and score at the other basket, which makes the game more challenging.

Next, I confirmed with Mitchell that although this was the case, the goal for his team had stayed the same – to get the ball, make baskets and score points. Mitchell confirmed that was true. I confirmed some basketball terms I know with Mitchell (“blocking,” “passing,” “and one,” “rebound,” etc.). We established that these things get in the way of players making baskets, presenting a challenge for the players. I asked Mitchell if these things made the players give up and resign to lose the game, or if those things made them want to work hard to improve their skills and learn new strategies so that they make it to their goal of winning. Mitchell confirmed that even though sometimes teams win and sometimes they lose, they always start the game with the goal of doing their best and winning it.

Taking out another piece of paper, I placed it on the table and drew a “timeline” down the middle. At one end, I wrote the word “START,” and at the other end I wrote the word “FINISH.” I told Mitchell this line represented the biggest goal that he and I have been working on since we started our contract as Young Decision Maker and Future Worker: finding Mitchell a family of his own, and getting him adopted.

Along the line, I put a few dots at random points. The first dot nearest to start, I labeled “PLANNING.” We noted how in the beginning, we became experts on each other, and made a plan together to do future work that would get us to Mitchell’s goal of being adopted. Another dot was labeled “FIND A MAYBE-FAMILY.” We noted that this was when “Ellen” was found, and he started visiting with her. The next dot (in the middle of the line) was labeled, “NOT THERE YET,” and I noted that this was when Ellen made her decision to stop visiting Mitchell. The next dot I labeled “MOVING ON,” explaining that when all of that happened, Mitchell had a big decision to make: to move on toward his goal of being adopted into a family, or to change his goal. I noted that he had bravely chosen to tell (FFAS Executive Director) Jack to continue to look for a family for him rather than decide to stop working toward his ultimate goal of being adopted. I also added that Mitchell could always change his mind about his goal, but these are the choices he has made so far.

At this point our food was ready, and Mitchell volunteered to go to the counter to get our pizza. When Mitchell returned to the table with the pizza, I asked if we could finish our future work while we ate. Mitchell thought that was a good idea. After we each took a slice of pizza, Mitchell confirmed that he was ready to finish today’s future work. I told Mitchell that I thought his getting to his goal of being adopted was a lot like basketball. We started a comparison chart to illustrate my point.

Mitchell was clearly surprised that these were similar. I reminded him that although we had compared basketball and adoption, we know that the goal of adoption is very serious and not a game. I added that I wanted Mitchell to see that just as in basketball, where there are things such as players’ choices, decisions made by refs, and obstacles such as blocks and fouls that get in the way of a team winning a single game, the adoption journey involves making decisions and sometimes has blocks and setbacks which present challenges along the way. Mitchell confirmed that he understood this. I let him know that he had done some excellent future work today.
MEMBERS:
Vivian Alexopoulos & Anna Brady
Anita Brann
Leon Brawer
Thomas & Veronica Carchietta
Elizabeth Cardone
Jane Cassi
Edward & Isabella Conti
Francine Cournos M.D.
David & Ellen Dean
Kevin Ferenz
Nam Forster
Nick Fox
Ronnie Gersten
Goodshop
Lisa Green
Loren Wisnner Greene
Bob & Sandy Hagen
Robert Hall & Ella Wilcox
Christopher Hahn
Robert & Diane Hunt
Integrated Consumer Mktg. Consulting
Arthur Kettenbeil
Mark & Nora Krieger
Gale Lavinder
Joan Lazarus
Eugenia Luis
Albert & Mrs. B. Matousek
Network for Good
Rich & Lisa Oliveri
Joshua Polenberg
Christopher Pragman
Debra Rubien & Gregg Wagner
Brenda & Rose Santiago

DONATIONS:
Amazon Smile
Anonymous
Steven Bernstein & Carol Barsky
Lori Beth Brandston & Michael Greene
Mike & Fallon Brown
Anita Brann
Leon Brawer
Thomas & Veronica Carchietta
Elizabeth Cardone
Jane Cassi
Edward & Isabella Conti
Francine Cournos M.D.
David & Ellen Dean

DONATIONS IN HONOR/MEMORY OF:
Mary & Bob Abes IHO Joe Rutkowski & Lisa Binder
Mary & Bob Abes IHO the Mothers of Joe Rutkowski & Mary Abes
Roz & Arnie Bernstein IMO John Forster
Roz & Arnie Bernstein IMO Barbara Settanni
Maris and Stewart Blechner IMO Harriet Bandel
Maris and Stewart Blechner IMO John Forster
Maris and Stewart Blechner IMO Ken Rudolf
Maris and Stewart Blechner IMO Barbara Settanni
Maris and Stewart Blechner IMO Shirley Solomonowitz
Elizabeth & Daniel Case IMO Cyril K. Petrov
April Dubison & Aleksandr Lerner IMO Max Lerner
Arthur & Ruth Friedman IMO Arthur Friedman

CHOCOLATE MILK CLUB MEMBERS AND DONATIONS:

Tito Del Pilar
Pam & Bob DeMan
Constance Dougherty
Joanne & Tony Ferrante
Bennett Finkelstein
Mauri Fitzgerald-Jamsich
Joel & Almarie Fridovich
In Memory Of Lynn Fridovich
Gilberto & Lisa Gonzalez
Keith Griffin
Rosa Griffin
Michelle Hatzopoulos &
Stephen Knoll
Camille Henn
Richard & Denise Hughes
Liam & Cara Irwin
Tova Klein & Travis Cloud
Annie & Peter Lipke
Liz & Mike McAleen
Darrell McBroom
Kathleen McQuown
Valjean Minichino
Ines Miyares
John & Linda Nelson
Lillian Neumar & Robert Meyer
William O’Keefe
Shawn O’Riley & Sara Hornstein
Mary and Bob Peel
Yvonne Perez-Sommer
Denise & Rob Pilgrim
Mary Potter
Sharon & Steve Powers
Chris Pragman & Laura Lee Blechner
Marguerite Riggiedionore
Lucy Ruden
William and Merit Ruden
Sandi & Roger Salerno
Judith Santoanni
Linda & Mitchell Schwartz
Sharon Sorrentino & John O’Keefe
Kathe & Steve Stojowski
Lisa Stojowski

(Donations are from 11/16/18 through 2/15/19)

DONATIONS MATCHES:
AT&T Employee Giving: Keith Griffin

End Quote:
“"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."”
- Plato

Please send correspondence to:
Family Focus Adoption Services
535 Broadhollow Road, Suite B-42, Melville, NY 11747 718-224-1919 www.familyfocusadoption.org
With training and meeting centers in Little Neck (NY Metro), Castleton (Capital District), and Liverpool (Central New York)