FFAS celebrated our 25th anniversary with a Gala Fundraiser at The Italian Academy at Columbia University, NYC, at which we honored four wonderful child advocates. Each of our honorees, who spoke passionately about their work, are people who do not stand idly by, but devote their time and efforts to protecting and supporting children and children’s rights (see previous newsletter).

More photos on page 5-6.
Jack’s Blog

Jack Brennan, Associate Director and head of our public programs, continues to write a very moving, personal blog about his experiences in, around, and outside of adoption, and he is building quite a following.

The-year end report on his blog stated that he had 5,200 views (it is now over 5500). The report noted that if every one of those hits was a person on a NYC subway train, it would take four trips to carry all of them!

Most of the views are by referral from our website, which means that we are generating enough interest with our site for people to want to know more. Others were directed there by NYSCCC.org, the New York support and advocacy group for foster and adoptive families.

It was also wonderful to learn that jackspectives.com has gone international... with readers on five continents, in such places as the UK, Canada, South America, Australia and China.

If you haven’t read Jack’s blog yet, please take a look. It is honest, straightforward, and evocative, and really gets you thinking - all in all an excellent commentary on the human experience.

Program Updates

Waiting Child Programs

Family Focus successfully piloted our new Certification Training: Dynamics of Adopting Multiply Betrayed Children. Seven families participated, and have told us how much they appreciate the innovative and compelling concepts they've learned. We’ve also solicited feedback on the training materials from adoption professionals in several NY counties, and it has been overwhelmingly positive. We are about to begin our second series, and are opening the training up to any family who is considering adopting or who has already adopted, as well as foster/adoption professionals. Email us for details, and if you know anyone who would be interested in taking the training please refer them to us.

We continue our streak of sibling placements with a group of four from Texas. We also saw a child spend his first holiday season with a family in years - and then move in with them in the new year!

Child Welfare Training

Not only does Family Focus have our All Children, All Families Certification from the Human Rights Campaign, but staff member Rich Buley-Neumar, a trainer in the initiative, has just completed training of a large New York City agency to help them on their way to Certification. More New York agencies are expressing interest in obtaining the training as well.

Don’t forget to check us out on Facebook!
Adoptions Finalized in 2011

11 in ’11: Here are the children Family Focus placed, whose adoptions were finalized last year.

Bob*, age 18, originally from Steuben County, NY, was removed from his birthmother's home at the age of eight because of neglect and sexual abuse at the hands of his birthfather. Separated from his sister, labeled mildly mentally retarded, and diagnosed with ADHD and depression, Bob bounced in and out of 13 foster homes, interspersed with many hospitalizations for depression, suicide threats and physical aggression, until he ended up in a Residential Treatment Facility where he lived for 4 years. A Family Focus family was located through a recruitment video made by a Wendy’s Wonderful Kids recruiter. (Reportedly, Bob called this recruiter constantly asking her when she would find a family for him.) Bob was adopted by two gay dads on LI (who had previously adopted a 16 year old boy through Family Focus) in April 2011, after a one-year transition. He is now 21 years old.

(*All children’s names have been changed to protect their privacy.)
Adoptions Finalized in 2011 cont’d

Jane, age 9, originally from Oneida County, NY, was removed from her birthparents as an infant because of the birthfamily’s problems with alcoholism, domestic violence, anti-social behavior, physical and sexual abuse. Jane lived in a series of foster homes and spent three years at a residential treatment center. She was not successful in any foster placements due to highly volatile and violent behavior. Jane had numerous diagnoses including ADHD, PTSD, RAD, Bi-polar Disorder, Encopresis, Enuresis, and was mildly retarded. Jane’s adoptive parents, a heterosexual couple living in the Albany area, had previously adopted her older sister. The transition process took 13 months. Jane is now 12 years old.

Steve, Sam, Tom and Joe, a set of 10-year-old twins, an 11-year-old and a 12-year-old, originally from Washington County, NY, were placed into foster care due to their birthmother’s drug abuse when the boys were 6, 7 and 8 years old respectively. They had two short placements with relatives but neither placement worked out because the relatives could not manage all four boys. The boys were eventually separated - the twins with one family and the older boys with a second family. All four boys were diagnosed with ADHD. One brother was also diagnosed with PTSD and another with Bi-polar Disorder. They were placed with a heterosexual couple from Schoharie County with no children in the home who was interested in adopting all four boys. The transition process took 14 months. The boys are now 12, 13, and 14 years old.

Jake, a 14 year old boy originally from Columbia County, NY, was removed from his birthparents at age five because of parental substance abuse and neglect. Jake had six placements - including two therapeutic foster care placements plus a psychiatric hospitalization - before his involvement with Family Focus. He began visiting a heterosexual couple (with a birthson) from Orange County while placed in a residential treatment center. Jake’s diagnoses were Reactive Attachment Disorder and Mood Disorder. His behaviors included mood swings, suicidal ideation and aggressive behavior. He had a two-year transition process before being adopted. Jake is now 16 years old.

David, a 13 year old boy originally from Oneida County, NY, was removed from his birth mother at the age of seven because of domestic violence between her paramour and her, and educational and medical neglect. David was in four foster homes before being referred to Family Focus. David was diagnosed with ADHD and depressive symptoms. Through Family Focus he was placed with a heterosexual couple that had a daughter who had adopted as an infant. He lived with this family for a year and he and the family were on Step 3 of the 6 step transition process when the couple asked for David’s removal. David was then placed with a second Family Focus family, a single man in his 30’s who lives in a very rural area of Ulster County, New York. David’s transition with this man took two years, four months (a Family Focus record!) and he is now 16 years old.

Sally, Ben and Margie, three siblings ages 11, 9, and 5, originally from the state of Oregon, were placed into foster care because of parental neglect, domestic violence and drug abuse. They were placed with grandparents for more than a year but were removed because of physical and sexual abuse. They then moved to a foster home where they remained for more than two years. The children were all diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and Ben also had ADHD, night terrors and frequent bedwetting. In 2009, a heterosexual couple with no children (trained and approved to adopt by Family Focus) living in Sullivan County, New York inquired about the children. After much telephone contact between FFAS, the couple and the state of Oregon, the children were placed with the couple in 2010. (The couple visited the children for one week in Oregon before they were placed in New York.) The children’s adoption was finalized after 11 months of placement. The children are now twelve, ten and six years of age.
Sarah Gerstenzang, Executive Director of the New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, and friend of FFAS.

Ronald E. Richter, Commissioner of New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) - discusses his experiences with FFAS.

Our honorees (clockwise): Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, Janice Huff, Dr. Jane Aronsen, and Theodora Anema.

Auctioneer CK Swett of Phillips de Pury & Co. leads an exciting - and successful - live auction.

Family Focus Board President Mary Jo Romeo-Pappas introduces our esteemed honorees.

FFAS Executive Director Maris Blechner welcomes our guests.

Joe Rutkowski provides a lovely musical ambiance.
David reads his poem expressing his adoption journey.

Rick Whitaker, FFAS Board Member, and Director of Theater and Music at the Italian Academy at Colombia University, our generous hosts for the evening.