



family FOCUS

Adoption Services

— *We Don't Walk Away* —

I BELONG HERE

Ideally, we all have a place we call home. As is the nature of life, conditions are not static. Actually, the "there" of home is not static either; the physical place, the people who frequent it, and particularly our concept and understanding of home almost certainly will change over the course of our lives.

Home can be a house in the hills or an apartment in an urban sky. Home can be peaceful and home can be chaotic. Eventually for most of us, home is not a place *out there* but rather, a place we can find within ourselves that is built from the remnants of homes past and present; a mosaic with pieces of personal, familial, cultural, and spiritual identity interspersed. It's a place where we can return and settle and recharge with the knowledge that we are safe, accepted, and loved without conditions. It's where we can confidently say with our most authentic voice, "I belong here."

Our kids, as we affectionately call them and claim them to be, have histories involving that word: home. What has "home" meant to them? For some of them, they once had a home, a physical space as well as a place inside them where they felt grounded and safe. But at some point, what seemed like a rock-solid foundation on which their home was constructed began to crumble, due to circumstances completely outside of their control.

Beneath it, a dark underworld called foster care, into which they fell, and where they remain, feeling confused, aggrieved, betrayed, and alone. Not only is home a place they cannot return to in the physical sense; perhaps the home within, too, is a place of suffering, fueled by memories of traumatic events, including but not limited to being removed from their families, as well as new waves of experiences created in temporary foster homes and residential facilities.

Relationships are the vehicles by which all healing and growth must travel. The state of the foster care system-at-large is not currently conducive to developing and nourishing lasting, trusting, long-term relationships on which the children can rely. The counties are having trouble staying staffed, as are the foster care agencies and residential facilities where *our* kids are placed, and where *our* kids frequently experience the entrances and exits of many professionals, in addition to countless moves to new placements.

And that is assuming the always-needed and ever-sought new placement is available. The number of families coming in to be foster parents has taken a dive. Pre-adoptive foster parents? Even worse. And never before have we seen the new reality of counties resorting to sending kids to motel rooms manned by LDSS workers, or to out-of-state residential treatment programs, because of widespread lack of space and/or staff, or the system rejecting them based on their histories.

The questions we must answer, and the need we must respond to, are...

Without parents; without long-term, reliable relationships; without a steady and safe place in which memories can be banked and recalled; without a clear and honored connection to their culture(s); without an ability to look ahead of today, or right now, due to uncertainty in where they are going, and who will be waiting when they get there...

Where is "home" for *our* kids? Where will *our* kids *believe* they belong?

They need our help. Let's help them.

HAPPY 38TH BIRTHDAY, FAMILY FOCUS!



FFAS WORKER SPOTLIGHT

My roles at FFAS have included Adoption Specialist, Social Work Intern, and now, Future Worker.

I originally learned about FFAS through my brother, Jack Brennan, who is now the Executive Director of the agency. I began working at FFAS around May of 1988 as an Adoption Specialist. I conducted family studies, placed children for adoption (including infants), and supervised those placements. In January of 1989, I became an intern while working toward my BSW degree. I graduated in May of 1990, and continued to work as an Adoption Specialist while attending graduate school.

After graduation, I was juggling three part-time jobs and raising two children as a single mom. It was overwhelming, and I was struggling to make ends meet. In January of 1993, I obtained a full-time position and, as a result, left all three of my part-time jobs—including Family Focus.

After retiring from my full-time job, I returned to FFAS on a part-time basis as a Future Worker.

My role at FFAS today is very different from my role 37 years ago. Back then, most of the employees were

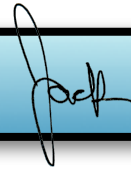
adoptive parents - I was not. However, I felt I could relate to many of the issues our children face.

When I was 10 years old, my parents were in a car crash. My mother was killed instantly. My father survived, but his alcoholism worsened over time. By the time I was 12, he gave custody of us to my aunt and uncle. As an adult, I'm grateful for them, but as a child, it was difficult. It was hard to be told how "lucky" I was while I was grieving the loss of my mother.

At Family Focus, we listen to our kids, we empower them, and we understand their pain. What a great opportunity it is to make a difference in a child's life. I'm grateful to do this work.

My favorite part of working at FFAS is being part of the FFAS family. Everyone here truly cares about the children we work with and understands the importance of empowering them and preparing them for adulthood. I love that we all remain focused on our commitment to the children.





If A Relationship Is Not A “We”, Then What Is It?

When you adopt a kid from the foster care system, especially a teen, and more especially one who was living in an institution (the old orphanages), you have to recognize that their experiences have led them to thinking – and not thinking – in a way that is often very surprising. And troubling.

Anthony’s video about his own adoption is out there online now (Family Focus Adoption on Facebook or Instagram) and I know that he wrote, and then spoke, the truth from beginning to end – which is why we recorded it and put it online. I am writing this afternoon to talk a bit about my perspective on him and his adoption.

Anthony’s judgement is not good. Like many of the kids with his kind of background (and far too many Americans) he lives by his feelings. Like a young kid, he wants what he wants when he wants it. And this has caused him problems. And driven me crazy.

Example: he had a great position at Amazon for the past year and a half. He liked it; he was good at; and he got paid really well. But he wants to be on his phone when he wants to be on his phone. For doing it more than once, it got him put on probation. Then, last month, he did it again, while on that probation, and he was immediately fired.

Prior to that, my second car, that I was letting him use, died. He decided that he wanted to get a fancy-dancy car. As my car dealer called it: a “vroom vroom” car. Anthony found a used one at a dealer in the Bronx. I told him not to buy it: that a car in the city would most likely have much more wear and tear on it than a suburban car. But he was determined. I told him what to watch out for from this used car dealer, and I watched as Anthony just blew past every red flag that I saw and pointed out to him. And there were plenty. I asked, “What are you going to do if this lying guy is selling you a lemon? What if you have to bring it to him for repairs and he keeps the car for weeks to do them? What if the lemon can’t be fixed? Where will you get the money to buy a different car?” And so forth and so on. But he’s 20 years old – I couldn’t forbid him. So, he bought it. I told him that he was on his own. I wasn’t helping him buy it; I wasn’t driving to the Bronx, etc. (Of course I violated that when I took him to my mechanic later.)

Within days, the “check engine light” came on. My mechanic, around the corner, opened the hood and said that there was no way he could fix the car. We took it to my dealer’s mechanic and he said something that he had never said to me in 25 years: “We cannot fix this car.” He recommended a specialty shop that fixes “vroom vroom” cars. We brought the car there a month ago and they – on first look – told us to bring it back to the dealer he got it from and get his money back. But Anthony wanted this car, this model specifically. So, we asked if it could be fixed. They thought so – but it would cost. They gave us an estimate and began work. And as they did the work they came up upon more and more issues. The estimate kept going up, and this week had reached 10 grand.

Yesterday, they called us in and told us that it wasn’t worth fixing; that there were some (even criminal) issues regarding how it passed inspection, etc. They told us what to do to walk away whole, and how to get the dealer to buy the car back and pay for the repair work already done using the DMV. We will do it and see. Meanwhile, Anthony is without a car, still.

But three times - while we were in the garage, while we walked to my car, when we were in the car - Anthony said to me, “Pop, what are we going to do?”

I wanted to scream at him for bringing this all down on his head, and mine. I wanted to tell him that he has made his bed and he will have to lie in it. I wanted to tell him that “I told you so.” I wanted to tell him a lot of things.

But I didn’t.

Because I was experiencing, in that very moment, through his language and his presence with me, his conviction that he and I were a “WE.” I wouldn’t have talked like that at his age. I would have said, “What am I going to do?” Anthony said, “What are WE going to do?”

Not a doubt in his mind that WE would be doing something.

That, folks, is the joy, and the realness, of being a father to this young man. And to all those who have been betrayed as he was.

That is what adoption is about: “Pop, what are WE going to do?”

WE.

family FOCUS

Adoption Services

Folks,

A kid - we will call him Terry - aged out of foster care on a frigid winter Wednesday afternoon. Like so many young adults leaving care, he walked into the unknown with as many of his belongings as he could carry. And his first call was to his Future Worker.

“Sally, what am I going to do? Where can I go?”

Sally immediately made arrangements to meet with Terry. As she approached him, sitting alone on a park bench, she noticed Terry looked bigger than just a week ago when she last saw him. As she got closer it became clear why: Terry was wearing layers upon layers of clothing. Aside from being cold, Terry explained, he had decided to wear all of the clothing he owned so that he could be sure they would go with him wherever he was going.

Due to changes in legislation, the foster care system has shifted to an insistence on kinship and “family settings” for the children who have unfortunately found themselves in the abyss. Rightfully so, and good for kids - when successful. However, there are kids who get lost in the shuffle - the 4-5% like Terry who have no one to go to. And the group homes and institutions that once acted as the reliable “last resort” for these kids are now either closing, or becoming so selective that they don’t take the very kids who need them most.

That’s why we at Family Focus have always been an agency that stands with the “Terrys” in the system. We see it as our responsibility to think outside the box, and create innovative programs to serve these children especially, and to never walk away from them without their having arrived at a safe, stable, and successful future.

Less than two weeks after he left the foster care system, Terry defied the odds, and even his own expectations. He wasn’t homeless, sleeping on that park bench. He wasn’t in a jail cell. He wasn’t rummaging through dumpsters for food. Instead, with our support, Terry was on his way to something better. His meaningful relationship with Sally morphed into an aunt/nephew relationship of sorts, and he began visiting with someone he now refers to as “grandpa.” We helped Terry get a place in a rooming house. He was securing interviews for jobs that could lead to long-term employment and a hopeful future. And he had something else he hadn’t fathomed possible: keys to his very own car. This gave Terry not only the ability to expand his work options, but also to reconnect and visit with long-distance family members. It gave him a sense of freedom and independence that he had seldom experienced in his time in foster care.

Success stories like Terry’s wouldn’t happen without you. Our programs for aging-out kids aren’t funded by any government agencies, they are only possible through the generosity of your donations and Chocolate Milk Club membership. Please consider being a part of us by supporting this wonderful and vitally important work.

With thanks,



Help further our mission, with possible tax benefits to you!

Consider donating to Family Focus Adoption Services through your IRA. A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) allows an individual to request their IRA institution transfer money out of their IRA directly to their chosen charities without paying taxes on their money. The process is easy!

- * You must be 70½ years or older and, if required to take a required minimum distribution (RMD), the Qualified Charitable Distribution counts against the RMD.
- * Distributions can only be made from an Individual Retirement Account (IRA).
- * The maximum donation that can be excluded from taxable income in any year is \$100k.
- * Distribution must be made directly to Family Focus Adoption Services. That keeps it out of your taxable income.
- * Instruct your IRA Administrator to distribute up to \$100k or a designated amount as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to FFAS. By directing your IRA distribution to FFAS, you don't have to report the QCD as taxable income, and won't owe any taxes on the QCD.

Contact your Plan Administrator directly to begin the process.

Below is important information you may need when requesting a Qualified Charitable Distribution:

MAILING ADDRESS: Family Focus Adoption Services, 1528 Columbia Turnpike, Suite 202, Castleton, NY 12033

TAX IDENTIFICATION: 11-2869661

CONTACT NAME IF REQUESTED: Jack Brennan, Executive Director, 845-401-5225, jack@ffas.info

Please let Jack know when you send in your QCD request to your IRA Administrator. Be sure to tell us if this gift is in honor or memory of a friend or loved one.

Family Focus recommends you seek guidance of a professional advisor, to assist you on making an informed decision. Any information provided by Family Focus Adoption Services is not meant as a substitute for legal or financial advice.

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DONATIONS IN HONOR/MEMORY OF:

Judith & Mark Ashton IHO Anthony Salinas Brennan
Maryanne Hood IHO Jack Brennan

Maris and Stu Blechner: Celebrating the Life of:
Marvin Sklamberg

(Donations are from 2/15/25 through 5/1/25)



The Chocolate Milk Club: Get in the Mix!



Scan me

"Adoption - authentic adoption - we tell our kids, is like chocolate milk: once that chocolate is mixed with that milk, there is no way ever to separate them again."

The **Chocolate Milk Club** is a community of hope and help for a population of children that mostly has neither.



Dues are \$35 monthly
(or \$420 annually)

Please contact us if
you would like to
increase your giving.

Contact Amy:
amy@ffas.info
518-595-9513

<https://www.familyfocusadoption.org/emc>

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Adoption Services

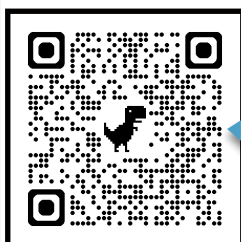
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FFAS NEWS

The
Chocolate Milk
Club

See our website to
join!

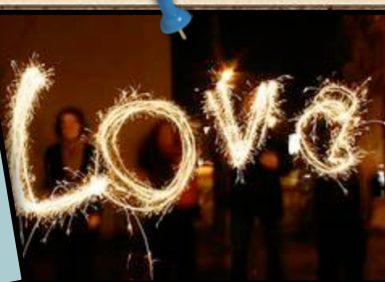
RAD! Program Update:

We have 45 in RAD!
4 in GATE
7 in GAP
11 Active in Alumni

Overall, we have had 45
who have left the
programs, 24 to finalized
adoptions.

* Family Focus works with
freed and non-freed kids.

ORIENTATION AND
TRAINING:
are done 100% via
Zoom.
Check our website for
dates.



Since the Last Newsletter

One child and one family had their Covenant Ceremony in St. Lawrence County.

One child and one maybe family both moved to step 6 of the FFAS Transition Process.

One child and one maybe family have started their adoption steps.

Four new kids have started in the RAD! Program.

Five new prospective RAD! Workers are in our NTDC training.

One child has transitioned home to his birth family.