



Family Connections

*Parents and Children
Growing Together*

REPORT CARD

Fall
2012



Luis with his daughter Ailen and wife Amalia

Fathers as Involved Participants at Family Connections

As everyone involved with Family Connections knows, one of the most important underlying tenets of our educational philosophy is that parent involvement—at home and at school—is an extremely important contributor to a child's personal and academic growth.

In early years, this includes reading aloud, telling stories, and singing and playing with your children. These experiences contribute to children's language and literacy development and transmit information and knowledge about people, places and things. (2/ed/gpv)

What many may not know is that as the child grows, "children whose fathers participate in classroom activities and school meetings and events receive higher grades,

enjoy school more, and are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities than children whose fathers don't participate -- regardless of the level of maternal participation." (NCES, 1997) The experts even quantify this by noting that children enjoy school more and have a lower dropout and expulsion rate when fathers participate in 3 or more school activities, e.g. parent-teacher meetings, back-to-school night, chaperoning a field trip, or helping in the classroom. This holds true even if the father doesn't live with the child. (www.workfamily.com, July 2005)

Even when fathers do want to be more involved with their children, "Many ... are unprepared for this new and expanded parenting role. For this reason, involving

fathers in parent education programs should be a program priority," says Virginia Commonwealth University's professor of counselor education, Andrew Beale. (*Professional School Counseling, Oct. 1999*)

At Family Connections, this philosophy is a reality on a daily basis. We not only strive to teach our parents the importance of father involvement, we have worked to make FC a "father friendly" agency in an effort to make fathers and male caregivers feel included and welcomed in all of our classrooms. We've asked a few of our many wonderful participating fathers to share their thoughts on what involvement at school means to them and their children.

Jose Briseno has been participating at FC, EPA site, since September 2009. He has two boys—3-year old Bryan and 6-month old Diego. At first, Jose's wife Monica was the involved parent, but says Jose, "as soon as I came to visit the school the first day I was impressed with the way the children were treated." He liked how the teachers, "talk to the children and the attention they pay to them. How they sing and dance with them as if it is a natural thing and nobody feels embarrassed." Jose explains that he became more involved at FC because, "I learned how important it is for them and their development." Because

of his job, Jose can't always be as involved as Monica; but, he says, "I try to read all the written information that my wife brings home to learn more about their development," and also finds receiving school information e-mails "very beneficial." "Now," he says, "I also sing and dance with my children without feeling embarrassed. Our whole family feels more united by having all the members participate in the program."

Francisco Martinez is a Family Connections dad who has been participating at the Belle Haven Site since October 2010. He and his wife Emilsa have two children—Karen, who is starting Kindergarten this year and four-year old Alan. As a child himself, Francisco experienced a traditional family structure: "My mother was the one who took care of us and my father was the provider who went to work very early in the morning and came back in the afternoon, but was never involved in our education." As a father, Francisco has made a point of taking on a different role. "I am very involved in my children's life," he says. "I do not see that with my male friends. In general the mothers are the ones involved." Like Jose, Francisco finds it a challenge to participate at school on top of working. He became interested in doing more at Family Connections as his wife told him about, "some of the activities they were doing at the school with teacher Angela." He enjoyed the atmosphere at FC from his first visit. From there, he says, "I incorporated the idea of being a volunteer and making it a habit." Francisco is a convert, noting he now believes that, "the father's presence makes children feel more secure. It is very important to have the fathers involved."

Luis Cauch has been participating since January 2011 at FC, RWC Site, where he and his wife Amalia bring their 2-year-old daughter Ailen. Like our other FC dads, Luis finds that FC has helped him gain new perspectives on the importance of paternal involvement. "I know it is difficult after a workday," says Luis, "but I realized the important point is the quality of the time we spent together, not the quantity." He says that it took awhile for him to get involved, "because I did not believe going to school had an impact, but as I started seeing the benefits for my daughter in her behavior, I decided to get involved and come regularly to school." Seeing Ailen become increasingly independent, says Luis, "motivates me to continue." Luis has the additional challenge of being auditorily impaired (he is both deaf and mute); he communicates with Ailen through American Sign Language which he himself has sought out help in order to improve. "I became a role model for my children incorporating the necessary tools," says Luis, "because I want my children to be productive members of society. To be a parent with auditory needs is very difficult but I



Jose and family at the 2011 Belle Haven graduation celebration.

know that if I am consistent and know what I want for my children I can achieve that goal."

Research shows that even very young children who have experienced high father involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem solving capacity. Fathers' involvement seems to encourage children's exploration of the world around them and confidence in their ability to solve problems (Pruett, 2000).

We are so impressed with these fathers and the many others they represent. And we are so proud when a parent like Jose says, "I feel I am a better dad based on all the tools Family Connections provides for us." With the insights he's gained, Jose's advice to new dads is, "To be more involved from the beginning and talk to them from a very young age because even though we think they do not understand, I know children understand much more than we think they do."



Francisco helps out during a recent landscaping project at the Belle Haven Classroom

Note from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I am excited to share this year's Report Card Newsletter with you because I feel it hi-lights two areas of strength for Family Connections...getting parents involved and harnessing the power of volunteerism. Speaking of volunteers, I'd like to introduce two new and important members of our volunteer corps **Sabrina Alfin** and **Amy Schwimmer**. Both are helping us in the area of communications. As our agency grows, so too does the need for increasing the public's awareness of who we are, and why Family Connections is an important piece to the educational puzzle in our community. Amy's communication skills have been put to great use already as the copy writer for this very newsletter and Sabrina has jumped in as a key member of our Communications Committee which is tasked with implementing several elements of our newly completed Strategic Plan.

If it has been a while since you have visited our program in action, this is the year to make that call. Family Connections is growing in exciting new ways and we would love to share our vision with you and encourage you to bring others along who may want to learn about supporting an agency such as ours.

Of most importance is our 2nd Night of Dreams fundraiser. We have moved the timing and location of the event to Tuesday February 26, 2013 at the fabulous Sharon Heights Country Club. This year's event will be a perfect opportunity to honor not only some very important supporters of ours but will serve to launch our year long 20th anniversary celebration as well. Please mark your calendars now and plan to spend a cozy evening with other friends of Family Connections helping us raise funds and awareness so that more families and young children can benefit from a quality early education and parent involvement program. I look forward to seeing you in February and hopefully before!

Cooperatively Yours,

Renee Zimmerman
Executive Director

Annual Giving Campaign

The following is a list of individual donors, foundations and corporate funders who made gifts between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. Please inform us of any errors or omissions so that we may correct our records.

\$20,000 + Donors

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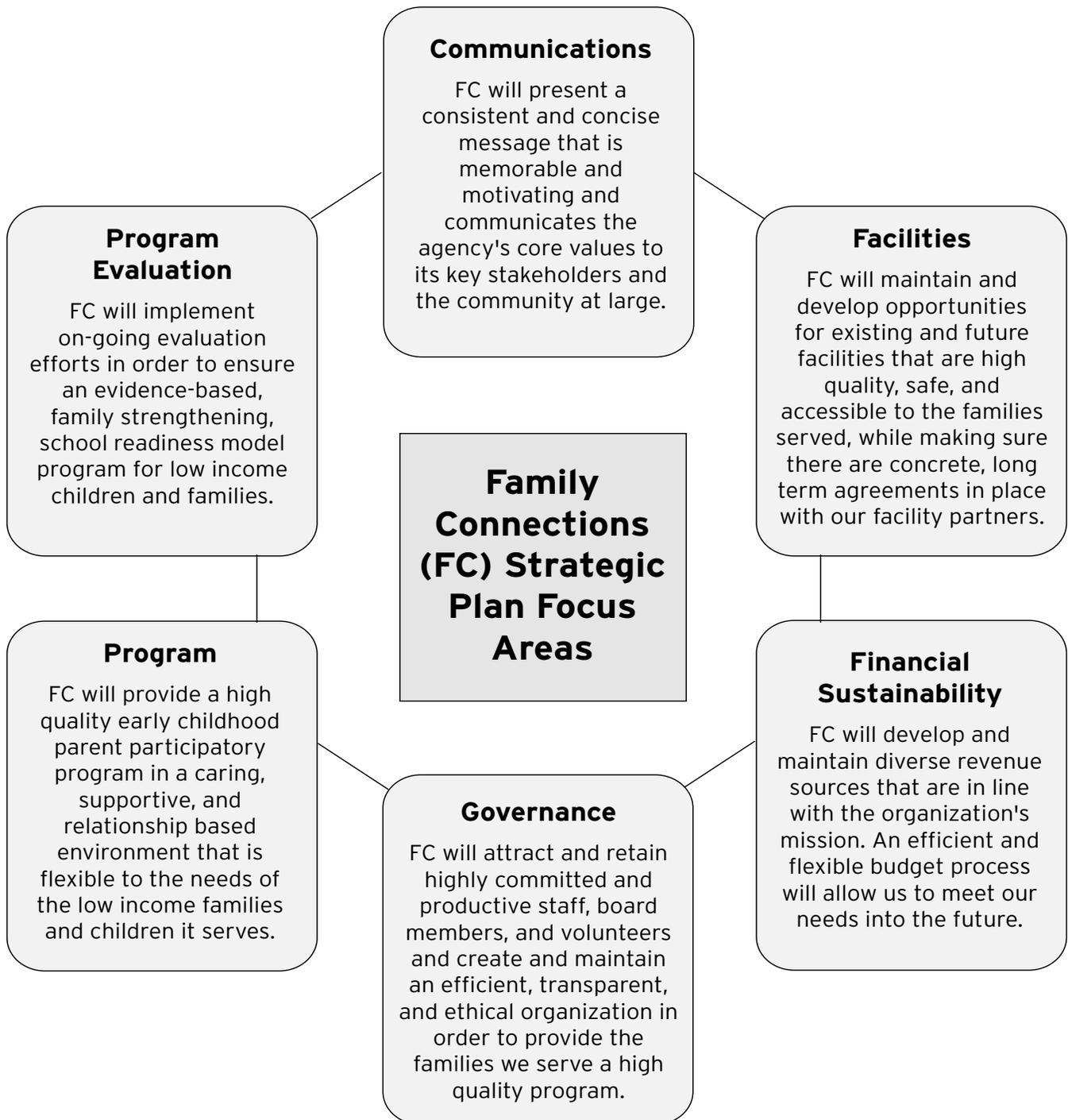
Family Connections also thanks "Night of Dreams" sponsors and attendees and "Rotary Car Raffle" ticket purchasers.

In Kind Contributions - Thank you to the many individuals and businesses who contributed throughout the 11/12 fiscal year. The following is a list of larger in-kind donations:

Bring Me A Book Foundation
Burlingame Mothers' Club
Everest High School (meeting room space)
Hands On Bay Area (volunteer power)
Look Design (graphic design)
Palo Alto Kiwanis Club (outdoor projects)
Raising A Reader
Ravenswood City School District (facility space)
Second Harvest Food Bank
Sequoia Union High School District (facility space)

Family Connections' 2012-2015 Strategic Plan Completed!

Family Connections is excited to announce the completion of our 2012-2015 three year Strategic Plan. The plan reflects the culmination of six months of work by our dedicated Board, Staff and supportive stakeholders. Designed to provide direction and vision, this plan will serve to position Family Connections for leadership and growth in the early childhood education and parent support arenas at a time when low-income families in our community need programs, services and support more than ever before. To view our plan summary please visit our website at www.familyconnections.org. For detailed work plans email director@familyconnections.org





Project leads from BNBuilders, Inc. pose with teacher Angela and Renee Zimmerman after a hard day of work

Play-yard Magic at Belle Haven School!

Just over one year ago, the Family Connections Preschool at Belle Haven School in East Palo Alto was destroyed by an accidental electrical fire, leaving almost nothing salvageable in its wake. In the face of this challenge, old and new members of the Family Connections community demonstrated that not only can a “village” come together to raise a child, but they can also build—or in this case, rebuild—a preschool.

First, the Family Connections community came together to find a new space for the preschool—still on the Belle Haven School campus—and pitched in to assist with the long clean up and recovery process. This included finding furniture and supplies so that the new room was miraculously able to open at the start of school last year.

Then began a longer-term project of making a good thing even better—transforming the area outside of the preschool into a play-yard for the children. This space of dirt and rock was far from kid-friendly, functioning simply as the building entryway. Goals for the yard renovation included having a concrete surface to facilitate the use of tricycles, a garden area, and a dedicated entrance through a side door.

Belle Haven staff knew that tricycles would be a popular and important addition to the program. Trikes help children develop a range of integrated motor skills (pedaling, balance, steering, left-right, hand-eye and leg-eye coordination) as well as psychological ones (the sense of movement and the pretend element that wheeled toys give children as they imitate the important adults in their lives).

A garden area was on the wish list because one of the new focuses at Family Connections is on sustainable gardening and utilizing that concept as a teaching tool; thus the addition of several new gardening containers for the teacher and families to use.

The dedicated entrance was important so the preschool could be accessed without disturbing the adjacent Belle Haven Family Center, where counseling and other services take place during the day.

The play-yard project dream became a reality when Family Connections Board Member Cynthia Becker got her husband, David Becker of BNBuilders, Inc, interested in the idea. Alun Lang and Ross Battarini of BNB became the wonderful project leads, spearheading months of planning which culminated in a 4-day effort on the part of many devoted volunteers (see box).



BNBuilders employees help make a new planter box

Kathy Reiner, a BNBuilders volunteer who came along with her son Nathan to help out on the final big work day, said, *"I've been at BN Builders for only 4 months and was excited to join the company because of their involvement in the community. It was a great experience today. I love being a part of things that help those less fortunate. It feeds my soul to give back and to have all of us working together to create something this beautiful. I really understand the importance of a good, quality preschool environment, so I wanted to help Family Connections improve their school."*

Those sentiments were clearly shared by all the generous companies who pitched in with time, skill, and materials, as well as the many BNBuilders and Family Connections volunteer participants—a total of over 50 volunteers took time from their weekend to help complete the project on Saturday, August 11, 2012.

Parents, students and staff are all thrilled with the improvements. As Valeria, a 4-year old attendee, put it, *"Mi escuela esta bonita! I like it!"* Valeria's mother, Rocio Gutierrez, agrees: *"The school with this new look on the outside ... gives a sense of peacefulness and a cozy environment. You want to be here to enjoy!"*

If you have not visited us at our new and improved Belle Haven location, please stop by any morning or email director@familyconnections.org for a tour.



FC Staff Loree Watanabe and BH Parent Helen Xin Li help with planting

Thank you to all the BNBuilders, Inc. and Family Connections staff and volunteers who made our Belle Haven Yard Renovation a Success

BN Builders, Inc. Employees, Family & Friends

- | | |
|---|---|
| Andrea Larsen | Justin Porter |
| Alun, Amy, Ian, Fiona, and Alyssa Lang | Bill Meroshnekoff, Mercedes Snell, and Rodney Snell |
| Todd Ahern | Ashley Husbands |
| Tri Lai | David, Cynthia, and Claire Becker |
| Kathy Reiner, T.J., Nathan | Kristen Del Rio |
| Lance Tucker, Kelly, Laura, and Steven | Kelley Chafin |
| Mike, April, Maricela, and Killian Paye | Nick and Addie Pera |
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- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
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Family Connections

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 San Carlos, CA 94070

Site Locations:
 Belle Haven School
 Menlo Park
414 Fourth Avenue
 Redwood City
1070 Beech Street
 East Palo Alto

Parents and Children Growing Together

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SAVE THE DATE! Night of Dreams Recognition Event to Take Place February 26, 2013



Please save the date and be sure to join us for our second Night of Dreams event. February 26, 2013 will be a night to not only kickoff our year long 20th Anniversary celebration but will serve to honor and recognize very important individuals and organizations who have been great supporters of ours over the past two decades.

We have moved the venue to the fabulous Sharon Heights Country Club in Menlo Park and we promise you will be both entertained and inspired. Stay on the lookout for future announcements regarding the 2013 honorees and be sure not to miss our biggest fundraiser of the year.

If you know of someone who would be interested in receiving the Report Card, please let us know. Or, if you received this newsletter and would like your name removed from our mailing list, contact us at 650.369.6467 or director@familyconnections.org. Thank you to LOOK-Agency for our newsletter design and layout.

Our Mission

To establish the resources and broad recognition to be the first place that low-income families go for early childhood and parent education - empowering children and their parents to learn, grow and dream.

Our Vision

To foster the potential of our community's youngest at-risk children and their families by giving them the skills to succeed and the confidence to have a positive impact on the world.

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