SUMMER CAMP … Those simple words would bring utter panic to me. I often would sit with my friends talking about the awesome camps that their kids would attend. My friends would always ask what plans I had for Emerson, and I would say I am looking for the just-right camp. Often this camp never appeared, and then COVID-19 made it impossible.

For many of us, we cannot just look at the great adventures provided or awesome field trips the campers will take. We must look for that special place that has the staff on hand that understands the complexities that some of our sweet kids come with.

Last summer, Emerson found a camp just for him! I was so surprised when I got a call from the FOCUS (Families of Children Under Stress) staff to go over Emerson’s needs. They wanted me to share any little thing that would make his time more special with them. They assured me that they were prepared to handle his needs and not to worry.

Every day we were greeted with a welcome from the staff, who again assured me that he would be fine. I watched him...
From the Editor…
Honoring Our Leading Ladies
by Frances McBrayer

On February 26, 2022, we had the pleasure of honoring FOCUS founder Susan Calhoun, former Executive Director Lucy Cusick, and former Associate Executive Director Joy Trotti at our “For the Love of Children” event.

Susan’s dream is how it began. In the early 1980s, Susan Calhoun and Lynne Conboy met at Egleston hospital where Susan’s daughter and Lynne’s son were both receiving care. Susan and Lynne became friends after seeing each other so often at the hospital.

They shared their deepest fears for their children, their huge hopes for the future, and medical resources from the library. Susan and Lynne also began to meet other families with children with similar conditions, and in 1983, the informal group became a nonprofit, Families of Children under Stress, Inc. (FOCUS) with Susan Calhoun as the first Executive Director. The core FOCUS programs were support groups, hospital visits, a monthly newsletter, and family activities, all of which continue today.

Lucy Cusick began with FOCUS part time in 1991, but her involvement with FOCUS began as a parent in need of support after the premature birth of her son Josh in 1985. In 1994, Lucy became the Executive Director, taking over for Susan Calhoun. Lucy helped start Camp Hollywood that same year. She also helped start Camp Infinity, our overnight camp for Teens and Young Adults and many of the FOCUS programs we know and love today. Lucy’s never ending energy, vision,

continued on page 5 >
and ability to create programs has allowed thousands of children to participate in activities that are designed just for them.

Joy Trotti joined the FOCUS team in 1998, also after receiving support from FOCUS as a parent of a child with a rare genetic condition. Joy and Lucy became a dynamic duo developing innovative programs for children, teens, and young adults with disabilities while professionalizing FOCUS as an organization.

During their tenure at FOCUS, Lucy and Joy championed two mergers which allowed FOCUS to become a more comprehensive organization. In 2009, the Kool Kidz Foundation merged with FOCUS, and in 2017, the Fragile Kids Foundation merged with FOCUS. These mergers allowed FOCUS to enhance its services which now include comfort, hope, and information to parents; prescribed but unaffordable medical equipment not covered by insurance or Medicaid; accessible recreational and social programs for children and teens; and fun, inclusive activities for the entire family.

All three of our Leading Ladies have contributed to making life better for thousands of families.

Thousands. I think there is much to celebrate that the foundation laid by parents 39 years ago is still going strong thanks to the leadership of Susan, Lucy, and Joy. We are thankful for each of them, and the best part is that all three ladies are all still cheering for and supporting FOCUS and the families we serve.

Those of us at FOCUS now are continuing the legacy that they built. FOCUS continues to touch the lives of children with disabilities and their families, and we hope that families continue to say that our work makes their lives better.
It’s spring, and that means IEPs are in season! We asked an expert for five tips that will help parents prepare for the remainder of the year, summer and the start of a new school term. Here are five tips from Christy Calbos with the Calbos Law Firm.

Before you attend a spring IEP meeting (you can ask for a meeting to be held, even if you have already had an annual review meeting):

1. Ask for current data on your child’s IEP goals. This data might be already included in an IEP progress report that you have received every 9-16 weeks for the past year, but a current snapshot of mastery is important before a spring meeting. Special education teachers and therapists take data on IEP goals because goals are how many special education students demonstrate progress in school if they don’t receive grades and a report card like general education peers. It is important for parents to understand that even if their child isn’t working on grade level tasks, they should be making progress on IEP goals. This will help you know also whether the IEP is effective.

2. Ask for actual statistics (trials or percentages) on each IEP objective so you can compare where your child is today (spring 2022) with where he/she started when the goal was first introduced (baseline). This will help you determine progress and head into the meeting ready to discuss what did and did not work this past year.

3. When you schedule the meeting, ask the team to set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss ESY (Extended School Year). Even if the ESY discussion was previously held during the current school year and the team decided “no, not required,” revisiting this before the end of school is important. ESY during the summer is intended to help a student maintain progress levels over the break. If you and the team determine that your child requires ESY, you will then select which goals to work on and create a customized, individual plan that gives staff enough weekly time to work with your child on those goals. If your child does not require ESY, you can ask the team...
to give you books, packets, or other resources that will help your child maintain knowledge/skills over the summer break.

Once you get to the meeting, here are a few more tips:

4. It is a good idea to discuss the transition into a new school year. Who will be implementing the IEP? Have you met them, or will you be told who the new teachers are only a week or two before school starts? Can you arrange a time to meet and review the IEP prior to school starting? If your child is going to have ‘new’ people working with him/her, how should the team plan so this is a smooth transition? Do any special supports or services, extra training, or additional communication guidelines need to be included in the IEP as we think ahead to next year’s routines, locations, schedules, etc.?

5. Last but not least, ask if the current goals are appropriate for the new school year. If a goal was mastered, the team can either delete it or tweak it to increase the challenge and set the bar higher. If there are additional areas of academics, communication, social-emotional, or adaptive growth that the team would like to see your child achieve, the team can create goals and add them to the IEP.

Christy Calbos has been a special education attorney since 2003. Practicing in Georgia, she helps families navigate IEP and 504 questions and meetings. Her website is www.calboslaw.com.

In my own words: FAST FINS

I love butterfly and breaststroke. I swim one hour. I like coach Carson and coach Kimberly. Seeing coaches and friends is fun.
– Yu Qian Kip

I love the coaches. I like freestyle and to swim fast.
– Austin Peller

The FAST Fins swim season is going on now! Thanks to all of our swimmers, parents, coaches, and volunteers for helping us make this season a success!
A Look Back
35th Annual FOCUS Education Conference

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#showyourstripes
Thank you, FOCUS

By Brian Darden

Working for FOCUS and getting to know innumerable FOCUS families taught me so much about myself and about the kindness, thoughtfulness, and grace of others. I have been blessed to watch so many kids and teenagers grow up and thrive while attending FOCUS programs, seeing them gain, maintain, and grow in their abilities, relationships, and lives.

Having the opportunity to play a small part in the lives of FOCUS kids and their families has meant the world to me. I have many parents, siblings, and FOCUS kids and young adults that I count as friends and who gave me the encouragement and purpose behind so much of the last 7 years of my life. I attended more swim practices, family programs, teen groups, and camps than I can count. Those programs weren’t always simple to coordinate or easy to manage, but those interactions gave me joy and purpose in my work. The most challenging programs and logistics tended to lend the greatest experiences to families, and parents were extremely grateful to have programs so thoroughly planned and considered.

Though I am moving on from having the constant presence of FOCUS in my life, I know that FOCUS has forever left a mark on me, and I hope that I have been able to make a positive difference in your life or the life of your kiddo. If you are reading this, you and all of the other FOCUS families who I met and got to know along the way made this experience a treasured one for me, and for that I will always be grateful. Thank you for your kindness and for allowing me to experience a small part of your journey alongside you and the ones that you love most. It has been an honor.
Save the Date!

Equipment Grant Application Deadline for Quarter 2: April 15, 2022

22nd Annual FOCUS Golf Classic: April 26, 2022

FOCUS Family Day at Six Flags: May 15, 2022

Playdate for 0-12 year olds at Oak Grove UMC Accessible Playground May 21, 2022

FOCUS Ongoing Activities

For share groups, workshops, and if your child is in the hospital, contact jaide@focus-ga.org

For adapted swim team, teen & young adult activities, and overnight camps, contact kimberly@focus-ga.org

For information about day camp programs, family activities, and family retreat, contact cesar@focus-ga.org

For information about equipment grants, contact devi@focus-ga.org

To volunteer for any and all programs and for questions, email inquiry@focus-ga.org.

Check our calendar at www.focus-ga.org for the most up-to-date information!

More from “For the Love of Children” Gala
FOCUS

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Huge thanks to those who created Facebook/Instagram Campaigns for FOCUS!

Linda Parker
Molly Hopkins

April 2022
Curt Smith is hiking the Appalachian Trail to benefit FOCUS! FOCUS sent him off in style on February 27th, and he has already hiked over 250 miles! Curt’s son Trevor has been part of FOCUS for over 18 years, and Curt is very thankful for all the support his family received from FOCUS. He is hiking to raise awareness and support so that more families can enjoy the programs that FOCUS has to offer! Learn more about Trekking for Trevor and follow Curt on the trail at www.focus-ga.org/trekkingfortrevor.