President’s Letter

from WILLIAM M. PINSOF, PHD

Dear Friends,

This newsletter is devoted to our Clinical Service programs and initiatives. Clinical Service represents one of the three vitally important pillars that form the foundational heart and soul of our organization. Clinical Service, along with our Education and Research programs, enables us to fulfill our mission — strengthening and healing families from all walks of life.

Our expert therapists provided over 72,500 counseling sessions last year to over 7,000 individuals, couples and families. Approximately 25% were seen through our Bette D. Harris Family and Child Clinic, where we are deeply committed to serving at-risk, under-resourced communities. We are one of the largest mental health service providers in the Chicagoland area, but it is not our size — it is how we provide our counseling services — that makes us proud.

We work in context. We compassionately work with people as members of systems, particularly families that affect and are affected by their member’s suffering and well being.

We are innovative. Family Institute researchers created the most sophisticated feedback system, the STIC,* which clients fill out online before each session. Therapists use the information to make treatment efficient and effective.

We collaborate. Our clients are co-planners and co-evaluators of their treatment. Therapists also collaborate with other health professionals working with the client to make their health care more cohesive and integrated.

The Family Institute brings a unique mix of knowledge, innovation, technology, collaboration and heart to the services we provide. Thank you for partnering with us.

With gratitude,

William M. Pinsof
President

* STIC stands for Systemic Therapeutic Intervention Center.
The Crisis Facing African American Marriages
By Anthony Chambers, PhD

Couples therapy is at the heart of The Family Institute. Our Couples Therapy Program, which provides culturally grounded therapy to couples across the racial, socio-economic, sexual orientation and religious spectrum, believes that by strengthening all relationships, better communities are created for all.

The current state of African American marriages represents a crisis. African Americans have the lowest marriage rate, the highest divorce rate, the highest out-of-wedlock birth rate and the highest rate of never married persons compared to all racial and ethnic groups. I believe that strengthening African American marriages is an essential part of the solution to many problems. My belief is supported by research showing that a healthy marriage promotes the social, familial and psychological well-being of African Americans and appears to benefit African Americans financially more than Caucasians. Additionally, African American children receive important benefits from their parents being happily married — they are less likely to be delinquent, have fewer behavioral problems, have higher self-esteem, are more likely to delay sexual activity and have better educational outcomes.

Some explanations for the low marriage rate and high divorce rate among African Americans have focused on sociological causes. However, examining this problem on an interpersonal level is integral as no social policy can change what happens between a couple behind closed doors.

Through clinical experience and research, I have found that what is missing is a model of what a healthy marriage looks like. Although the lack of a healthy model is not unique to African American couples, given the disproportionate number of African American children growing up in single-parent households, this problem is particularly significant. A lot of my work with African American couples involves discussions about what type of marriage they envision. I then use relationship education to help couples ground their marital vision in the core principles necessary for a healthy relationship.

Few programs across the country are committed to strengthening African American relationships. With relationships as our passion, The Family Institute is dedicated to strengthening African American marriages.

Dr. Chambers is the Director of The Family Institute’s Couples Therapy Program. He can be reached at achambers@family-institute.org.

A Success Story
B & T were a high conflict, African American couple in their late 20s. They were engaged but felt they needed to address their issues before setting a date. Therapy focused on learning specific anger management skills. However, they had a hard time using these skills at home, and each week brought in a new crisis. After eight sessions, I changed their therapy to an educational format. They agreed and were enthusiastic as they valued learning and, having both come from single parent homes, wanted to learn the ingredients to a successful marriage.

They began using the skills and information I taught them, and quickly reported no more fighting. T saw a shift in her understanding of relationships, which I interpreted as an indication that she now had a script and model for how to approach their relationship.

By the end of therapy, they not only reported a higher level of relationship satisfaction but both reported an increased commitment to the relationship and started discussing wedding plans. This was a clear success story and highlighted for me the importance and value of using relationship education in couple therapy.

The Family Institute is dedicated to strengthening African American marriages.
Reaching Out: Human rights clinic helps those seeking asylum

By Constance Sheehan, LCSW

The topic of international human rights abuses frequently headlines today’s newspapers. While many see this as a problem occurring overseas, The Family Institute is aware of and addressing a growing incidence in our own metropolitan area.

To meet the need for the provision of mental health services to those seeking asylum in the United States, The Family Institute has developed and launched the Mental Health Human Rights (MHHR) Clinic. This Clinic incorporates innovative collaborative programming in which attorneys and Family Institute staff therapists and students bridge the intersection between legal, mental health concerns, family issues and human rights. Along with providing direct service to clients, the MHHR Clinic serves as a vital community mental health outreach practicum for students in our Counseling Psychology or Marriage and Family Therapy programs. These therapists-in-training serve as client advocates, providing comprehensive mental health evaluations upon the request of pro-bono legal teams. Clients receive individual counseling and support, giving therapists-in-training a valuable opportunity to deepen their understanding of critical issues related to culture, trauma and immigration.

The MHHR Clinic is achieving success. Approximately 90% of clients seen in the MHHR Clinic have been granted asylum compared to 10% of those who did not receive the student-conducted mental health evaluations.

For more information on the MHHR Clinic, contact Constance Sheehan at csheehan@family-institute.org.

A Success Story

M is a young single mother who is a long-term domestic violence victim. Due in large part to the Mental Health Human Rights (MHHR) Clinic’s evaluation, the immigration agency reconsidered a prior indication to deny M’s application for relief as a victim of violence. Sadly, M was raped as a young teenager. Courageously, she cooperated with law enforcement in her abuser’s prosecution. After the MHHR Clinic submitted a new argument supported by a detailed evaluation, M was released and has legal status so she will not be deported. She is now working to provide for her young son and rebuild her life.

Providing Integrated, Quality Client Care

By Cyndi Schu

Through the new Behavioral Health Information System (BHIS) and the STIC® (Systemic Therapy Inventory of Change), The Family Institute aims to provide efficient, collaborative, high quality care to all. In accordance with the ever-changing face of health care, The Family Institute has dedicated over two years to creating the BHIS, or electronic health record. The BHIS will allow the Institute to uphold patient confidentiality and for clinicians to continue providing the best care through aggregated data found in the system, allowing for decision-making in all aspects of mental health. The BHIS will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Institute’s mental health service and ensure more informed decisions for improving the quality of care.

As mental health becomes more and more grounded and informed by science, The Family Institute remains at the forefront of discovery. The Institute spent a decade developing a state-of-the-art online tool that allows clinicians to assess client systems, plan treatment and track progress in psychotherapy. The STIC® is an online self-report instrument that clients fill out before each session. The STIC® has two major consortium partners (one in Chicago and one in Norway) collaborating with the Institute on its implementation and evaluation. These initiatives will continue to better the work done by Institute clinicians, ensuring clients receive the most cutting-edge and effective care.
Mind over mood. Excessive anxiety is almost always associated with negative thoughts, beliefs or images. When we are anxious (or sad or angry), we view the world “through dark-colored glasses,” creating negative thoughts that maintain and/or heighten anxiety. To better cope, identify your scary thoughts, and then look for evidence (hard facts) to counter and negate those thoughts. Identify an alternative, more balanced way of thinking about the issue.

Face your fear. Avoidance often brings some immediate relief but does nothing to reduce anxiety and may contribute to maintaining it in the long run. Replace avoidant patterns of behavior with gradual increasing exposure to the triggers of one’s anxiety. For example, if one is fearful of public speaking, practice in front of a small group and build up to a medium-sized group and then a large group of people, until the anxiety subsides.

Accept your anxiety. Many struggle to fight or escape when they start to experience excessive anxiety. This fear creates a vicious cycle: we get anxious about something in the environment (work, school, a relationship, etc.) and then get anxious about our initial anxiety response. The harder we fight, the more power we give it. Work on accepting your anxiety rather than fighting it.

Dr. Zinbarg is the Patricia M. Nielsen Research Chair and Director of The Family Institute’s Anxiety and Panic Treatment Program and a Professor in Northwestern University’s Department of Psychology. He has devoted almost 25 years to helping patients with excessive anxiety gain some measure of mastery of their anxiety. He can be reached at rzinbarg@northwestern.edu.

Validate your child's feelings. Validating statements are statements that communicate to your child that you understand your child's feelings, and it is understandable that they would have these feelings.

Ask open-ended questions to try to discover their specific fears. Many children will express their fears in vague terms such as, “I don’t want to go the sleepover. It scares me.” As a parent, you want to gently ask open-ended questions such as, “What are you afraid might happen at the sleepover?” Try to find out every possible worry associated with the feared object or event.

Try to help your child problem solve each possible worry. Help your child generate different coping skills they can use such as deep breathing, coping thoughts (“I will be able to handle the sleepover”) and a plan of action (“I can call mom if I get really upset”).

Praise your child’s success when they do face challenges despite being anxious. If your child’s anxiety does not improve after teaching them coping skills, or interferes with their functioning at home or school, it is important to contact a trained professional.

Dr. Black is the Director of The Family Institute’s Child & Adolescent Program. She can be reached at dblack@family-institute.org.
Launching our Circle of Knowledge Series

By Tammy Reed

The Family Institute at Northwestern University is pleased to announce the new and enhanced Circle of Knowledge Lecture Series. Through this Series of luncheon lectures and evening programs, we hope to provide the knowledge and care families’ count on to live healthy lives. We are excited about the geographic expansion of this great programming as well as this year’s line up of speakers and topics. From relationships to family life, our renowned cadre of presenters will share their insights that incorporate and highlight cutting-edge research findings in the field of family therapy.


For more information on how you can attend one of the upcoming talks, please visit www.family-institute.org/circleofknowledge or call 312-609-5300, ext. 484.

Understanding the Family System Leads to Client Success

By Linda Michaels, PsyD

Peter’s mother contacted The Family Institute with concerns that Peter, 12, was hitting and pinching himself and calling himself “ugly, fat and stupid.” She worried that Peter’s father was verbally and emotionally abusing him.

Peter was anything but “ugly, fat and stupid.” He was average height and weight, had tousled brown hair, wore baggy shorts and liked math, music and video games. But he felt he did many things wrong, was lonely and worried, and, deep down, he seemed to really hate himself.

As I worked with Peter to discover other outlets for his behaviors and ways of understanding his troubling feelings, I met with Peter’s mother and father. Using The Family Institute’s model of understanding and interacting with the entire family system, I learned that while their divorce was acrimonious, they were still actively criticizing and blaming the other – not only for their marital problems but for the problems Peter was now facing.

I felt that if the parents remained locked in a power struggle, it would be hard for Peter to let go of his negative thoughts and feelings. I worked with Peter’s parents to help them understand this, and to examine how their ongoing anger and fighting was making it difficult for Peter to feel safe, stable and happy about himself or his family. Other important adults in his life – stepparents and grandparents – were brought into the therapy, and their role in the parents’ power struggle was examined and discussed.

Helping all of the key adults in Peter’s life understand their role in the family system has been critical in Peter’s treatment. Peter now has a more positive image of himself and his parents, and he knows that he’s smart, likable, and a good friend and son. The work has been difficult and challenging for the entire family. Yet I have been gratified that everyone involved has been willing to be curious about their behavior, thoughts and feelings, and about the complex ways in which everyone in the family system is interconnected and interdependent.

Dr. Michaels is Chief Clinical Fellow at The Family Institute.

Understanding the Family System Leads to Client Success

By Linda Michaels, PsyD

Peter's mother contacted The Family Institute with concerns that Peter, 12, was hitting and pinching himself and calling himself “ugly, fat and stupid.” She worried that Peter’s father was verbally and emotionally abusing him.

Peter was anything but “ugly, fat and stupid.” He was average height and weight, had tousled brown hair, wore baggy shorts and liked math, music and video games. But he felt he did many things wrong, was lonely and worried, and, deep down, he seemed to really hate himself.

As I worked with Peter to discover other outlets for his behaviors and ways of understanding his troubling feelings, I met with Peter’s mother and father. Using The Family Institute’s model of understanding and interacting with the entire family system, I learned that while their divorce was acrimonious, they were still actively criticizing and blaming the other – not only for their marital problems but for the problems Peter was now facing.

I felt that if the parents remained locked in a power struggle, it would be hard for Peter to let go of his negative thoughts and feelings. I worked with Peter's parents to help them understand this, and to examine how their ongoing anger and fighting was making it difficult for Peter to feel safe, stable and happy about himself or his family. Other important adults in his life – stepparents and grandparents – were brought into the therapy, and their role in the parents’ power struggle was examined and discussed.

Helping all of the key adults in Peter's life understand their role in the family system has been critical in Peter's treatment. Peter now has a more positive image of himself and his parents, and he knows that he's smart, likable, and a good friend and son. The work has been difficult and challenging for the entire family. Yet I have been gratified that everyone involved has been willing to be curious about their behavior, thoughts and feelings, and about the complex ways in which everyone in the family system is interconnected and interdependent.

Dr. Michaels is Chief Clinical Fellow at The Family Institute.

Launching our Circle of Knowledge Series

By Tammy Reed

The Family Institute at Northwestern University is pleased to announce the new and enhanced Circle of Knowledge Lecture Series. Through this Series of luncheon lectures and evening programs, we hope to provide the knowledge and care families’ count on to live healthy lives. We are excited about the geographic expansion of this great programming as well as this year’s line up of speakers and topics. From relationships to family life, our renowned cadre of presenters will share their insights that incorporate and highlight cutting-edge research findings in the field of family therapy.


For more information on how you can attend one of the upcoming talks, please visit www.family-institute.org/circleofknowledge or call 312-609-5300, ext. 484.

Understanding the Family System Leads to Client Success

By Linda Michaels, PsyD

Peter’s mother contacted The Family Institute with concerns that Peter, 12, was hitting and pinching himself and calling himself “ugly, fat and stupid.” She worried that Peter’s father was verbally and emotionally abusing him.

Peter was anything but “ugly, fat and stupid.” He was average height and weight, had tousled brown hair, wore baggy shorts and liked math, music and video games. But he felt he did many things wrong, was lonely and worried, and, deep down, he seemed to really hate himself.

As I worked with Peter to discover other outlets for his behaviors and ways of understanding his troubling feelings, I met with Peter’s mother and father. Using The Family Institute’s model of understanding and interacting with the entire family system, I learned that while their divorce was acrimonious, they were still actively criticizing and blaming the other – not only for their marital problems but for the problems Peter was now facing.

I felt that if the parents remained locked in a power struggle, it would be hard for Peter to let go of his negative thoughts and feelings. I worked with Peter’s parents to help them understand this, and to examine how their ongoing anger and fighting was making it difficult for Peter to feel safe, stable and happy about himself or his family. Other important adults in his life – stepparents and grandparents – were brought into the therapy, and their role in the parents’ power struggle was examined and discussed.

Helping all of the key adults in Peter’s life understand their role in the family system has been critical in Peter’s treatment. Peter now has a more positive image of himself and his parents, and he knows that he’s smart, likable, and a good friend and son. The work has been difficult and challenging for the entire family. Yet I have been gratified that everyone involved has been willing to be curious about their behavior, thoughts and feelings, and about the complex ways in which everyone in the family system is interconnected and interdependent.

Dr. Michaels is Chief Clinical Fellow at The Family Institute.
Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am a Wisconsin native who splits time between Elkhorn, Wisconsin and the Chicago area. I am a graduate of Marquette University and a CPA. After enjoying the finance and accounting profession, I moved into the technology arena. I have been a CIO at a major insurance company and in charge of global technology finance and operations at a global insurance broker. Currently, I am the President and CEO of Swingtide, Inc, a consulting firm that specializes in technology business and outsourcing advisory. For fun, I play golf, follow my beloved Green Bay Packers and am an avid sports memorabilia collector.

What attracted you to The Family Institute?

My technology and entrepreneurial experience was a good fit for some of the challenges and opportunities that The Family Institute was facing as it grew. New systems being implemented and the opportunity to help guide the development of the STIC® were exciting. The people I met were wonderful and their focus on family and relationships was something I was really interested in. In my business, I help clients with difficult business relationships, and in my personal life, I have a special needs step-daughter. Understanding the importance of relationships made me want to be a part of The Family Institute’s good work.

What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure on the Board?

With some of my colleagues, we have established an Information Technology Committee that will help with many of The Family Institute’s initiatives. I am also on the Finance committee and active in the Psychotherapy Change Project. I hope I can bring my experiences with progress on many fronts.

Describe the Institute in three words.

Compassionate, caring, thought-leadership

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I have always lived in Chicago, except during college and law school in New York City. I am a co-founder and Managing Partner of EdgeLine Capital Partners, an institutional marketing and capital raising firm. I am an avid jazz and music fan, and enjoy biking, hiking and playing jazz piano. I have two kids, Julie, a digital media consultant living in LA, and Nick, a grad student at the University of Chicago. I am committed to non-profit work helping at-risk, exceptionally talented kids in the arts and mental health issues, including the STIC® project at The Family Institute.

What attracted you to The Family Institute?

Bill Pinsof and I went to high school together, and he and his wife Suzan are very close friends. He asked me to join the Board around 1990 and, of course, I didn’t hesitate. Also, I have always strongly believed in the value and importance of family therapy, so it was logical for me to join the Board. Since then, I have learned what an amazing organization The Family Institute is and how effective their work is for families.

What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure on the Board?

I have been on the Board for over 20 years, and served as Chairman during the early 90s when the Institute first affiliated with Northwestern University and embarked on the capital campaign to build the headquarters building. In those early days, the Institute faced tough challenges typical for a young organization, like making payroll and paying rent, all while raising millions for the building. Now the Institute is financially successful and enormously respected for its programs, research and clinical services. I look forward to helping the Institute attain its goal of becoming the pre-eminent leader in family therapy, research and education in the U.S. and eventually globally.

Describe the Institute in three words.

Healing, compassionate, innovative
The mission of The Family Institute at Northwestern University is to strengthen and heal families from all walks of life through clinical service, education and research.

An affiliate of Northwestern University, The Family Institute is a unique, innovative not-for-profit organization, governed by its own independent Board of Directors and responsible for its own funding. We have four staff practice locations, including Evanston, Chicago, LaGrange Park and Northbrook. For more information on our staff practice, please call 847-733-4300 or visit our website at www.family-institute.org.

The Family Institute Calendar of Events

- **November 2, 2012**
  Circle of Knowledge Event
  Indian Hill Club, Winnetka

- **November 9, 2012**
  Circle of Knowledge Event
  University Club, Chicago

- **November 16, 2012**
  Clinical Update
  Norris University Center, Evanston

- **December 6, 2012**
  Circle of Knowledge Event
  Mars Gallery, Chicago

If you are interested in more information about our upcoming events, please contact Michelle Weil at 312-609-5300, ext. 480 or mweil@family-institute.org.