

Families with Children from China

Austin, Texas Chapter

Winter Newsletter

January, 2014



President's Note

Welcome to the Year of the Horse! Austin's chapter of Families with Children from China will celebrate this new year on Sunday, January 26, 2014 from 2:30 until 5 pm at the new Asian American Resource Center. The board of directors has been planning this terrific event for months and we encourage you to join us. I know we all are busy and have miles to go before we sleep, but this event is so worth the time for both parents and children to stay rooted in our community. Please make the effort. I don't think you will be disappointed.

This newsletter features much of what will make this celebration special. At its core, what makes FCC unique are the people that come together who share our mutual journeys. For the past six years, I have served on the FCC board and met so many, many extraordinary families and I am so grateful for the opportunity to raise my children with you. Participation in this organization has made my life richer and more meaningful, and when I was sick, it was the FCC community that wrapped its arms around my family the most. We will never forget the love and compassion shown to us in that difficult time.

Now it's time for me to move in a different direction and I encourage you to vote to approve the 2014 officers who will, no doubt, continue to design important and joyous educational and social events. The proposed officer slate includes Alan Greenberg, president; Abby Turner, vice president of events; Robin Davis, vice president of events; Jena Goodridge, secretary; Vicki Gargano, treasurer; Bethany Morrison, membership; and Carrie van der Wal, culture and outreach. These are exceptional people and I am sure they will make 2014 an incredible year for FCC.

See you soon,
Becky Harding
FCC Austin

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Membership

By Bethany Morrison

Now is the best time to renew your FCC membership! From now until January 26th, you can renew your family's membership online for the discounted rate of \$26. Membership renewals can be secured at this rate online even if your family cannot attend the New Year celebration. Please note that membership dues are tax deductible.

FCC Austin is the primary facilitator of China adoptive family connections in Central Texas. Thanks to your financial support, FCC Austin creates and sustains an empowering and enriching community for families touched by adoption from China. We use membership dues to fund holiday celebrations, educational opportunities, social activities, and to obtain resources that help develop us personally and keep us connected to each other throughout the year. ❖

FCC Austin's CNY Celebration: Sunday, January 26, 2:30–5:00

at the Asian American Resource Center, 8401 Cameron Road, Austin, TX

Register online at: <https://2014fccaustincny.eventbrite.com>

General Schedule

- 2:30–4:30 = Dancing, Music, Free Appetizers, Drinks, Balloons, Crafts, Calligraphy, and Slideshow will be available for your enjoyment; pick up your Year of the Horse t-shirts in the lobby
- 3:00–3:15 = Taking advantage of a quorum, we will vote for this year's Board of Directors and bid adieu to FCC President Becky Harding
- 3:30–4:00 = Noodle Eating Contest, immediately followed by prizes handed out for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners
- 4:00–4:10 = Ribbon Dance
- 4:10–4:30 = Raffle
- 4:30–5:00 = Dragon Dance/Lion Dance Team will perform onstage, and bubble wrap will be tossed down in front of the stage for all the kids (and kids at heart) to simulate firecrackers; event ends at 5:00 p.m.

Odds & Ends

2014 FCC-UT
Chinese Culture Camp

August 4–August 8, 2014

Summitt Elementary School

Registration materials available on
March 1, 2014 at www.fccaustin.org.

*Note: Look for the Family Focus and
Book Review articles to return in the
spring newsletter! ❖*

A Sneak Peek at FCC Austin's 2014 Chinese New Year Celebration



The Love of China-trained dancers performing a classic ribbon dance at this year's celebration will be: Amy Brookhart, Michelle Ross, and Alisan Turner.

Created by Robin Davis, these beautiful bamboo centerpieces will adorn every table and then be given to our volunteers to take home as a token of our gratitude.



Just one of the many craft projects that will be available at this year's Chinese New Year celebration—come join us for this truly wonderful event!

Raffle Details



This is one of the raffle prizes you could win at the FCC Austin Chinese New Year celebration—a box of goodies and a \$50 gift certificate from Austin's premiere toy store, Terra Toys.

Raffle tickets are \$1 each, but if you buy 20 tickets, you'll get 5 free! What makes the raffle so unique is that you can put your raffle tickets in for specific prizes, the ones that you're most excited about winning,

instead of a draw for all prizes. For example, if you're wanting the one week of summer music camp (no musical training required) from Orpheus Academy of Music, put your tickets in that specific raffle bucket. Or if you'd prefer to win a month of Mandarin lessons for your child from Grace Language & Culture Chinese School, you can choose to put all of your raffle tickets in that raffle bucket. It's up to you!

Remember to bring cash or your checkbook to buy your raffle tickets. The raffle drawings begin at 4:10, and you must be present to win. With so much going on at the celebration, though, we're sure you'll stick around for all the fun. ❖

Note: 100% of the net funds raised from the raffle are earmarked for our charities, and will be announced in the next newsletter.

Noodle Eating Contest

There is still time to sign up for the noodle eating contest! If you have a noodle eater at your house who can eat their weight in pasta, then sign up and compete for the title of FCC noodle champion!

Prizes will be awarded! ❖

Slideshow

If you would like to have a photo of your family included in the slideshow, please email your photo to Becky Harding at bjh0902@aol.com by Friday, January 24th at midnight. This traditional feature is always a hit, and this year it will showcase all of our activities throughout the year as well as spotlighting our children. So come relive the camping trip, the tween/teen cooking class, the Xishuangbanna trip to China, culture camp, the moon festival and the recent adventure to Dallas for the lantern festival! ❖

FCC Road Trip to the Chinese Lantern Festival, January 2-3, 2014

By Carrie van der Wal

Eight FCC families recently road-tripped to Dallas to attend the enchanting Chinese Lantern Festival at Fair Park. Though it was a quick 28-hour trip, it was a fantastic adventure!

We all met at Summitt Elementary School at 10 a.m., January 2nd, and hit the road soon after, a caravan crowd of 23, dispersed between one passenger van, one mini-van, and one family car. Though we'd originally hoped to fill a chartered bus, we rode in rental vans instead, chauffeured by the valiant Alan Greenberg and my husband Hans. After a few pit stops along the way, we arrived at our west Dallas hotel in the early afternoon; almost all of the children (and a few of the parents) were romping in the indoor pool less than a half-hour after we checked in. For our two sons, that was one of their personal highlights, being able to play in the pool with their friends.

Another FCC Austin family joined us at the hotel and at 5:00 that evening, we



regrouped and reloaded, bundled against the cold, and made our way to Fair Park. Our group arrived right at dusk. It was magical to be walking in at that transition time, the illuminated lanterns growing brighter as the day faded. With 25 lantern sets—each more impressive than the one before—it truly was a stroll through fantasyland, made all the more so by sharing it with our children.

My personal festival favorites were the acrobat show on a dazzling stage and the Porcelain Pagoda, consisting of nine towering spires, made from an astonishing 68,000 spoons, plates, bowls and cups, all tied together by hand. The Imperial Dragon boat, reflected in the calm lagoon, was

also stunning, as were the Qilin creatures, made from small glass bottles filled with colored liquid. Our two sons were especially enthralled with the multitude of panda lanterns playing in the Bamboo Forest.

The Chinese Lantern Festival is not a touring show but a site-specific exhibit. More than 100 artisans and technical staff in Sichuan, China, a province celebrated for its lantern making, did the preliminary work. The smaller components and raw materials were shipped by sea to the U.S. west coast, then, brought by truck to Dallas where a team of more than 40 arrived

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Parenting with Mindfulness

By Janie McMahan, MA, LMFT Associate

“... we need to remind ourselves of what that is, or even admit that we may have no idea at the moment, for the thread of meaning and direction in our lives is easily lost.”

—Jon Kabat Zinn



A few days ago I read an article by a blogger confessing to being one of “those” parents. She was admitting to the world, or at least to the readers of *The Huffington Post*, that she was guilty of being a less-than-perfect parent. You know the scenario: parent is tired, overwhelmed, emotionally triggered in some way and doesn’t respond to the child in a way that would win an award for Parent of the Year. Sound familiar? It certainly did to me! As the mother of three now-adult sons (the oldest biological and the two younger ones adopted from Russia), I have certainly had my moments of not exactly stellar parenting. Being a parent is a tough job, and as Daniel Hughes wrote in his book, *Brain-Based Parenting: The Neuroscience of Caregiving for Healthy Attachment*, “Although the process of becoming a parent may seem like a ‘no brainer,’ the process of parenting taps all the brain power we can muster.”

What I have learned through the years, from my sons as well as in my role as counseling professional, is that consciously tapping into our mental processes, and working at mindful parenting, can go a long way towards helping to allay the reactivity we all have with our children from time to time. In fact, it has been argued that the practice

of mindfulness could be the single most effective way to improve your parenting skills.

What is mindful parenting? I’ve seen a number of definitions, and what they have in common is an emphasis on the practice of moment-to-moment awareness from a non-judgmental stance. My favorite description of mindful parenting is this one offered by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book, *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*:

“Mindful Parenting involves keeping in mind what is truly important as we go about the activities of daily living with our children. Much of the time, we may find we need to remind ourselves of what that is, or even admit that we may have no idea at the moment, for the thread of meaning and direction in our lives is easily lost. But even in our most trying, sometimes horrible moments as parents, we can deliberately step back and begin afresh, asking ourselves as if for the first time, and with fresh eyes, ‘What is truly important here?’”

How do we become more mindful parents? First, it is important to accept our own imperfection as parents. None of us will ever be perfect in our role as Mom or Dad. As the *Huffington Post* blogger

pointed out, it’s impossible to remain attuned and empathic with our children at every moment. We do our best, but we are human. After acknowledging and accepting our imperfection as parents, it is a day-to-day, moment-to-moment endeavor to practice mindful parenting. It begins with each of us as individuals.

The benefits to the parent of parenting in a mindful way include a decrease in parental stress as well as increased pleasure in parenting. It also brings profound benefits to your child. There are a number of ways to practice mindfulness, from simple breathing exercises to formal religious practices. If all of this mindfulness talk is new to you, here are a couple of simple things you might try to help you become more mindful in your role as a parent and in every aspect of your life:

- **Breathing exercise.** Find a quiet place and sit comfortably in a chair, or on the floor, if you prefer. Close your eyes and notice your breath as you inhale and exhale. Focus on your breath as you inhale and exhale. If you find your focus and thoughts have wandered away, simply go back to noticing your breath as you inhale and exhale. That’s it!

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■ **Listening exercise.** Find a place to sit or relax comfortably, where you will have few distractions, and notice any sounds you might hear. You might be surprised at what you notice when you focus your attention in the moment and listen. A barking dog outside in the distance, the silent whir of the refrigerator motor as it clicks on at the opposite end of the house. It's amazing what we can hear when we listen with mindfulness. Again, if you find your thoughts have wandered, simply return to focused listening.

Pick one of these and try it out once a day for five minutes. Expect that from time to time you will have to bring your attention and focus back to the moment during the exercises. That's all. Even five minutes each day of one of the exercises described above can pay off in significant ways for you, your children, and your entire family. My guess is that after a while, you may want to increase your mindfulness exercise time to 10 or 20 minutes once each day. It's a small investment of time with the potential for big rewards. ❖

Janie McMahan, MA, LMFT Associate, is a therapist in private practice in Austin. The focus of her work is building and maintaining healthy families and healthy relationships. She works with individuals, couples, and families on a variety of clinical presentations, but the heart of her work is with adoptive parents, assisting them in their journey of parenting children who have experienced attachment trauma. You can learn more about Janie at www.janiemcmahan.com.

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from China to assemble the showcase last summer. The Chinese Lantern Festival opened during the Texas State Fair, and though it was originally supposed to run through January 5th, the end date has now been extended to February 17th. You can learn more about it via the website, <http://chineselanternfestival.com/index.php>.

Throughout the Chinese Lantern Festival, our group ebbed and flowed, each family moving at its own pace, but collective memories were made when we joined together: around the pool, around the tables, and on the highway.



Though in our children's Mother Land, the traditional Chinese Lantern Festival marks the last day of the Chinese New Year celebration, the Chinese Lantern Festival in Dallas was a fantastic way for us to start 2014, reinforcing the treasured connections amongst our families. ❖

Friends of the Family: A Series to Highlight those Supportive of our Community

Featured Friend: Rowena Fong, Ed.D.

By Becky Harding

Rowena Fong, Ed.D., has hosted two Dr. Changfu Chang film screenings at the Utopia Theatre at the UT School of Social Work, taught a mahjong class in her home as a part of our first summer series, co-directed the Xishuangbanna Cultural Exchange Learning Project and, of course, co-directed our four FCC-UT Chinese culture camps. We thought we should take a moment to thank you publicly from the deepest parts of our hearts for your enormous contributions to our community and, for our new FCC members, introduce you.

Becky: What is your professional background and what lead you to your interest in international adoption?

Rowena: I am a college professor in the school of social work at the University of Texas at Austin. I became interested in international adoptions because of my dissertation topic on China's only child policy and my concerns for Chinese children and youth adopted and non-adopted, growing up as Asian Americans in the US.



Becky: What are some of the best aspects about working with our community?

Rowena: A warm and friendly community, I have found FCC to be a remarkable group of parents who really care about their adopted Chinese children and youth and are invested in finding and offering what's best for them in terms of their overall psychological and emotional development.

Becky: What are some suggestions you might have for raising Chinese American children?

Rowena: All children must find their identity as they grow up. So in raising Chinese American children and youth, they need to know the personal, psychological, and emotional meaning of their being Chinese. Parents can help their children and youth discover this by promoting ethnic pride and identity as being Chinese Americans. Giving them opportunities to have both role models and their ethnic identity affirmed is very important.

Becky: What are your favorite Chinese foods?

Rowena: Dim sum, jasmine rice, and Cantonese-style lobster.

Becky: Anything else you want to add?

Rowena: Becky Harding, FCC Board members and volunteers, Pat Morgan, and Em Hardy are all awesome people and great to work with in putting on Chinese Culture Camp! ❖