

Families with Children from China

Austin, Texas Chapter

Fall Newsletter

October, 2016



President's Note

Twenty years ago, FCC Austin came into being. Twenty years! In this issue, some of our members (including two founders) share their FCC memories. Thank you, Karen, Shu Zhou and Abby for your contributions.

As I wrote about in the last newsletter, our family became involved with FCC at Chinese New Year, 2011—the Year of the Rabbit. About two years later, I was invited to serve on the board; what a great tenure I've since enjoyed. In reflection, some of my favorite FCC moments invariably involve our unconstrained time together. At the annual retreat, I recollect those welcoming TBarM Friday nights with the grown-ups chatting at the picnic tables and energetic kids in the sports hall, all of us happy to be connected again. I vividly recall a lazy Saturday afternoon spent on the dining hall front porch, catching glances of our children darting past, exuberant to be running carefree with their friends as I gabbed with mine. I think of all those giddy kids around the campfire roasting marshmallows, accompanied by singing and ukuleles as the sun set over Lake Travis. Such great memories... I also have fond recollections of our FCC road trip to Dallas for the Chinese Lantern exhibit as well as the group overnight in San Antonio. All in all, I'm most grateful for the extended tribe time we've enjoyed together over the years as well as for the friends that have made them so memorable.

As I bid adieu, I offer my heartfelt gratitude to an outstanding 2016 FCC board: Nelda Bullis, Mark Estes, Christine DeVries and Jena Goodridge. Thank you for your hard work this year. Though Christine, Jena and I are stepping down from the board, we look forward to others taking over the FCC mantle of leadership including Dianne Harwood, Clay Heath and Tom Hurt, with Kathie Tovo helping behind the scenes to take the organization forward. Thank you all for your steadfast dedication to FCC. Anyone else interested in joining the board should contact me.

Here's what you can do, community, to help FCC prosper:

- Volunteer for our Chinese New Year party. The online sign-up makes it easy to find a task.
- Renew your FCC membership. FCC counts on those funds to run our organization, including paying for website hosting, board insurance, storage, annual scholarships and MoonFest as well as subsidizing the costs of the Chinese New Year celebration. If FCC ever did your family good, please pay it forward to the families that remain active.
- Attend the 2017 Chinese New Year bash. Let's make FCC's 20th Chinese New Year party the best yet!
- Buy a few 2017 Year of the Rooster t-shirts; this year's shirt promises to be something even your teen would wear.
- Come to the next FCC retreat April 28–30, 2017, either for the weekend or as a day guest on Saturday. It's community building at its best for our families and our children.

Thank you for your continued support, FCC. I'll be looking forward to celebrating the Year of the Rooster with you and your families.

Warm Wishes,
Carrie van der Wal

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Summer Camp 2016 at AARC



This past summer, the Asian American Resource Center had their first ever Asian Adoptee Teen and Youth Camps. As our FCC organization had their final Culture camp in 2015, this was a great opportunity for community building and cultural enrichment. The camps were organized by Ms. Hanna Huang, MSW (and BA in Asian American Studies), who serves as Education Coordinator at AARC, along with staff.

Especially for adopted children from Asian countries, week one was Teen Camp for 13–17 year-olds where the focus was leadership and identity building, preparing them to be junior counselors for the youth camp the next week. Teen campers also had a boba tea social event with local Asian American community leaders from all walks of life; this included Asian Americans in politics, non-profits, comedy and more!

Week two was comprised of two groups, ages 5–7 and 8–10. Instructors Vincent Martinez, an experienced art instructor, took charge of the 5–7 year-olds, and Vivian Lin,

a native of Taiwan and art exhibit specialist at the AARC, engaged the 8–10 year-olds. Three teen campers were enthusiastic helpers throughout the 5-day camp. Highlights of the youth camp week included:

- A Monkey King hand puppet show by the Austin Taiwanese Association
- A workshop for parents and campers by Dr. Norma Leben, LCSW and Certified Play Therapist, which emphasized feeling identification through a game, and included a lively discussion on bullying
- HBO's *East of Main Street* video and discussion:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LYG3M3dU5s.
- A family diorama creation and presentation (enjoyed by all parents at the end of the week) along with arts and crafts activities relevant to Asian/Asian American history and heritage.

There were periods of time for the two groups to have free play and socialize. Friendships formed and shyness diminished if only for a while, but good things happened during their time together.

When asked about the plans for camps next summer, Ms. Huang replied, “My personal staff recommendation is that the 5–7 ages would benefit a lot from just enrolling in our regular youth camps which incorporate Asian/American themes and perspectives. I would love to be able to serve age 8–12 in the youth camps in the next year and hence be able to focus on more complex activities and projects. Then for the teen camps, AARC intends to create more one-week teen summer camp opportunities in general. One program of which we are especially interested in developing is a Counselor-In-Training camp. Helping to create some activities for and working with youth was the primary reason the three teen campers signed up.”

She also stated they would definitely include the 11-year-olds next year. Hoping to build from this year's experiences, survey responses, and input from staff, the center expects to offer camps which involve the Asian adopted population next summer. Stay tuned! You can learn more about the AARC here and sign up to receive their newsletter: <https://austintexas.gov/aarc>. ❖



Family Focus: The Devries

“I remember driving to work and around town blasting Queen’s song *Somebody to Love*, singing ‘Find me somebody to love!’ over and over and over at the top of my lungs!”

—Christine Devries



I’m the only native Texan in the family—actually the only one born in the continental U.S. (other than our Great Dane, Mardy, who is from Florida). Doug was born in Japan on a military base, and our two girls—Sara, 7 and Tessa, 5—were born in Jiangxi

Province in China. In my early 30s, I remember reading an article about families adopting daughters from China and a seed was planted. At the time, the minimum age requirement to adopt from China was 35. I was impressed, and decided that one day when I was older I would adopt a daughter from China.

Early in our marriage, Doug deployed to Iraq for a year. Upon his return it became clear that we would not be able to start a family the old-fashioned way. We immediately started the adoption process—I loved Doug’s attitude of preferring to go to China for a child than to a hospital! What we thought would be a 1–2 year process turned into four as referrals slowed substantially. I remember driving to work and around town blasting Queen’s song *Somebody to Love*, singing “Find me somebody to love!” over and over and over at the top of my lungs! It wasn’t until we moved to the Waiting Child List 3½ years later that we got our referral. Our somebody to love is Sara Mei Grace, who, at 16 months and 17 pounds, was put into our eager arms. Her “special need” was eczema (yes, seriously). After three glorious weeks of bonding at home, Doug deployed to Afghanistan. How to sum up that first year on my own? It

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was joy-filled, exhausting, glorious, challenging and we did just fine. For 11 months, we did weekly Skype calls and Sara never missed a beat with her dad. Upon his return, it took about five minutes for Sara to crawl all over her dad as she previously had.

What a relief to have Doug back and be together again!

Sara has grown into this amazing 2nd grader who makes friends in a heartbeat, does cartwheels as you walk with her, loves to sew (especially with her grandmother in New Mexico) and is an avid Girl Scout. She frequently thinks of her birth parents, and looks forward to visiting China in a few years. She has many FCC friends and loves going to the events. She proudly dresses up in her Chinese dresses.

Shortly after Doug's return from Afghanistan, we started the paper chase for our 2nd somebody to love. Tessa's referral was much quicker—14 months start to finish. Sara, just shy of four at the time, was so eager and ready to be a big sister. She was an immense help to us when we traveled to China for Tessa. Not quite two, Tessa Mei Xun walked into our

hotel room scared and confused. Sara took her by the hand to show her the crib, and then started feeding her Cheerios. It was a rough first day and night, but I knew everything would be okay when Tessa giggled the next morning at her new jiejie (big sister). Tessa had been with a foster family for much of her life, and had no trouble with eating or drinking, despite her unrepaired third degree cleft lip and palate. The next four months were a whirlwind of settling in and two surgeries. I will never forget driving home from the lip repair surgery and looking in the rearview mirror. There was Tessa, licking her repaired lip and looking in the mirror, delighted.

Now a kindergartner, Tessa is in that magical phase of fairies and mermaids. She frequently reminds me “Mom, be silly.” Tessa has amazed me with her hard work and progress in learning to communicate. She outgrew her need for speech therapy after 1½ years in the Round Rock ISD speech and language program, and has never shown frustration when working on articulation. She is feisty—I'll never forget what the anesthesiologist said during Tessa's second surgery: “muy fuego” (much fire).

She adores her sister, and especially loves needling her. She is fiercely possessive of me, but no longer worries whether or not we'll be there for her.

There are no more deployments; Doug has retired from the military and is able to work from home now. I am fortunate to be able to work part-time. Doug recently bought a plaque for the living room that says “Family is everything. Everything else is just everything else.” I am so grateful for our family—our somebodies to love—and so glad that I get to be their mom. ❖



FCC 20th Anniversary

By Shu Zhou, LMSW

When my husband started school at University of Texas in spring 2014, I stayed in Austin with him for a few months. It was a new place for us and we didn't know anyone. I am originally from Wuhan, China, and was living in the U.S. with an F2 spouse visa, which prohibited me from pursuing a degree or employment. As a recent MSW (Master of Social Work) graduate, I was desperate to find volunteer opportunities, so I could use my new skills. I don't remember how I found out about FCC, but it was likely through UT's China Care. As soon as I knew about FCC, I fell in love with the organization and its mission. It is extremely powerful to me that a group of cross-racial adoptive parents have built up such an amazing nonprofit organization for their children and families.

I did not hesitate to support FCC, so I immediately became an official member and a big sister. I visited my two little sisters at their home every week and did all kinds of things with them. Of course, those activities included making and eating Chinese food! One time, I brought a Chinese friend with me. We taught the girls a traditional Chinese game "Fan Shou Sheng" (Cat's cradle), and they showed us how to play Twister. We played these two games together and had a lot of fun. When I got home, I saw a Facebook post from the girls' mom, saying that she had heard happy laughter from the downstairs, and the adults sounded louder than the teenagers. That was so true... sometimes, I may have more fun than the kids! ☺ As a volunteer, I actually gained much more than I can ever imagine. I had the chance to make friends, practice English, learn American culture, get delicious homemade food, give back to the community and found self-confidence and self-value from my contributions. As a foreigner in the U.S, I used to be the one that always asked for help, and I didn't feel

good about it; being able to give back to others was an amazing feeling after so many years of being on the receiving end.

In the summer 2014, I moved to Houston to pursue my PhD in Social Work at the University of Houston. I was very sad and tried to keep my connection and bonding with FCC Austin. Fortunately, I came back to FCC as a Chinese teacher during the summer camp for 2014 and 2015. I tried my best to bring my students the real Chinese experience in a fun way. I spent a lot of time in Houston's Chinatown and Austin's Teacher's Heaven to pick up activity prizes and teaching tools, such as Yin Yang symbols and Terra Cotta warrior models. Although I was exhausted at the end of every teaching day, I enjoyed spending time with my lovely students, the responsible parents, the helpful counselors and all the friendly camp volunteers.

I was afraid that the Mandarin class would not be very attractive, considering so many other fun activities were going on at the camp. However, my students' handwritten cards on the wall at celebration parties always made me happy and proud. They addressed me as "Shu Laoshi" (that was the first and the only time because I am actually Zhou Laoshi) and thanked me for teaching them Mandarin. They described me as "understanding, nice and careful," and they said they had "always wanted to learn Mandarin" and that I had helped them to do that. These precious cards are on my bedroom wall in Houston; they remind me of who I am and what I want to do for my life and in our community. In the Chinese language, teachers are always framed as "Yuan Ding" (Gardener). As a Chinese gardener, I don't expect those students can accurately memorize what I have taught in class (although I hope they do). The most important thing is that I have planted a seed of Chinese language and culture in their growing hearts. With

sunshine and rain, little by little, (hopefully) we'll eventually see the beautiful flowers and juicy fruits some day in the future.

Also, I am extremely thankful for the Freer Family. As my generous FCC homestay, they not only gave me free room and board, but also friendship and fun. The family's daughter Zili, one of my camp students, helped me a lot with making teaching materials. It was mindblowing to listen to their stories and thoughts about adoption, family, China, and so many other things that I could never learn from classes or books. I still remember: they were not at home when I arrived at their house for the very first time. Zili's mom told me she would leave the door open or keep the key somewhere for me. I was shocked because we had never met before and just barely knew each other through email. It was so warm that she trusted me deeply without hesitation simply because she had been told I was part of FCC. We are all family!

As of July 2016, I had lived in Texas for 2.5 years and in the U.S. for 7 years. Believe it or not, FCC is where I found the most sense of belonging, connection, and happiness. Obviously, the first bonding between me and the FCC kids is that we look alike and most of them come from Mainland China, where I was born and grew up. The parents and I bonded through shared love and care for our FCC kids and our best hopes for their journey of adjustment into their new lives. As a passionate and organized group, FCC inspired me in so many different ways. It taught me the essential meaning of family, and showed me the power of love and the creativity of parenting. I am so happy for FCC's 20th anniversary and proud to be a part of it. As a first-time expecting mom, I cannot wait to bring my little Ryan to this big family and celebrate FCC's many anniversaries together in the future! ❖

Shu Zhou, LMSW, is a University of Houston PhD student, teaching assistant, future faculty fellow and student ambassador in the Graduate College of Social Work. She and her husband are awaiting the birth of their first child Ryan in October.

Life Happens

By Karen Stevens Doyle

Happy Anniversary FCC! How is it possible that 20 years have gone by since FCC Austin was a conversation?

1995 was Thee year. I was now ready to meet my daughter. FINALLY! No matter how anyone arrives at deciding to adopt a daughter from China, you go through A LOT to get to that point. All of my paperwork and interviews were complete with the dossier ready for submission. Everything had been checked and double-checked, then boom, a bomb dropped—all adoptions were placed on an indefinite hold. Why? Three British reporters exposed and reported on horrific conditions in the Chinese orphanages; their documentary, *The Dying Rooms*, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zd_nptd2qoM) halted all adoptions in 1995. In January 1996, the news came unexpectedly; China was allowing “limited adoptions.” My phone rang shortly thereafter and I was told I would join my daughter in two weeks.

The impact of *The Dying Rooms* was significant for me. How could a culture allow that to happen? These babies were lost

within their own society. The abandonment of baby newborn girls during this time was abundant; they were truly trying to be forgotten. This was not the China I knew or wanted my daughter to know and love.

During my process of deciding if a Chinese adoption was the right path, the adoption agency suggested I visit other families who adopted from China. I was invited to a home where I met numerous families who answered many questions and provided much needed traveling tips to China. Remember—the internet was not full of bloggers... no Facebook or YouTube. Information was not as easily available as today. During those visits, I met adoptee Asian adults who told me when mingling with other Asians, they felt isolated because of their lack of knowledge in their own culture; they were raised American even though they were Asian. They further expressed feelings of isolation, discrimination and a wish that their parents had taught them about their culture. I already had it in my mind to teach my daughter about her culture, but this feeling of isolation motivated me. As an American who

knew very little about the Chinese culture, I wanted to create a community where we all learned together about Chinese traditions and culture. I wanted my daughter to know she was not alone, that there were lots of other families who have parents that don't look like them or speak their native tongue.

My adoption agency assembled 10 families to travel together to China. Honi Beck Canon (another Austinite) and I became fast friends in this group. Our daughters were cribmates in the orphanage—mind blowing! Of course, this tightened our bond. As we each held our daughters in our arms for the first time in China (Kimberley was 4 ½ months old and Raelyn, Honi's daughter, was 5 ½ months), we made a pact to do everything in our power to be involved in each other's lives. Our girls had a very special bond to honor... thus the FCC journey began.

Once we got home, Honi and I met for playdates regularly, becoming each other's support system. We met weekly but felt

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there might be other families who would have an interest in playgroups, celebrating Chinese holidays, traditions and offering general support.

Several of the families I met through the adoption journey expressed interest in a playgroup. Steve Ross and Sandi Sykora, Abby Turner and Patty Fridocki along with Honi and I started getting together for playdates. As word got out, our group grew expediently. We started having “parties” at Sandi and Steve’s clubhouse. We celebrated Chinese New Year at my church, St. Michael’s Episcopal (now The Grove). Each year, we outgrew our space. Remember, this was before social media. Community meant getting together and being able to touch one another. Everyone who joined was thirsty for connection and information. Now, I am not bad mouthing social media—I personally embrace the virtual world of information and community—but at the time, there were no virtual communities for families with children from China so we relied on each other to build our own.

Steve Ross told me about the Families with Children of China organization. Their core values and mission aligned with what we envisioned and had informally started

to create. With no Austin chapter, we set the wheels in motion to formalize our little community. With the help of attorney Suzanne Bryant (adoptive mom, with married life partner Sara Goodfriend, to two daughters from China), along with Steve (also an attorney), we began to draft the bylaws for FCC Austin. Abby, Suzanne, Steve and I sat in a room for what seemed like months but soon FCC Austin was born. At the time, we had about 30 families. We were amazed when we boasted the organic growth to over 100 families. I served an unofficial one-year term as president and officially for one year. Abby and Patty followed my footsteps, and our programs grew with the creative help of Sandi, who tirelessly assembled together our paper newsletter, mailed out quarterly.

Many of the FCC traditions started back then still hold including celebrating The Mid-Autumn Moon Festival and Chinese New Year as a community. Even the relationship with Amy Wong Mok (founder of the Asian American Cultural Center) continues; early on, she was very involved with FCC, and we collectively supported each other’s goals.

The impact of the *The Dying Rooms* touched others and moved many to change. FCC Austin has supported Half the Sky, which

has single-handedly changed the way orphaned children are nurtured. ICC supports orphans with disabilities; as a society, China has no infrastructure to address this growing population.

Three years ago, as I saw my 18-year-old daughter nurture, coach, and support the younger children at the FCC Chinese Culture Camp in Austin, I was reminded of how life comes full circle. At the time, I felt that I was being inconveniently delayed to get my daughter because of that 1995 documentary but yet that documentary set off energy around the world to make changes, including my own. I see the strength in the community we created. I am so proud to have been a founding member of FCC Austin, and to have served as your first President.

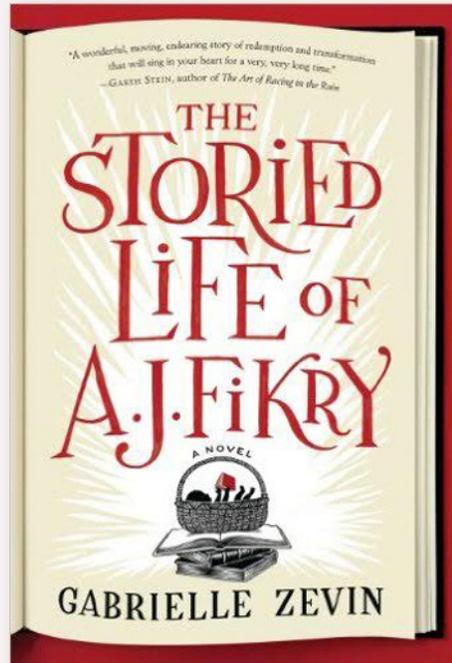
Congratulations on 20 years, FCC! ❖

As one of the founding members of FCC Austin, Karen Stevens Doyle was FCC Austin’s first president. After living in Austin for 25 years, Karen now resides with her husband in Aledo, Texas. She is the mother of two daughters, adopted from China as infants. Both are graduates of Westlake High School: Ali is a freshman at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and Kimberley is a junior at The University of Washington in Seattle. Feel free to connect with Karen on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/karenannedoyle>.

The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry

By Gabriel Zevin, Reviewed by Abby Turner

A. J. Fikry is a bookstore owner on small Alice Island. His wife has died and his life is lonely and miserable. Just when he can't imagine his life getting any worse a baby is abandoned in his store and he becomes unexpectedly attached. This is the story of how a child can transform a person from despairing into joyful. It affirms our need for someone to love and the amazing magic of being loved. I may have enjoyed this book so much because it revels in the things I value. The author adores books and book stores. He lets book clubs be the character's group therapy. All the characters are rich and real and connectable people. Of course, the child who is a transracial adoptee is so clearly A.J.'s soul child. Beautifully written, full of sweet relationships, *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* is a great read! ❖



FCC Austin Has a Library!

Our collection features books and DVDs for children and adults. We have titles that feature Asian children and stories of China. We have documentaries about searching and reunions. There are picture books for reading about adoption and parenting ideas for adoptive parents. The list is on the FCC website under Library. If you would like an item, please contact me at abbyo814@icloud.com. I will either bring it or mail it to you. I will provide a way to return it. There are no due dates or late fees. Check it out! ❖

Noteworthy

CNY 2017

Our FCC Austin Chinese New Year is slated for Sunday, January 29th, from 2–5 p.m. at the Asian American Resource Center and we're going to need your help to pull it off. Unlike the last few years, the current FCC board doesn't have Event Chairs, thus we need the community to step up and help put on the party. We've made it easy with an online sign-up, available in November. To lock in the volunteer task that you'd prefer, sign up as soon as you can. Thank you for helping us be able to celebrate The Year of the Rooster together; we can't do it without you.

Family Retreat 2017

You won't want to miss the next FCC Family Retreat, April 28–30, 2017. On Saturday afternoon, April 29th, FCC member and *Our China Stories* founder Jena Heath will be leading a presentation on adoptee Birth Parent Searching in China, sharing what she's learned via OCS as well as the current resources available to those who are considering or interested in searching. The presentation is free for retreat participants, including Saturday day guests. Stay tuned for more retreat information early next year but put it on your calendars now. ❖

FCC Austin Beginnings

By Abby Turner

In the spring of 1996, Janet and Malcolm Kincaid hosted a group of families who had adopted or were in the process of adopting from China. We met at Janet's home. At the time, our children were Zach (4), and Alisan (8 months). Zach and my husband, Don, swam but there were few other children in attendance. Janet Kincaid collected money for dues and we began to organize what would become FCC Austin.

Sandi Ross put together our newsletter. It included new arrivals, next gatherings, recipes, activities for kids and more. Julie Kirby organized Saturday Playgroups for families north, central and south with families taking charge of each group. We had a Christmas party potluck in December and a Chinese New Year celebration in February of 1997.

In the fall of 1999, meetings were held to decide what organizational changes needed to be made to best serve our rapidly growing membership. Questionnaires, phone surveys and a series of open meetings resulted in becoming a nonprofit and establishing a board. FCC Austin had to write a mission statement and follow federal

guidelines for membership and activities. Many folks participated in these founding meetings, including Robin Arnold, Carol Brookhart, Bonnie Connor, Patti and Walter Fidrocki, Pam Hefner, Jane Hunter, Lisa Radebaugh, Melissa Ricks, Steve Ross, Irene Chiang, Tina Schroeter, Karen Stevens, and me. Others were helpful in working on var-

ious parts of organizing as well. In 2000, our first president was elected, Karen Stevens, followed by Patti Fidrocki, Shawn Dubiel, Abby Turner, Sandi Ross, and Linda Nenno-Breining. ❖

Austin resident Abby Turner was one of the founders of FCC Austin and actively continues her support.

Connect with Us!

Below is a list of opportunities to connect with fellow FCC members on a regular basis.

Mom's Lunch Wednesdays

Every Wednesday, Austin area Moms connected via adoption meet for lunch at Galaxy Cafe on Mesa Boulevard. If you would like to be on the list and reminded of each week's meeting, please contact Sandi Sykora-Ross at: rosyk@austin.rr.com.

Book Club

This group is open to all Moms and meets at a restaurant monthly to discuss the current book. We are not a serious group but enjoy a wide variety of literature. For information, please contact Abby Turner at: abby0814@icloud.com.

Mom's Night Out

On the last Wednesday of each month, adoptive moms meet for dinner at various restaurants for a mom's night out. For information contact Abby Turner at: abby0814@icloud.com. ❖

FCC Austin Moonfest 2016



On Sunday, September 18th, FCC held our annual Moon Festival at Central Market on North Lamar. The weather was hot, but a great group of FCC folks gathered for this laid back and fun event. Moon Festival, also called Mid-Autumn Festival, is traditionally a time for family reunion and peace. The festival is celebrated when the moon is the biggest and fullest. The moon is a symbol of prosperity, happiness and family reunion. Mid-autumn festival is the second most important Chinese festival after Chinese New Year.



The FCC Moon Festival was greatly attended despite the hot weather as families came to visit each other and share in the festivities. At check-in, many people enjoyed a taste of two different types of moon cakes. A large number of China Care members volunteered at the event to help our children apply temporary tattoos, play bean bag games and decorate sugar cookies. A

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parent volunteer also helped to run traditional “back to basic” children’s games such as Simon says and relay races. A balloon clown created works of art for the children.

Texas WuShu, with their second performance at Moon Fest, performed a skilled routine which you can view via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILEbKb2ngGY>. Following the performance, FCC President Carrie van der Wal announced the raffle winners of the much coveted 20th anniversary FCC t-shirts.

The FCC Moon Festival came to a close with a spectacular performance by the Summitt Lion Dancing team. It was joyful to see Lion Dancers of all different ages perform for and engage with FCC Families.

FCC would like to thank the families who attended and volunteers who donated their time to put on this fun annual event. We can’t do it without you! ❖

