REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Serving families. Serving communities.

2013-14
Isaiah Shell’s mother admits she used crack cocaine throughout her pregnancy. Isaiah tested positive for cocaine when he was born, and he was taken into FSS care as a result. That was a wake-up call for his mother, Nikki.

Nikki and Major Shell got serious about making their home environment safe for their son. Nikki faithfully met with her substance abuse counselor and addressed the seriousness of her addiction. She embraced the professional support offered and successfully met all court-ordered requirements. Nikki established herself as drug-free.

Nikki and Major put all their effort into supporting each other, creating a newfound bond as they worked hard to provide a safe home for baby Isaiah.

“The support of my husband, the classes and FSS saved our family,”

Nikki said. “I could not have done this without help. We are so grateful that we can be a family again.”
Often people ask me: What is Family Support Services? What do you do?

I am proud to reply that FSS is about serving the children and families of our Duval and Nassau county communities every day in many different ways.

As the lead community-based care agency, FSS provides assistance that has created successful results in their lives, in our community and throughout our child welfare system. All of us here are working toward a better future by improving the chances for a positive outcome for children in foster care.

Our efforts include strengthening local families by improving safety and giving parents the tools and confidence to move forward together. I am particularly proud of the Safe Baby Task Force we created this year to focus efforts on our most vulnerable children, infants and toddlers.

We continue to see the positive impact of the diverse services we offer the community, including our monthly Dad All Day fatherhood program and the Breakfast Learning Series for parents or caregivers.

Due to a number of extenuating circumstances, we experienced a significant increase in children entering the child welfare system this past year. The positive note is that we have stabilized the influx by working diligently with our partners and have seen a downturn over the past few months.

To better serve the Nassau Community, we moved our Yulee office to a more centralized location and brought other service agencies there as well, to provide the convenience of a one-stop service center.

We are pleased to work with Judge David Gooding on developing Girls Court, a specialized program focused on supporting and providing services to young women in the juvenile court system. FSS also continues to serve as an active partner in our community’s efforts to help the young victims of human trafficking.

Please take time to review this report to learn more about our best practices and innovative services. You’ll also hear from some of the clients we’ve served this year, as well as compassionate members of our community who make it possible for us to serve children that need all of us. Their stories are inspirational, and clarify why we do, what we do every day here at FSS.

Sincerely,

Lee Kaywork, CEO
Family Preservation

Family Support Services helps struggling, at-risk families overcome obstacles to achieve healthy relationships and a cohesive family environment. Most families want to care for their children when they have access to the tools they need to do so. Evidence indicates that children do better when they remain with their family; therefore, the ultimate goal is to keep the family intact.

FSS achieves this through two family preservation in-home programs:

The Family Assessment Support Team (FAST) offers services when serious problems identified in the home are not deemed as an imminent danger to the child. In-home crisis services are implemented and daily visits may be warranted.

Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (STEPS) offers direct, in-home services while providing links to community resources. In-home interaction allows for assessments of child safety and family needs.

Sometimes best practices are simply not enough. To help families conquer unyielding challenges, FSS developed the Integrated Practice Team. Partnering with professionals from other service agencies, FSS staff invites struggling families to participate in focused discussions and idea sharing when seeking solutions. The team of experts, family, and when appropriate, the children, discuss all facets of the issues the family faces so that all voices are heard, solutions offered, options considered.

This year has also seen an added focus on children three and younger, with expanded assessment tools for early screening that yield information about developmental or social delays. Early identification means early intervention and increases the healthy development of infants and toddlers.

### Caring for kids

**AS OF JUNE 30, 2014**

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<thead>
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<th>Children in care</th>
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<tr>
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<td>An increase of</td>
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<td>June 2014</td>
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<td>An increase of</td>
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**Number of children in care by:**

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<td>5 – 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 – 17</td>
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<tbody>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>823</td>
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### Financials

**Casework Services and Related Support** $15.79 million 29.9%

**Adoption Promotion and Support** .93 million 1.8%

**Prevention Services** 6.21 million 11.9%

**Staff and Parent Training** .40 million 0.8%

**Family Support, Preservation and Reunification** 1.61 million 3.1%

**Mental Health for Child Welfare** .94 million 1.8%

**Other Services** 3.60 million 6.8%

**Subtotal** $29.58 million 56.0%

**ROOM AND BOARD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adoptive Care</th>
<th>$15.27 million 28.9%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Care—Foster Home and Shelter</td>
<td>4.92 million 9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living</td>
<td>2.35 million 4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Foster Care (NEW)</td>
<td>.71 million 1.3%</td>
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**Subtotal** $23.25 million 44.0%

**TOTAL EXPENDITURES** $52,834,410 100.0%

**Annual Community Donations**

| Cash Donations/Grants | $741,697 |
| In-kind               | $905,189 |

**TOTAL** $1,646,885
FSS services helps mom overcome obstacles

“FSS came into my life just when I needed help the most.”

A single mom with two children and a third on the way, Jennifer Hamilton was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder.

Her pregnancy prevented use of needed medications. FSS family preservation programs enabled Jennifer to care for her children and herself.

“They gave me a way to map everything out, and they made it possible by coming to my house. It would have been very hard for me otherwise.”

Initially, Jennifer was skeptical about the effectiveness of therapy, but through the services FSS provided, she began to experience the positive effects for her son and herself.

In addition to therapy, in-home intervention services, parenting skills training and a specialized plan for her older son were part of the solution for this family.

Throughout this challenging time, Jennifer completed her education and graduated from Everest University. She worked hard to keep her family together and to overcome obstacles that might otherwise have derailed her goals.
Family Support Services ensures that appropriate care is provided in Duval and Nassau counties for children whose safety is compromised in their home. Efforts are made to remedy home conditions first, and when necessary, FSS provides care for the children whose well-being is jeopardized at home. Loving, trained foster parents provide a temporary, safe and caring home.

While in foster care, children receive medical and dental care, counseling and support services, and efforts focus on bringing a sense of normalcy to their lives—something as ordinary as going to an overnight camp, a basketball game or the zoo.

Reuniting children with their biological families is priority one, and increased successes to safely reunify families prompted FSS to host a reunification celebration to recognize local families’ successes in overcoming issues and challenges to create a safe environment for their children with the help of FSS services and programs.

FSS stepped up its focus on recruiting quality foster parents and now has more licensed foster homes than ever before to receive children needing care, which enables a better match and greater stability for the children.

Leadership programs prove successful

Foster care is intended to give children a safe haven when they most need it. With FSS enrichment programs, it can also launch a successful future.

Shatavia Bowman was a scared 9th grader when she made a call to report conditions that threatened her safety and that of her two sisters. Since entering foster care, Shatavia has participated in FSS’s Life Skills Training, Tour de TRAILS and Passport to Leadership. She was chosen to be a Senate Page in the opening week of the Florida Senate this year and was recently honored at the FSS Academic Awards Luncheon.

“Passport to Leadership made all the difference for me.”

“Without it, I would not have realized that I even had the potential to succeed. It gave me the skills I need, real world experience and the confidence to try new things. Now I know I can do whatever I set my mind to do.”

A 2014 graduate of Robert E. Lee High School, Shatavia is enrolled at Florida State College at Jacksonville and plans to continue her education to earn a bachelor’s degree in early childhood development. In the meantime, the successful teen is gaining valuable experience by volunteering at a local child care center.
Foster parents share their love and home

Harold and Angela Rand’s children are grown and they have 11 grandchildren. With an empty house and a lot of love and attention to provide, Angela had the idea to bring foster children into their home. Harold, while still grieving the recent tragic loss of his youngest son, who was in the military, was reluctant to go along.

Not to be deterred, Angela decided to take the foster parent training and Harold agreed to be her backup. Then something miraculous happened. Harold said that during the foster parent training, “the Lord gave me the confirmation I needed, to know that this was the right move.”

The Rands believe each child needs to feel loved. Their goal is to provide a home in which each child feels he or she belongs. “Love is all they need—your time, your attention and your love,” explained Angela.

Acknowledging the children may be returned to their natural parents or adopted, they still see fostering as a way to help. Knowing they can do it again with other children should that happen, helps them face the impending separation.

Angela said that, in her own way, she’s on a mission to increase the quality of care for children in distress. She is diligent about training. During the first year as a foster parent, she completed two to three times the required amount of hours needed. She says that she loves to learn and is more than willing to sign up for anything that will better help her give children a better way of life.
Cherokee was 12 years old when she and her 6-year-old brother were adopted by Mike and Amy Drafts. Cherokee describes it like this:

“When you first get put up for adoption, you wonder if it’s going to be the perfect family and if it’s the family you really want to be with. I wanted a family I could trust! When the day came for me to get adopted, I was nervous, but then I had this feeling. I knew my family was the right one. Now I feel like I have people I can actually rely on, who can cheer me up through rough times. Although being adopted can be hard at times, it’s one of the most amazing feelings ever!”

The Drafts always knew they wanted to adopt. Amy had been adopted, and Mike had relatives who had come into the family through adoption.

“My adoption by my forever family was a gift,” Amy said. “It was a gift I wanted to give someone else. Mike knew firsthand the difference adoptions make for children and their adoptive parents, so we were in complete agreement about wanting to adopt.”

The couple began taking classes through FSS to prepare for adopting. Thinking the Drafts might be a good match for Cherokee and her brother, Austin, FSS staff arranged an initial informal meeting. It was love at first sight—on both sides.

“Through FSS, we had access to many incredible people and resources,” Mike said. “There are challenges, but we’ve learned that success without struggle is not really success. Anything worth having is worth the effort.”

Family Support Services strives to reunite children with their biological families and to provide quality interim foster care when it is needed. In some situations, adoption is the answer for a child to be able to permanently live in a loving, caring family environment.

Often, family, close friends and foster parents choose to adopt.

When those options are exhausted, a suitable home is sought from the larger community. FSS creates appealing outreach programs to find adoptive homes and great effort is made to match children who need homes with a family that welcomes them. From first contact with a child, options are explored to find the right fit with a loving family.

Heightened emphasis has been placed on finding homes for older children who need a forever family. Adoptive parents of older children have the opportunity to shape and develop a well-adjusted, successful adult who will be a member of the family for the rest of their lives.
Family Support Services joins with community partners to provide on-going programs and support for young adults in the foster care system to help prepare them for adulthood. Practical life skills training programs include financial literacy, household management, educational pursuits and career planning.

In addition, innovative enrichment opportunities offered by FSS to teens in foster care bring them life experiences, eye-opening opportunities and encouragement to thrive and succeed.

New regulations in child protective services have created specialized programs to better meet the needs of young adults 18–21 years old, as they transition from foster care to adulthood. Extended Foster Care enables them to focus on their education and career goals. Additional programs are available when they age out, so they can continue to move forward and become truly independent.
Kaharai Simmons Kitchen, 19, is the second oldest of his mother’s nine children. He feels a heavy responsibility for the younger siblings and wants to live a life that will inspire hope in them.

Kaharai entered foster care when he was 13 and had the good fortune early on to meet his adoptive parents, Patris Wright-Kitchen and Wayne Kitchen. Having a new family enabled him to branch out, discover more of himself and make a change.

Kaharai credits *Just Like Me* with helping him learn to express his own feelings about “who I am, and what I want to be.” He began with music and has started dancing.

*Just Like Me* is committed to the healthy development of 11 to 18 year olds in the foster care system. The mission of the cultural arts and education experience is to teach teenagers in foster care to learn skills in trust and team building, problem solving and decision making. *Just Like Me* lays down an educational foundation that builds upon individual talent to explore career options and possibilities based on the child’s own creative talent and abilities. The unique summer camp was nationally recognized by the Center for the Study of Social Policy as 1 of 15 programs across the country that “are achieving outcomes that are truly improving the well-being of very vulnerable youth.”

*Just Like Me* was also named “2014 Best Project of the Year” and recipient of the Ripple Effect Award from Mental Health America of Northeast Florida.
Helen Baker raised four children to be successful, productive adults. For many people, that would be a job well done and the end of the story. But for Helen Baker, it was just the beginning.

Helen has a calling: To give hope and opportunity to teens through FSS. She opened her home to a young adult who aged out of foster care and is participating in Extended Foster Care.

For Danny Camberdella, 18, Helen Baker is a God-send. He calls her Auntie; she calls him Nephew. When they met, his behavior was disruptive and he was not doing well in school. Now he talks about the difference “Auntie” and FSS have made in his life.

“I was going nowhere,” he admitted. “Auntie asked me if I wanted to do right or not. Now I want others to know there is hope. This is not a foster home. This is a family.”

Danny and Helen say FSS responds to their needs, including providing a tutor and counseling. People who have worked with Danny say he has made a 360-degree turn and has never done as well as he has in the home with Ms. Baker.

Danny’s immediate goal is to keep a straight A grade average. Without FSS and Extended Foster Care, Danny would have had few options and little hope for a future.

FSS was the first community-based care lead agency in the state to create a housing specialist position specifically to assist foster teens entering Extended Foster Care find appropriate housing to meet their needs.

“Just Like Me” is more than music and dancing, Kaharai said.

“It taught me leadership, to help others and to get into their perspective,” he said. “It builds trust and team building.”

“I’m getting to know more about what life and work are really about,” he said. “And, my life coach keeps telling me anything is possible. It’s beginning to sink in. I literally can be anything I want to be if I put my mind to it.”

His next step is to complete training as a certified nursing assistant. Helping others and saving lives will be part of Kaharai’s life no matter where he goes or what he does.
Family Support Services of North Florida exists to protect children and help ensure their safety, stability and quality of family life by working with the community to strengthen the family unit. FSS is the lead agency in Duval and Nassau counties, providing four core community-based care programs to at-risk children and struggling families:

FAMILY PRESERVATION • FOSTER CARE • ADOPTION • INDEPENDENT LIVING

Family Support Services is a nonprofit organization. Donations are greatly appreciated and are utilized to provide normalcy for children in care.

Please send your contribution to:

DUVAL COUNTY MAIN OFFICE
1300 Riverplace Blvd., Ste. 700
Jacksonville, FL 32207
(904) 421-5800

NASSAU COUNTY OFFICE
96016 Lofton Square Court
Yulee, FL 32097
(904) 225-5347

You can also donate online at fssjax.org/donate

Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc., is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization contracted by the Department of Children and Families and the State of Florida. Your donation is eligible for an IRS tax credit. Please contact your tax consultant for a determination of tax deductibility.

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