MAKING A SPLASH IN THE COMMUNITY
In this 2009-2010 Report to the Community, Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) is proud to show the effective programs we employ, and highlighted successes, to be the lead nonprofit agency serving children and families in Duval and Nassau counties. Our community-based care agencies provide these four primary services to families:

- ADOPTION
- FOSTER CARE
- FAMILY PRESERVATION
- INDEPENDENT LIVING

With responsibility to develop and oversee the child protection system, our board of directors is representative of both counties.

Our mission is to be the leader in providing safety, stability and quality of life for all children by working with the community to strengthen the family unit.

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We invite you to find out more about child protective services in our area online at fssjax.org
Dear Supporters, Families, Partners and Community Members,

I am pleased to share with you our 2009-2010 Report to the Community, highlighting the many programs and services Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) provides to the children and families of Northeast Florida.

It is a privilege to have served as CEO of FSS for the past seven years. With the help of our community-based care agencies (CBCs), our judicial advocates and judges, and our board of directors, we have made significant strides in positively affecting the lives of over 3,000 children and families.

As a result of our Foster Care Redesign, the number of children in out-of-home care has decreased more than 62 percent since 2006. We have met and exceeded the federal standard for placement stability targets and have consistently increased total adoptions, which is due, in part, to our partners at: Children’s Home Society, Child Guidance Center, Daniel, PSI, Mental Health Resource Center and Jewish Family and Community Services.

The past year has been challenging as we extended our services, increased areas of coverage and diversified the number of programs initiated and funded by FSS. While we continue to focus on reducing the number of children coming into foster care, we have shifted efforts to also focus on our youth who will age out of the system. Our independent living program has made quite a “splash” by offering travel and scuba lessons. Scuba diving is just a small part of Passport to Independence, a program that is being developed to provide core life skills critical to a teen’s survival success as they enter adulthood.

With this program, and many others that you’ll read about in this report, FSS will continue to have a positive impact in our community. We remain committed to enhancing our services and programs, and to deliver care, programs and resources to those we serve.

I’d like to extend a personal thanks to Casey Family Programs, donors, board of directors, foster and adoptive parents, youth, providers, case managers, 4th Judicial Circuit Court, and staff. We are proud to be a part of this caring community and hope that you will continue to support our efforts to positively affect our youth and their families.

Sincerely,

Jim Adams, Chief Executive Officer
## 2009-2010 FINANCIALS

### CaseWork Services & Related Support
- $16.61 million (37.3%)

### Adoption Promotion & Support
- .81 million (1.8%)

### Prevention Services
- 2.62 million (5.9%)

### Staff & Parent Training
- .42 million (0.9%)

### Family Support, Preservation & Reunification
- 1.51 million (3.4%)

### Community Facilitation
- .15 million (0.3%)

### Mental Health for Child Welfare
- .52 million (1.2%)

### Other Services
- 1.27 million (2.8%)

**Subtotal**
- $23.91 million (53.6%)

### Room and Board

#### Adoptive Care
- $10.99 million (24.7%)

#### Licensed Care – Foster Home and Shelter
- 6.07 million (13.6%)

#### Independent Living
- 3.61 million (8.1%)

**Subtotal**
- $20.67 million (46.4%)

### Total Expenditures
- $44,583,000

### Annual Community Donations
- **Cash**
  - $232,700

- **In-Kind**
  - $792,800

  **$1,025,500**

### Children in Care
- **June 2009**: 1,826
- **June 2010**: 1,657

  **9.3% Decrease**

### Children in Out-of-Home Care
- **June 2009**: 975
- **June 2010**: 853

  **1.5% Decrease**

### Number of Children in Care by Age Group
- **0-4**: 693
- **5-11**: 512
- **12-17**: 452

### Number of Children in Care by Racial Profile
- **African American**: 951
- **Caucasian**: 683
- **Asian**: 4
- **Multi-Racial**: 19

### Number of Children in Care by Gender
- **Male**: 868
- **Female**: 789

### Active Foster Homes in Duval County
- **209**

### Active Foster Homes in Nassau County
- **22**
Some of our most important and creative opportunities this year were through partnerships with civic, church and business groups, whose efforts helped to bring vital services and support to children in care. Through their generosity and commitment, Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) hosted various community, state and national events. From book clubs to toy drives, advocacy events to educational workshops, FSS continues to make a splash in the communities it serves. At the 22nd Annual One Church, One Child Conference in Baltimore, four FSS foster children shared their poignant message of hope. Their presentations were met with tears and accolades as they bravely told their personal stories as an outreach to church members with a mission to find each of them a forever family. Governor Charlie Crist participated in two Duval County adoptions in conjunction with a press conference announcing that the state had once again surpassed its previous record number of adoptions. Foster Care Redesign continued as it entered its third year of implementation. The program was acclaimed in a New York Times article as “a transformation—remarkable for its speed…Florida has reduced the number of children in foster care by 32 percent….and in Duval County, the number has declined by more than 50 percent since 2006.” Children’s Advocacy Day at the Capitol brought more than 400 children and families in three buses and countless cars and vans to Tallahassee to give state lawmakers a chance to meet the children whose lives depend on the state’s welfare system. Two lawmakers known to have a strong commitment to child welfare—Senator Tony Hill and Senator Steve Wise—have gone the extra mile in their advocacy efforts. Passport to Independence launched as a cornerstone of the independent living program designed to teach life skills to youth aging out of foster care. The passport identifies more than 15 key achievement areas such as obtaining a driver’s license, opening a bank account and learning how to cook. Teaching these vital life skills to young people will help establish a knowledge base and give them direction for the future. One of the more unique independent living programs called SPLASH or Scuba Promotes Life goals And Supports Healthy living, is a scuba training program designed to increase trust, promote awareness and build confidence in older teens who have aged out of care. Through step-by-step training and classroom exercises, teens are encouraged to learn new skills including a diving technique called Buddy Breathing. As a result, each participant becomes a certified scuba diver, and gains confidence and a new outlook on the world and potential job opportunities—above and below the water. For three years, Volcom Surfwear sponsors a surf camp for foster children with area pros teaching them how to surf. The partnership with Volcom includes support from Jacksonville Beach Lifeguards, Sunrise Surf Shop and surfjaxpier.com. The kids’ fun in the sun is capped off by riding a wave and creating a memory that will
last a lifetime. **Toys for Tots**, the **Junior League of Jacksonville**, Talagy and Jacksonville Firefighters teamed together for an annual holiday tradition that collected thousands of new toys for local foster care kids. This holiday event continues to grow each and every year, and kicks off an event-filled season that includes: foster children’s holiday party at the **Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens** and two **Nassau County parades**. The season culminates with **Home for the Holidays** at the Duval County Courthouse, which brings happiness and joy to dozens of children and their new families by finalizing adoptions before Christmas. **Operation Backpack** is a fun, functional and family-oriented event to help children prepare for the school year. Organized by the **Junior League of Jacksonville**, Operation Backpack distributed thousands of backpacks filled with school supplies and gift cards to children in foster care. **National Philanthropy Day** is an annual event, with more than 450 attendees, to acknowledge the goodness of those who help to make the lives of children better in Northeast Florida. Judy Ellis, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, was honored for organizing backpacks, Christmas gifts and Easter baskets for foster and adoptive children. The **Wayman Community Development Center** partnered with FSS to host “**Seeds of Hope**” a community event to “plant” services information and hope to families in crisis. The **Breakfast Learning Series**, a monthly forum dedicated to educating and supporting social service professionals, current and prospective foster and adoptive parents as well as members of the community. The passion of those who work in child welfare is exemplified by Jessica Bright McMullen, award recipient of the **Governor’s Point of Light for Adoption Awareness Month**. McMullen helped form and launch a monthly community outreach initiative, “**Let’s Talk Adoption**”, which features adoption professionals in a town hall meeting designed to educate prospective foster and adoptive families. Jacksonville Jaguar David Garrard and several teammates hosted an off-shore fishing excursion for foster youth to help them enjoy unique experiences they wouldn’t normally have. Expanding on the adventure theme, the **Army Air National Guard** used a rock climbing wall to emphasize leadership skills, respect and courtesy, during **Leadership Values training** in an at-risk neighborhood. The fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders learned how to avoid problems and make good choices in their lives. The **Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office** is preventing crime and giving children a safe, fun way to play games during the inaugural Summer Night Lights. On the weekend evenings for two months, **Summer Night Lights** offers children and families in high-crime neighborhoods a venue to play games and do crafts in a safe environment. While this is only a sampling of the hundreds of events, partnerships, donors and businesses that have helped create awareness of FSS in the community, we want to thank everyone for their generous support during our fiscal year and beyond.
As Family Support Services (FSS) continues to focus on family preservation through family-centered practice, it has been proven that most families, when provided with education, programs and support, will care for their children successfully.

Reuniting foster children with their parents is our primary goal when children aren’t able to stay in their homes while the family works on preserving and stabilizing itself. Three years ago, it took 20 months to reunite foster children with their parents once children entered care. Today, it takes less than half that time.

FSS, in partnership with Casey Family Programs and the Department of Children and Families, has reconstructed the child welfare system using a process that encompasses change management as the framework for the continuing Redesign of the Foster Care system in Northeast Florida. Casey Family Programs has been instrumental by providing continued funding and technical expertise to support programs and services, particularly redesign evaluation, independent living, and community centers.

**Delivering Hope Where It’s Most Needed**

Immediate help for families in crisis is provided with in-home intervention to help stabilize the family unit and keep children from entering the foster care system. Prevention specialists quickly assess a family situation and establish immediate, appropriate support services for the entire family.

One such service is STEPS (Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents)—helping healthy families in Duval and Nassau counties avoid the stresses that foster abuse and neglect.

Underwritten in part by the Monique Burr Foundation for Children, Inc. STEPS offers activities through its community providers and service center networks. Cassat House, a fully-staffed outreach center, helps families with financial assistance, food stamps and parenting classes.

**Focusing on Family-Centered Practice**

Removing children from parents is the exception, not the rule, and happens in one out of every 20 cases.*

Interested parties, including parents and other relatives, are involved in discussing what's best for the child who may have been abused or neglected. The services needed for the family and the goals that parents need to achieve are essential in determining the success of reunification.

Family-centered practice is about respecting family members and reassuring them that we’re more interested in creating a safe home environment rather than taking away a child.

We go beyond a standard checklist. This requires the case manager to become engaged in knowing a particular child and family and suggesting individualized answers to stabilizing their lives. It may mean helping a parent get food assistance, a job, an education, parenting lessons or even a bus pass. It may be finding childcare, a football uniform, music lessons, summer camp or an internship for a child or youth.

The strategy to safely keep families together is proving successful. Changes made through foster care redesign has resulted in a 62.5 percent reduction in the number of children in care.

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*Florida Department of Children and Families, *Focusing on Family Centered Practice.* Photo above by Kirk Chamberlain
FOSTER CARE

Foster care is a protective service provided when children must be removed from their homes for a planned, temporary period of time. Foster families provide for the physical and emotional safety of children and, in the interim, allow them the ability to have a stable home environment in foster care.

The Florida Department of Children and Families set a goal of reducing the children in foster care by 50 percent by 2012. And, this year, under the lead of Family Support Services, 99.9 percent of children in care were seen every 30 days by their caseworker. (The average caseload went from 35 children per caseworker to 18).

The primary goal of foster care is to reunify families, which is part of family-centered practice and the preservation program (page 8). While a child is residing in a foster home, a variety of services are provided to parents and the child(ren)—with the objective of resolving the problems that led to placement.

While in care, FSS strives to provide normalcy in the lives children in foster care. At any one time, there are more than 200 licensed foster and group homes and over 1,500 kids in need of a place to sleep, counseling, medical care, love, support and normalcy. Foster parents, while willing to provide temporary housing for the youth, are not always able to provide the extras.

From holiday parties to back-to-school backpack events, family fun days, fishing trips and advocacy at the State Capitol, FSS provides community events for foster families and youth, who can partake in all the activities at no cost to the families.

There are approximately 1,650 children living in out-of-home care due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment in Duval and Nassau counties. Of these children, more than 144 are currently waiting to be adopted by a loving family.

Every year, there are hundreds of adoption stories that fill our hearts knowing that children and families have found each other.

Such is the story of the Morgan family—only it’s five times as happy.

Diane and Matt Morgan had been married for 13 years, before they got the call that five brothers needed a loving home.

Separated into two different foster homes, Jordan, 13, Aaron, 10, Christian, 5, and twin toddlers, Ethan and Evan, went from seeing each other once a month to living in the same Mandarin home. Diane, a 40-something former Toyota employee, opened the freezers and pantry to show Jordan he wouldn’t have to worry. His new parents could take care of them all.

The Morgans and their four youngest met Florida’s Chief Child Advocate Jim Kallinger to help promote a program that encourages adoptions of sibling groups, children older than 8, and ones with special needs.

Before they all started believing that a family is meant to stay together forever, Aaron, a third-grader at Crown Point Elementary, said it like this: “Being together. That’s the best part. Being together.”

FSS is proud of the fact that Northeast Florida leads the state in adoptions from foster care. This success has helped Florida become a leader in the nation.
What about the children who are never adopted? Living away from their birth families in foster families, group homes and relative caregivers, these youth are among those at greatest risk. Both research and their personal stories make it clear that they face numerous barriers to a successful transition to adulthood—educational attainment, health care services, lack of stability in foster care placements and school, an inability to participate in age appropriate normal activities, unavailable housing, lack of economic stability and the lack of connections with permanent supportive adults or “family.”

To improve their opportunity for success, Family Support Services (FSS) offers Independent Living services and support to foster care youth transitioning into adulthood to help them adjust and be prepared for responsibilities and life outside of care—such as managing money, getting a job, cooking, and other vital skills that will enable them to become self-sufficient adults.

Our Passport to Independence is a new program, featuring 15 life skills including financial literacy, driver’s education, job training, cooking and more. Every youth that completes the program is eligible to participate in SPLASH (Scuba Promotes Life goals And Supports Healthy living), the SCUBA training program designed to increase trust, promote awareness and build confidence in older teens who have aged out of care.

Upon reaching their 18th birthday, these young adults are eligible to participate in the following programs:

**Road-To-Independence Scholarship**
Financial assistance provided for full-time students who attend an accredited high school or college.

**Educational Training**
Vouchers for financial assistance for books, school supplies and tutoring are provided for qualifying students.

We are proud of the 254 independent living youths who have earned their GED, high school diplomas or college degrees this year, including Joya Thompson, who graduated magna cum laude with an Associate of Arts degree from Everest University.

**Transitional Support**
Short-term help for critical life needs such as housing, employment, education, mental health counseling, disability services and more.

**Aftercare Support**
Additional financial funds available for various services critical to living independently, including mentoring and tutoring, mental health/substance abuse counseling, life skills classes, parenting classes, job skills, housing and temporary financial assistance.

**Subsidized Independent Living**
For youth who demonstrate a high level of personal responsibility and proficiency in life skills, this special program places them in an independent living arrangement, providing financial assistance and other subsidies.

(Left) After being taught the basics in a classroom setting as well as the pool at the University of North Florida Aquatics Center, six independent living youth took their first open water dive at the John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo, FL in April.
THANKS!

Your donations are always welcome.

If you would like to support our community's children and families in need, please visit [fssjax.org/donate](http://fssjax.org/donate) or mail your donation to:

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