INNOVATION
THE YEAR IN REVIEW
FY 2010-2011

Stacia
Photo by Heather Stine

Savannah
Photo by Rick Testasecca
In this 2010-2011 Report to the Community, Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. (FSS) is proud to highlight some of its innovative programs that proved successful and created positive results. Providing community-based care in Duval and Nassau counties, FSS serves children and families in four core areas:

- FAMILY PRESERVATION
- FOSTER CARE
- ADOPTION
- INDEPENDENT LIVING

The mission of Family Support Services of North Florida 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.

Find out more about how FSS serves children and families. Go online to fssjax.org.
Dear Supporters, Families, Partners and Community Members:

As President of the Board of Directors of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. (FSS), I invite you to share in our organization’s 2010-2011 successes. FSS is an innovative and purpose-driven organization, assisting children and families to live better lives.

Our commitment to this mission, and to enhancing the community values, drives our staff to lay the groundwork for the next phase of community-based care. It is gratifying to me, and to our entire Board, that we have found success in our efforts, which have reduced trauma and accelerated permanency for children at risk.

Our governance practices will continue to seek diversity of input from government, faith-based, educational and peer organizations. The Board is grateful for our strong partnerships with the Florida Department of Children and Families, and with Dependency Judge David Gooding, who support our values every day.

In 2011-2012 we will have an orderly transition in our leadership team. I am pleased to report to you that our staff has never been stronger as the Board has enhanced its role with a balance of oversight and the right level of control.

As President, I am very proud to share this report with you. Thank you for your interest, commitment and support of the most vulnerable population in our community.

George Armstrong
President, FSS Board of Directors

2,309 families were served by our STEPS program in FY 2010-2011.
Since the implementation of Foster Care Redesign four years ago, Family Support Services (FSS), in partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), has taken unprecedented steps in developing unique, innovative strategies to support the primary redesign goal of safely reducing the number of children in foster care.

Utilizing an approach known as family-centered practice, FSS provides services to children and families in crisis based on the overall needs of the entire family. By focusing on a family’s strengths, and engaging the family in assessments, plans and coordination of services, the results are stabilized and strengthened family units, providing improved outcomes for the children.

Although FSS continually introduces new programs, many of the core services provided by FSS to families in crisis are now firmly established and show tremendous results in several key categories.

**Centered on the Health of Families**

Located in communities with a statistically high demand for services and assistance, Schell-Sweet Community Resource Center and Cassat House provide families with a team approach to services, including parenting, health and employment preparedness programs, and educational enrichment such as GED-prep and GED classes. Families are also referred to community resources. The neighborhood centers provide an on-site ACCESS worker to allow families to obtain direct support from the State of Florida, including Medicaid, food assistance and emergency cash assistance.

STEPS and FAST are successful, innovative programs that strengthen families in order to prevent child neglect and abuse. Families impacted by unemployment, substance abuse, divorce, domestic violence and other pressures can receive services and support through Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (STEPS). The program provides direct in-home services, including training in parenting skills, behavioral management and money management, and links families with much-needed resources.

For families deemed at a higher risk, with an increased likelihood for children to enter foster care, the Family Assessment Support Team (FAST) acts quickly to conduct a family team meeting and develop a case plan. Intense in-home intervention and services are provided. While stabilizing the family, children remain in the home with a high level of contact and monitoring.

**Why It's Innovative:** FSS is bringing critical services to at-risk families— with an emphasis on services in high-risk communities—to keep children safely within their families, preventing the need for them to enter into foster care. This produces a better outcome for the children.

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**Quotes**

“Cassat House helped us with rent, utilities, bus passes, food, diapers and household items. For the first time, we learned how to manage money. I had several interviews through WorkSource and I am now employed. The family team conference helped us talk through things and keeps me with a positive attitude.”

— A. Herndon

FSS Client

713 children were diverted from out-of-home care placement through the work of our prevention staff.
Creating Better Fathers

According to the National Fatherhood Institute, children whose fathers are incarcerated will suffer socially, economically and emotionally, and will likely carry the trauma and stress for their entire childhood and beyond.

Inside Out Dads™ is a fatherhood development program developed by that institute to prepare incarcerated fathers for re-entering society with the skills to communicate and interact with their children and the knowledge to be better fathers.

FSS brought the evidence-based initiative to the Baker County Work Camp to help keep incarcerated fathers involved in their children’s lives and increase the likelihood that their children will not end up in foster care. The program also helps motivate inmates to stay out of prison by strengthening family ties.

Initially targeting 30 incarcerated fathers, the curriculum focuses on parenting and communication skills, reinforcing the responsibilities and importance of being a father, and engaging or re-engaging the men with their families and children. Building on the success of the pilot program, the 2011 goal is to reach 120 Duval County inmates. FSS will track outcomes after the inmates are released to measure their attitudes and behaviors with their children and their children’s mothers.

Why It’s Innovative: This new initiative seeks to positively change outcomes for children affected by their fathers’ incarceration thereby giving the children a better chance of staying out of the child welfare system.

Transitional Trauma Therapists

Research shows that the most traumatic event in a child’s life is being removed from home and parents, despite the reported abuse or neglect.

Striving to reduce that trauma and its negative affects on children entering foster care, FSS formed the Transitional Trauma Therapist program in partnership with DCF and the Mental Health Resource Center. The program introduces a specially trained therapist into the child removal process. The therapist’s sole focus is the well-being of the child.

A team of trauma specialists is available 24/7 to ensure a transitional trauma therapist is present to focus on the child’s needs, when a child is removed from the home. The immediacy of the therapy helps to reduce trauma and avoid its long-term negative affects on the child.

Why It’s Innovative: Initial results indicate more than 70 percent of the children served show decreased behaviors of emotional distress. More than 75 percent increased their ability to function in their home, school and community.

The Power of Partnerships

The success of foster care redesign and its ongoing strategies lies in the strength of the partnership between FSS and DCF. At its core is a comprehensive understanding of research findings which clearly indicate that children who are safely maintained in their own homes have a better life outcome than those who are removed.

Casey Family Programs joined the foster care redesign partnership and has helped to develop strategies, facilitate trainings and provide approaches for change. Their support also includes process evaluations to document findings of what is working well in child welfare.

FSS maintains an extensive network of partners throughout the community. The success of neighborhood centers is a direct result of strong partnerships. From coordinating foster parents for sibling groups through Neighbor to Family, to establishing women’s support groups by Gateway Community Services, the partners create a web of support to help families or foster children achieve success. Critical to these achievements are core community partners contracted by FSS to provide case management services.

Why It’s Innovative: Under the leadership of FSS and DCF, more than 50 agencies unite to create an integrated support system for the children and families served by FSS.

A Safety Net for Children

One may assume that the more difficult the family crisis, the higher the probability that the child will be placed in foster care. Not so, according to the early assessment teams of social service professionals and child protection investigators collaborating together to form an Integrated Practice Team (IPT).

IPT is a safety net of sorts because the team develops a comprehensive family services plan that is tailored to target the specific needs of each family in crisis. The team focuses on identifying the needs, resources and child safety plans for the family, with emphasis on creating a safe home environment so the children can safely remain at home. In some cases, IPT evaluates a family’s situation after a child is placed in foster care in order to provide direction and recommend services with the goal of reunification.

Providing targeted services and goals that parents need is essential to guiding families to a successful outcome.

Why It’s Innovative: Removing children from parents is the exception, not the rule, occurring one out of every 15 cases.*
When children must be removed from their home for safety reasons, and relatives are not able to care for them, they are placed with a foster family or in a group home for a planned, temporary period of time.

Foster parents have the challenging task of providing an atmosphere that helps a child heal and prepare to return home, if possible, or go to an adoptive home. Foster parents are a vital resource for these children as they navigate between a painful past and an uncertain future.

The primary goal of foster care is to safely reunify families. While a child is residing in a foster home, a variety of services are provided to parents and the child—with the objective of resolving the problems that led to placement.

FSS strives to provide normalcy in the lives of children in foster care by providing specialized programs and services. At any one time, more than 375 licensed foster and group homes are available for Duval and Nassau county foster kids in need of a place to live while receiving counseling, medical care, love and support.

FSS maintained an average caseload of families per case manager.

In FY 2010-2011, in Duval and Nassau counties, more than 1,600 children lived in out-of-home care due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. While most were safely reunified with their families, 145 are still waiting to be adopted.

Every year, hundreds of joyful adoption stories are shared at FSS as children and families find each other, and foster children become members of forever families. FSS continues to be a statewide leader in adoptions from foster care. This success has helped Florida become a leader in the nation.

"Being together. That’s the best part. Being together."
Jacksonville’s Children is an award-winning weekly news segment with an important call to action mobilizing others to heal our community by building families through adoption. There’s no other cause I would rather lend my voice to than the beautiful children in foster care who long to find a forever family.

— Dawn Lopez, Anchor, Action News Jacksonville

Here’s a review of our results April 2005 to July 2011:

- 245 foster children interviewed
- 133 children adopted/matched
- 54% success rate

The Heart Gallery of North Florida proudly displays more than 25 portraits of children available for adoption, taken by some of Jacksonville’s finest professional photographers who volunteer for this special cause. Visit heartgalleryjax.org to see more photos and interviews with children hoping to find a forever family.
This report demonstrates the great work being done each day by our front line staff to help build strong families throughout Duval and Nassau counties. The services offered by our community providers allow us to successfully connect families and protect children. We look forward to another year of providing quality services to ensure safety and stability for children and families in our area.

— Chuck Young, FSS Interim CEO
As FSS continues to focus on family preservation through family-centered practice, results show that most families, when provided programs, support and assistance, will care for their children successfully. FSS stabilizes at-risk families and enables them to succeed and thrive.

When children aren’t able to safely stay in their homes, the primary goal is to reunite the children with their parents by improving the home environment. FSS works with the parents in completing parenting training and other programs designed to get the family the help it needs to stabilize and get on-track for reunification.

FSS, in partnership with DCF and Casey Family Programs, redesigned child welfare and incorporated a keen focus on prevention and family preservation. The expertise, resources and funding from Casey Family Programs led to a successful redesign initiative resulting in significant improvements in the child welfare system that continues to evolve. Such efforts also include process evaluations to document findings of what is working well in child welfare in Duval and Nassau counties.

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

Immediate help for families in crisis is provided through 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. Removing children from parents is the exception, not the rule, and happens in one out of every 15 cases.*

Family-centered practice involves respecting family members and reassuring them that we’re interested in helping them create a safe home environment rather than taking away a child. This requires the case manager to become engaged in knowing a particular child and family and suggesting individualized answers to stabilize 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, clothing for school, summer camp or eyeglasses for a child or youth.

The strategy to safely keep families together has proven successful. Changes made through foster care redesign have resulted in a 56 percent reduction in the number of children in care.

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*Florida Department of Children and Families, Focusing on Family-Centered Practice.*

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5,803 children were diverted from out-of-home care placement through the work of our prevention programs.

197 foster children found forever families through the recruitment efforts of our adoption staff.

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FSS is helping hundreds of local kids find better living situations.

253 children were reunited with their parents, and another 157 found permanent homes with other family members.

CHILDREN IN CARE
June 2010 1,695
June 2011 1,634
3.6% Decrease

CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE
June 2010 862
June 2011 923
7.08% Decrease

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE
BY AGE GROUP
0-4 710
5-11 527
12-17 397

BY RACIAL PROFILE
African American 847
Caucasian 771
Asian 4
American Indian/Hawaiian 2
Unknown 10

BY GENDER
Male 855
Female 779

ACTIVE FOSTER HOMES
IN DUVAL COUNTY 352
IN NASSAU COUNTY 25

FINANCIALS

Casework Services and Related Support $13.80 million 30.5%
Adoption Promotion & Support .43 million 0.9%
Prevention Services 5.97 million 13.2%
Staff & Parent Training .30 million 0.7%
Family Support, Preservation and Reunification 1.06 million 2.3%
Community Facilitation .18 million 0.4%
Mental Health for Child Welfare .52 million 1.1%
Other Services 2.05 million 4.5%
Subtotal $24.31 million 53.6%

ROOM AND BOARD
Adoptive Care $11.51 million 25.4%
Licensed Care – Foster Home and Shelter 5.96 million 13.2%
Independent Living 3.55 million 7.8%
Subtotal $21.02 million 46.4%

TOTAL EXPENDITURES $45,330,000

Annual Community Donations
Cash $640,700
In-Kind $713,200
$1,353,900

Taychaun
Photo by Agnes Lopez
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 or mail your donation to:

Family Support Services of North Florida
Attn: Donations
4057 Carmichael Avenue, Suite 101
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Key agency partners:

Comprised exclusively of volunteer members, the FSS Board of Directors is representative of both Duval and Nassau counties.