The first year of the FACTS Program, implemented by the Davidson County Department of Social Services, has ended. FACTS is a Work First Pilot program designed to identify and assess families at risk of imminent or future crisis. The program also identifies families in poverty and those at risk of remaining in poverty. By identifying these families, FACTS is able to connect families with resources that are available within their community. By educating families about these community resources they are able to utilize existing programs aimed at self-sufficiency in order to prevent them from becoming dependent on traditional welfare programs or falling deeper in the throes of poverty.

The Child Welfare Social Workers continue to utilize the FACTS program. The social workers have learned that a FACTS social worker can continue to work with a family after the CPS Investigation is closed. In many circumstances, a CPS Investigation will be unsubstantiated and closed. Despite the fact that an unsubstantiated investigation may result, there may be factors in the family that place a child at risk but care does not fall below state minimal standards. CPS social workers make a FACTS referral and the FACTS social worker can work with the family in a less intrusive manner. The services are voluntary and the family does not feel threatened by the presence of the social worker. In several instances the investigative CPS worker has made a FACTS referral and added that the caregiver was uncooperative and that even though they were referred for FACTS services they expected the family to turn down the offer. In most of those situations, the family has accepted services. Possibly the ordeal of the investigation made the caregiver realize the need for services.

As in the previous months, the last two months of the grant year, FACTS continued to serve a wide variety of families. Several families are two parent homes. Information about the FACTS program has spread throughout the county and families are accepting services as they have learned that this is a non-intrusive service that truly helps people become self-sufficient, identifying their strengths and building on them. As a result of the eligibility criteria of 200% of the poverty level, families are appreciative that there is finally a program for the working class family. In several situations, both parents are working but neither has a very high education level and have difficulty making a family budget. Therefore, what appeared to be problems with lack of sufficient income, were money management issues that the families were willing to explore resolving with sound household budgeting principles.

FACTS was fully staffed for six of the twelve months during the first year. Currently, FACTS is hiring for a social work case manager. This position was vacated in March. The caseload for each social worker is approximately seventy-five families. Due to the vacant position, the social workers are monitoring the families in the vacant caseload as well.
The total budget for the FACTS grant is $306,369.00. At the end of the first year grant period, the FACTS program has expended $159,688 (52%) of the budget. $40,309 (13%) was spent during the fourth quarter.

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program, contracted with Family Services of Davidson County, Inc. expended $59,191 (66%) of its budget during the first grant year, with $12,575 spent in the fourth quarter (14%). FAST currently serves twelve families at two sites. The families currently enrolled should graduate during April, 2001. In the upcoming months, FAST hopes to reach more families by gradually increasing the number of sites for the FAST program. Family Services states they have been unable to expand the program until now due to personnel and training issues. Linda Wheeler, Director, Community Services and National FAST Director with the national ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, wrote a letter to our agency, dated February 28, 2001, that the FAST programs implemented by Family Services are operating within the guidelines and parameters set forth by the National FAST Program and their organization. The slow progress made by Family Services is well within their experience and expectations for initial FAST program development.

The GET Real Program through Davidson County Employment and Training Center, was not successful in recruiting the position to expand GET Real Services to youth that have dropped out of school, ages sixteen through twenty-one and their families. They expended no funds (0%) during the fourth quarter and no funds during the first grant year. The State Division of Social Services has verbally approved for DSS to reallocate the GET Real budget of $40,118 to the case management/preventative services and outreach activities of the FACTS Program and for interpreter services. (This will also carry over for the second year of the grant.) This also means that objectives thirteen, fourteen and fifteen of the FACTS Program are obsolete as they related directly to the GET Real Program.

As outlined in objective one, FACTS hoped to receive 2400 referrals for case management and preventive assessment during the first grant year. We were unable to obtain these numbers however; the number of referrals has continued to be steady each quarter. The fourth quarter, which included only two months, had one hundred and forty referrals. Cumulatively, FACTS received 550 referrals.

The case management and preventative services of the FACTS program services are beginning to be realized by families. As the public has become educated about the FACTS Program, the number of self-referrals to the FACTS program has increased. During the first quarter, only one family referred themselves to the FACTS program. However, during the third quarter, thirteen families contacted The Department of Social Services requesting services. Even though the fourth quarter report only includes two months, nine families requested services in January and February 2001.

Objective two states that 1800 assessed families will receive case management and prevention services. During the fourth quarter, the FACTS Program accessed 116 families. During the grant year, FACTS assessed 517 families.

DSS declined to serve 191 families. Despite the appearance of the high number of families FACTS declined to serve, it should be noted that the largest obstacle was getting a family to contact the social worker when memos or phone messages were left at the residence. Of importance is the number of families where face-to-face contact was made. Only ninety families (17%) stated that FACTS services were not needed. Clearly, face-to-face contact either in the office or out in the field increased the likelihood that the head of the household was willing to accept services from the FACTS Program.

Objective three states that 90% of the principal wage earners in each of the families served are unemployed no more than three months through February 28, 2001. For fourth quarter reporting and based on the two-hundred thirty six (236) families served through February 28, 2001, only sixteen (7%) were verified to be unemployed three or more months. This calculation started with the date the family accepted services. Some families may or may not have been employed but there was not sufficient data to measure three months of employment as outlined in the program objective. Including heads of
households who receive disability payments rather than wages, 54% of the one hundred fifty-five self-reporting/known working families were self-sufficient/unemployed less than three months. Thirty-nine percent of the families were non-responsive or employment information was unverifiable. In summation, 54% of the principal wage earners in each of the families served were unemployed no more than three months through February 28, 2001. This number is somewhat less than the 90% goal for our third objective. While it would appear that a large number of the families served are unemployed or that the data has not changed, the numbers are somewhat misleading. When monthly contacts are made to each family that accepted services, a family may go three or four months without contacting their social worker. The social worker documents the family as non-responsive. The next month the family is at home during the social worker visit and states that he is employed. Although the family is employed, on the quarterly report, there is not three months of data for recording purposes.

Objective four states that 90% of the families served will remain intact through February 28, 2001. One hundred percent of families served by FACTS have remained intact. Objective five states that eighty percent of families served will remain free from a new Child Protective Services investigation through February 28, 2001. During the fourth quarter, DSS received new CPS reports on twelve families being served by FACTS. Collectively, 85% of families served by FACTS remained free from a new CPS investigation during the grant year.

Objective six states that 95% of families served will not need to apply for emergency financial assistance more than one time through February 28, 2001. Regardless of economic status, crisis situations arise. That situation may be an eviction notice, cutoff notice for utilities, or a broken down vehicle. Eleven families receiving FACTS services applied for emergency assistance with The Department of Social Service’s emergency assistance program during the fourth quarter. According to FACTS data, 96% of participating families did not apply for emergency financial programs more than one time. In some situations, this is the first referral by the FACTS social worker to aid the family in the direction of self-sufficiency.

Objective seven states that 95% of the families who participate in parenting classes will demonstrate improved parenting skills. According to family case plans, several referrals were made to free parenting classes at the local community college. According to follow up contacts with family, none of the referred families attended these classes. Obstacles as reported by families were childcare (though free to attendees), transportation, and time.

Objectives eight states that 100% of children in families served by FACTS will be immunized and have an annual health check by February 28, 2001. Follow up with families that accepted services indicates that all children are current on immunizations! Based on information during the initial assessment only one family had a child that was not properly immunized at the time the family accepted FACTS services. The goal of immunization was identified and placed on the case plan. The family followed the case plan and got the child immunized.

FACTS assesses families from a strengths perspective through the use of the FACTS assessment worksheet and case plans. By following the case plan developed between the social worker and the family, the whole household benefits when a goal that is actually identified by the caretaker is achieved. The following are samples of how families have utilized the FACTS Program as a step toward self-sufficiency.

Case #1:
Casey was just beginning a new job and having difficulty with her teenage son. Complicating this situation was the fact that she was in a domestic violence relationship. Casey is a live in assistant to an elderly couple. She has left the relationship and secured a stable residence for herself and her son. The South Davidson Family Resource Center helped Casey get household furnishings. She has arranged for her son to stay with a male friend’s family on the nights that she is at work. This has provided her son with a positive male influence.
Case #2:

Maria’s family is a Hispanic family that had five people in the home. The father was the breadwinner while the mother stayed at home and cared for three children. In ideal circumstances they family was able to meet all bills. However, the father received a DWI and was fined over seven hundred dollars. This created a financial crisis. The FACTS worker referred them to services to pay for the rent. The youngest child was behind on immunizations and transportation was an issue due to father working twelve hour shifts and the family only having one vehicle. Community agencies helped the family with all bills and the social worker provided transportation and translation services for the child to get immunized.

Case #3:

Nikki was referred to the FACTS program at the age of eighteen. She already had a nine month old son and two unsubstantiated CPS investigations. She did not have stable housing and was living between relatives. Nikki knew that she wanted a place of her own and to obtain her GED. With assistance from the FACTS social worker, Nikki now has her own apartment and is working toward her GED at Davidson County Community College. The FACTS social worker has seen a change in Nikki’s self esteem and feels that Nikki now realizes that in order to be successful one must set goals and stay focused.

Case #4:

Mandy is a self-referral family to the FACTS Program. She heard about the program from a relative. Her concern was adequate housing for herself and three children. She was determined to find a house, not an apartment with three bedrooms. Mandy has made it through the first round of eligibility in obtaining a Habitat for Humanity home that is already built in the Thomasville area.

Case #5:

Geneva had always been able to maintain financially with public assistance. However, when she suffered a stroke and found herself out of work, she found herself in a crisis. The single mother of two daughters, she was determined to not rely on public assistance. After speaking with the FACTS social worker, Geneva did get approved for housing assistance from Thomasville Housing Authority. This allowed her to use her disability payments for other needs. A friend and her ex-husband fixed her vehicle so that she could get to her doctor’s appointments.

Family Services of Davidson County, Inc. is a partner with Davidson County Department of Social Services, in providing FACTS services to the community. Family Services administers the nationally recognized Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program. The FAST Program targets children between the ages of four (4) and middle school who are at risk of alcohol and drug abuse, violence, delinquency, and school dropout. During the fourth quarter, Family Services started two sessions of FAST located at Liberty Drive Elementary School and Fairgrove Elementary School. During this cycle, they are serving twelve families.

According to data received from Family Services FAST was successful in meeting objective number nine. The objective states that fifty percent of clients referred to FAST will successfully complete the program. According to Family Services, twenty of the thirty-one referred families (64.5%) completed the program.

Objective ten and eleven state that seventy-five percent of the clients and children will demonstrate improved functioning in the community by no new court referrals as well as the children will demonstrate improved school performance, attendance, or a decrease in unacceptable behaviors. According to FAST data, one hundred percent of families report no new court referrals. While teachers and parents report 99.5% of children showed increased school performance and a decrease in unacceptable behaviors.

Objective number twelve states that at least thirty five percent of parents graduating from the FAST program will report an increased involvement in their community as demonstrated by full-time
employment, or involvement in continuing education activities, or participation in community activities or involvement in counseling settings. According to self-reporting parents, 99.5% are either employed or involved in one of the activities defined in the objective.

The coordinator for FAST hopes to expand the FAST program to include families with middle school aged children. This age group has been identified as being susceptible to peer pressure and at risk of using drugs, delinquency, and dropout. This component was listed in the first year contract but that objective was not obtainable due to the delay in startup and training of personnel to conduct the FAST training.

A number of beneficial lessons have been learned from the day to day functioning of the FACTS program. The lofty numbers set in objective one set the tone for the failure in objective number two. There was a significant delay in the implementation of the program; nonetheless, the numbers were not realistic for a new program. Obstacles encountered on other objectives were a lack of response on behalf of the referred family. DSS declined to serve families who did not respond to two outreach efforts. Families that accepted services also had poor follow through. Based on working knowledge of the families, objective three should be attainable. However, several families failed to respond to follow up efforts therefore there is a lack of three months data to evaluate employment. Objective seven states that ninety five percent of families who participate in parenting classes will demonstrate improved parenting skills. Several referrals were made to parenting classes sponsored by Smart Start. However, no family reported having attended these classes.

Through a formal evaluation survey, FACTS was able to determine the family satisfaction with FACTS services. Sixty-eight of the one hundred and seventy three families whose cases were closed prior to February 28, 2001 were asked to complete the survey. Based on their responses, the FACTS program met their needs. One hundred percent of respondents stated that they would tell others about the FACTS program.

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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>The FACTS staff treated me and all members of my family with respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>I believe that FACTS staff treats my family and me fairly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>My social worker listened to my needs</td>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<td>The agencies the social worker told me to contact were able to help me</td>
<td>(3% of families</td>
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<td>13%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>and my family (3% of families reported they did not contact any of the</td>
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The FACTS Program in Davidson County has tremendously affected the families it has served. By creating this program, Davidson County has addressed the needs of families that “fall through the cracks”. Any agency with the goal of helping families understands the need for a program that identifies those families that are at risk but are not eligible for traditional welfare programs. Countless families are denied services based on eligibility criteria. This does not mean the family is not in a crisis situation. We must identify what brought the family to apply for services, and help identify their family’s strengths and any barriers the family has to overcoming the situation. Hopefully, the family chooses to work with the
social worker and others in the community to reduce or alleviate the factors that place the family at risk. Families that take part in creating their case plans take greater ownership in achieving their goals and enjoy much satisfaction, maybe even happiness, in the success of overcoming their obstacles. By linking the family with community resources, the family learns to reach out to the community as opposed to those same traditional welfare programs that they were denied. This builds rapport with community agencies and families. The end result can only be collaboration, pride, positive contribution and self-sufficiency.