

Focus on Families



*New programs
pages 4 & 5*



PHOTO ONE ABOVE:
Linda Fontenot, 30-year veteran
PHOTO TWO ABOVE:
Jose Sepulveda, School-based counselor, leads team building activity

- 2 president's corner
- 2 annual giving donors
- 2 magical moments
- 4 driving toward success
- 5 children in the middle
- 5 self-sufficiency
- 5 website
- 6 'una notte in italia'

Moving On

Katrina Oliver has the energy and motivation you might expect from an eager 17-year-old high school student. But Katrina is far from typical. The **Lee High School** student has overcome immense difficulties throughout her life.

Katrina's mother was first arrested and jailed on a drug-related charge when her daughter was just one month old. Over the years, while her mother was in and out of jail, Katrina lived with her aunt. They developed a close relationship. Katrina even called her "mom."

When Katrina was fifteen, the stability she built with her aunt was shaken – her aunt died of cancer. For more than a year, Katrina lived with various family members. Her mother was released from prison before her junior year of high school and Katrina soon moved in with her.

At the beginning of her junior year, Katrina began visiting with **Family Services'** on-campus counselor, **Jesse Moreno**. She and Jesse met once or twice each week, and she began to trust him. Soon, it became clear that Katrina was being physically and verbally abused at home. Jesse contacted **Child Protective Services (CPS)** to find an alternative living arrangement for Katrina. She was amazed by how quickly her situation changed once Jesse helped her gather the right resources. As CPS worked with Katrina, they asked if she wanted to consider any counseling services. She said she already had a counselor – Jesse.

Today, things are better for Katrina. Her grandmother and sister have stepped in to help. They knew that Katrina had developed important and positive relationships at Lee High School, and they wanted her to stay there. She is now living with her grandmother and Katrina's sister is moving to Houston. Katrina and Jesse continue to meet for counseling

SEE SIDEBAR, PAGE 3

Katrina Oliver and Jesse Moreno, School-based Counselor



Stable Finances

Many clients contact **Family Services** because of financial need. They come to us because they are unable to pay bills due to an unexpected expense, such as a doctor's visit or a car repair.

Our **Case Management** program connects these families with resources to pay their bills. Often, however, clients return for additional help. Their needs resurface because they are not empowered with the knowledge or the resources to permanently improve their financial situation. The newly expanded **Financial Stability** program will help more of these families reach self-sufficiency.

A 2007 report by **The Center for Public Policy Priorities** found that a family of four in Texas must earn between \$29,982 and \$45,770 to make ends meet. Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of Family Services' clients have a household income of less than \$25,000. Recognizing the difficulties presented by that income level and the need for financial education, Family Services introduced financial literacy to its *Case Management* program last year. This summer, with support from **United Way of Greater Houston**, the agency is adding in-depth financial education and financial coaching.

The expanded *Financial Stability* program includes a curriculum-based lesson and follow-up meetings with a case manager trained in financial education.

Case managers help clients develop a clear picture of their

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Annual Giving Donors

Thanks to our donors who helped raise over \$62,000 - a record for Family Services' Annual Giving Campaign.

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SEE SIDEBAR, PAGE 3

president's corner

I'm always filled with admiration for the amazing resiliency of the people we serve. I know you will feel the same respect as you read in this issue about people who are reconnecting the pieces of their lives.

Katrina, an impressive high school senior, has regained her optimism with help from our School-based counselor (see story, page 1). The most challenged hurricane survivors are now achieving success in our **Disaster Housing Assistance Program** (see story, page 5). Drawing on the wide range of Family Services' programs, these clients and others are able to overcome diverse needs with our support.

Family Services also depends on connecting the pieces to accomplish our mission. Volunteers work tirelessly on our spring luncheon and the upcoming **"Una Notte in Italia"** (A Night in Italy) "celebrity" style show to guarantee program funding. Our Board of Directors provides expertise and guidance to ensure that we help people meet their challenges. Our skilled staff (see story on right) is essential to delivering personal and effective service. As a reflection of their enthusiasm and dedication, both our Board and staff also contribute personal financial support with 100% participation in our **Annual Giving Campaign**.

Thank you to all. With our volunteers, Board, staff and many community partners, Family Services offers the encouragement, counseling and resources our clients need to improve their lives and build healthier families.

**Nyla K. Woods,
President & CEO**

Magical Moments

Each year, Family Services holds an **Employee Recognition** event to honor milestone employment anniversaries and the many accomplishments of our staff. This year's event featured a magical theme, culminating with a magic show.

Linda Fontenot, a 30-year veteran with Family Services, was spotlighted during the recognition ceremonies. For the day, she was transformed into the Fantastic Fontenot, the Great Sorceress, complete with a magic cape and hat. Seated on a golden throne, Linda was treated to a storybook rendition of her life with Family Services. With her positive attitude and winning smile, Linda has taken on a number of different roles as the agency has grown holding positions in medical records, administrative support, appointment services and facilities coordination.



Cathy Garcia-Prats, Board Chair; Linda Fontenot, Yvonne Silhan and Ana Uvalle, Honorees; Nyla Woods, President & CEO

Commenting on her time with the agency, Linda said, "The best part of working at Family Services is the joy I feel about the people I work with and the clients I have met and helped. After 30 years I have been blessed with lifetime friends."

Yvonne Silhan was also acknowledged for celebrating her 15th anniversary with Family Services. Joining the agency as a temporary employee, with her Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance and her excellent administrative skills, Yvonne quickly fulfilled a vital role in the agency's fiscal department.

Other employees who were recognized for their significant anniversaries were **Ana Uvalle**, commemorating her 10th, and **Sergio Aguirre** and **Marcos Casares**, both celebrating their 5th anniversary. All are representative of the stability of the Family Services staff. In fact, nearly half (46%) of our staff have five or more years of service and 27% have ten or more years.

Congratulations to our milestone anniversary team members and thank you to all our Family Services employees for another great year!

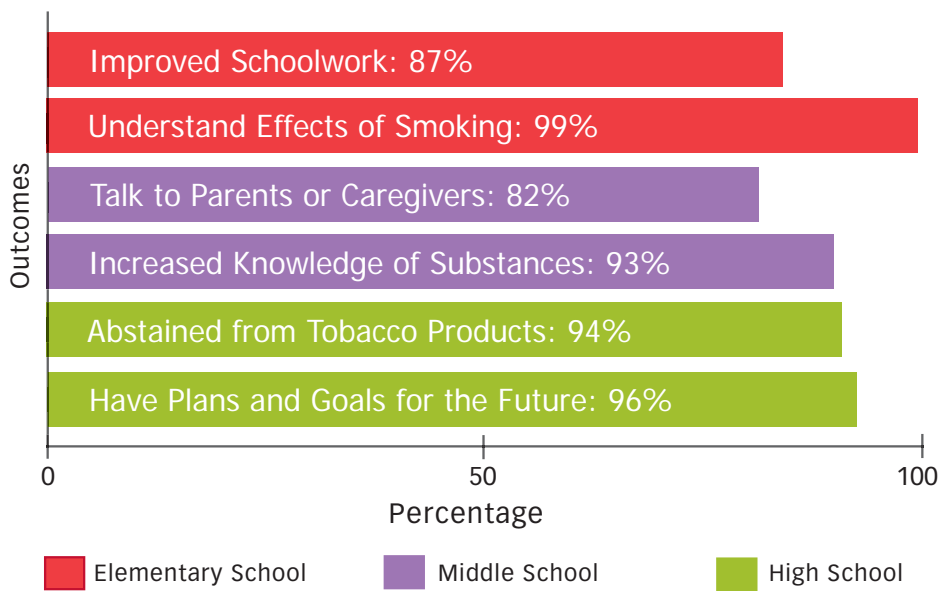
Making the Grade

Just as each **Houston, Spring Branch** and **Goose Creek Independent School District** student receives report cards on his or her academic progress, the schools and districts served by Family Services receive report cards on our progress working with Houston's children. The report cards outline the types of services provided at each school and the outcomes of those services. Below are some of Family Services' School-based program grades for the 2007-2008 school year.

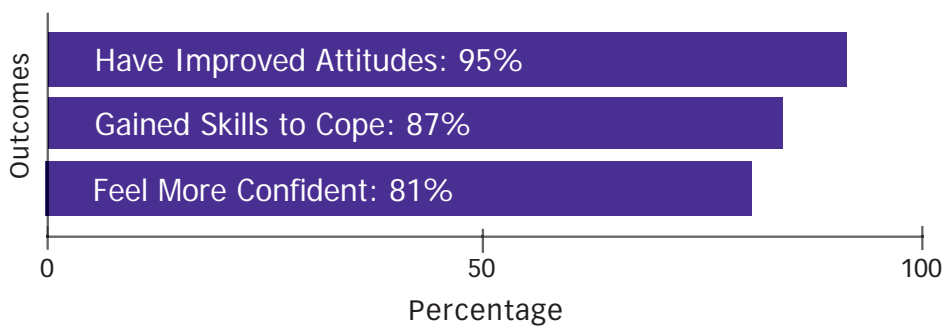
Total number of students served: 31,089
Total number of schools served: 36

- 549 substance abuse counseling sessions conducted with 199 students
- 399 substance abuse assessments and screenings conducted
- 7,840 individual and family counseling sessions conducted with 1,724 students
- 326 counseling groups serving 2,718 students
- 371 crisis interventions with 270 students

Substance Abuse Prevention and Education



Elementary, Middle and High School Counseling



Stable Finances

(CONTINUED FROM COVER)

personal financial situation, build a budget and create an action plan for increasing financial stability. Clients are also encouraged to open checking accounts.

Studies by groups such as the **New America Foundation** indicate checking accounts contribute to financial stability and savings. According to the **Houston Planning and Development Department**, more than half of the residents in low-income areas near Houston's downtown do not have bank accounts. They pay \$70 million in fees each year to non-bank check cashers and payday lenders.¹ Financial education will help clients reduce their reliance on these expensive services and make their dollars stretch further.

Clients interested in building assets and investing for the future are eligible for financial coaching. Family Services' certified financial coach will help them create plans for building wealth. The focus is on increasing savings, improving credit scores and reducing or eliminating debt. These clients are also encouraged to open bank accounts and are eligible for Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) to help them manage their assets and build savings. IDAs are proven effective at helping people afford homes, continue their education and even start their own small businesses.

Family Services is excited to be among the first in Houston to provide intensive financial education. Through *Financial Stability*, the agency continues to strengthen individuals and families.

¹ "Banking on a Stronger Houston Economy." Annise D. Parker, Houston City Controller. Houston INTOWN Magazine. July 2008.

Moving On

(CONTINUED FROM COVER)

sessions, even during summer school. "Everyone needs someone to talk to," Katrina said, "and Jesse is so great because he doesn't just listen, he understands."

Katrina is starting to look to her future after graduation from high school. "I don't dread going home anymore. I've let go of my past, and I can move on to better things," she said. She hopes to attend **St. Edward's University** in Austin and to pursue psychology so she can help others in the same way that Jesse has helped her.

Annual Giving

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

- Mark & Karen Mayfield
- Michele McClinton
- David Meetze
- Margie Mendoza
- Veronica Meza-Hernandez
- Mr. & Mrs. Arturo G. Michel
- Alice V. Molina
- Norma Mont-Garcia
- Alda Montenegro
- Yanira Montes
- Jesse E. Moreno, Jr.
- Shunney H.C. Nair
- Zebulun Nash
- Northern Trust Matching Gift Program
- Kimberly Nunez
- Mr. & Mrs. John J. Patton
- David L. Pitts
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- Rose Viviano
- Bernard Weingarten
- Sheila K. White
- Bryan & Carolyn Wimberly
- Dan & Nyla Woods
- David Wuthrich
- Carolyn Wynn

Driving toward Success

Life for low-income families has always been challenging, but today's challenges may be more complex than ever before. Despite working hard at their jobs, many families live on the edge of crisis.

At **Family Services**, we are constantly tracking client needs in order to provide better solutions. Two of the greatest needs are reliable transportation and affordable credit. Because clients live so close to the margin, even minor obstacles can become major barriers. Low-income families have no financial security, few assets or resources, and an uncertain credit history. These families need financial flexibility and job mobility to keep moving toward self-sufficiency.

In order to meet the needs of reliable transportation and affordable credit, Family Services is launching **Ways to Work**, a car loan program that provides low-interest, fixed rate loans to low-income families. *Ways to Work* is a highly successful national model: nearly 50 sites in 20 states have provided more than \$26 million to over 12,000 clients in the last decade. Repayment rates are extremely high due to the program's combination of product affordability, financial

education, case management and other social supports.

"Working poor" clients apply for an auto loan of up to \$4,000 for two years at a fixed 8% interest rate. Clients also participate in financial education to learn how to manage their financial situation, and traditional social services are available for their needs or the needs of their family. Clients stabilize employment, decrease tardiness and absenteeism at work, and eventually earn promotions or find better employment. Nationally, nearly three out of four clients report an increase in take-home pay over the course of the program, with the average increase at 41%. Two-thirds of borrowers attain a conventional financial service, pulling them out of the predatory alternative sector and into the financial mainstream. Clients improve their credit by repaying the loans, and there are a number of other financial and social benefits for clients and the communities in which they live and work.

Family Services is partnering with a number of businesses and organizations that have a stake in shaping the success of families and communities.

Funding for the program has been provided by **METRO**, **United Way of Greater Houston**, and **Ways to Work, Inc.**



Meet Our Interns

Family Services is pleased to introduce three graduate students working as clinical interns in our offices. All three come to us from the **University of Houston at Clear Lake**.

Laura Hicks, who works in our Bay Area office, will graduate next May with a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the **University of Virginia**. Laura has worked as a Youth and Family Minister for the past 12 years. She was inspired to go to graduate school for marriage and family therapy after her divorce. As a single parent, she has witnessed the devastation divorce causes in families and its negative effects on children. "As a marriage counselor, I hope to help couples before they reach this stage," Laura said. Laura appreciates the diversity of services available at Family Services, and the organization's dedication and commitment to serving families.

Brandon M. Wheeler, who works in our Central office, will also graduate next May with a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy. He obtained his Bachelor of Science in Psychology. "I feel honored to be involved with Family Services, as it is an incredibly diverse and warm organization," Brandon said, "and the growth of the clients is powered in part by the loving support that exists within this agency." Brandon hopes to help advance several aspects of Family Services, especially *Marriage Education*. He is appreciative of the encouragement he gets from his supervisors. "I would

not be able to serve my clients were it not for the support of my supervisors, fellow clinicians and support staff," Brandon said.

Celeste Budwit-Hunter, who also works in our Central office, will graduate next May with her Masters in Family Therapy. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, with a minor in Business Management from the **University of Texas**. As a returning student, Celeste has already had several varied careers, but finally feels at

home in a career centered on helping families. She was attracted to this work by its far-reaching impact.

"When an individual, couple or family goes to therapy, everyone connected to them can benefit as well," Celeste said. Some of her clinical interests include helping people through adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), grief and trauma. She has felt a great deal of support from the people she works with and has learned that a good therapist loves her clients. "I'm finding that a genuine connection is the fuel that

makes therapy work," Celeste said.

Arlene Fisher, Vice President of Clinical Services, has been training interns for nine years. She is excited about the opportunity to have these three interns on board because "University of Houston – Clear Lake Marriage and Family Therapy interns are always very knowledgeable and well-prepared. The competence, skill and enthusiasm displayed by Celeste, Laura, and Brandon have exceeded my expectations," Arlene said. Welcome to Family Services!



Clinical interns Laura Hicks, Brandon Wheeler and Celeste Budwit-Hunter