



### The Stories Behind the Headlines



The costs of most basic things are rising. Gas prices are up and rising with no end in sight. Food prices are up and are expected to rise due to higher fuel costs and weather disasters in farming regions of the country. Home heating costs will be higher this winter--record highs--due to the price of oil and regulatory decisions to allow utilities to pass on energy costs to consumers. Housing prices are dropping and home foreclosures rising. Unemployment is rising sharply. All the signals indicate a struggling economy, and a quick recovery appears unlikely.

At Durham County DSS, these headlines are not surprising. The families we serve have been feeling the impact of cost increases and stagnant or reducing family income for some time. The families we serve are those who are hit first and suffer the longest when the economy takes a downturn.

This is our second report to the community on our work to improve results for families. In this installment, we focus on some of the key programs targeted towards economic needs: Adult and Crisis Services; Food and Nutrition Services (formerly called "Food Stamps"), and Child Support Enforcement. In addition we highlight some of our important work with children and youth (foster care and adoptions) performed by our Child Placement and Supportive Services section.

Hopefully, as we share some of the data we are

tracking you will see the stories behind the headlines. The facts tell the story-increasing requests for help with paying rent, utilities, food, and other basic necessities. The facts point to the need for both parents to provide financial support for their children. The facts reflect the importance of keeping kids in a safe and stable environment, where they feel secure in their neighborhoods.

These are tough economic times for many in Durham and so our agency is privileged and grateful to be a place where "neighbors help neighbors." We see the impact everyday.

Thank you for your interest and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

**Sammy R. Haithcock**  
Director

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### Meeting the Needs

As food prices rise, Food and Nutrition Services (food stamps) benefit amounts do not increase. As gas and utility prices rise, the amount of emergency aid our agency provides an individual family does not rise with the costs.

Decisions about eligibility criteria and benefit levels for most of the programs administered by the Department are set at the

federal level by the US Congress.

It is rare for eligibility criteria to expand to make programs available to more people. Minimum benefit levels for Food Stamps remain at \$10 per month. Minimum emergency assistance payments remain the same.

It is more likely for new funding to be allocated as more people slip under the income and asset levels making

them eligible for help.

Bridging the gap between the needs and available services when the economy hits a downward cycle is a big challenge in any community.

We invite your ideas and help to help us fill this hardship gap.

#### Board of Social Services

- Gladys Dunston, Vice-Chair
- Newman Aguiar
- Gloria Green
- Stan Holt
- Commissioner Michael D. Page

#### Director:

Sammy R. Haithcock  
560-8038



## DSS Customers are Healthy

### Food and Nutrition Services (Food Stamps)

Eligible households are provided a monthly allotment of funds via an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to purchase food. Benefits are electronically transferred to the EBT card monthly for use in grocery stores.

All households must meet an income test to receive benefits. Income limits vary by household size (number of people living in the home).

In May 2008 there were 23,545 recipients of Food and Nutrition Services in Durham.

The County Health Department partners with us to share information with FNS clients about purchasing and preparing nutritious foods.

The most important indicators of success in our Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Program (food stamps) are the number of participants in the program and the participation rate.

This data comes from the NC Division of Social Services Food Stamps Information System. The participation rate tells us the percentage of those in our community who are "potentially eligible" who actually receive assistance.

The data indicate that the number of people we are serving has been rising from 19,651 in June 2004, to 23,545 people in May 2008.

The economic downturn is forcing more people to rely on the program to put food on their tables.

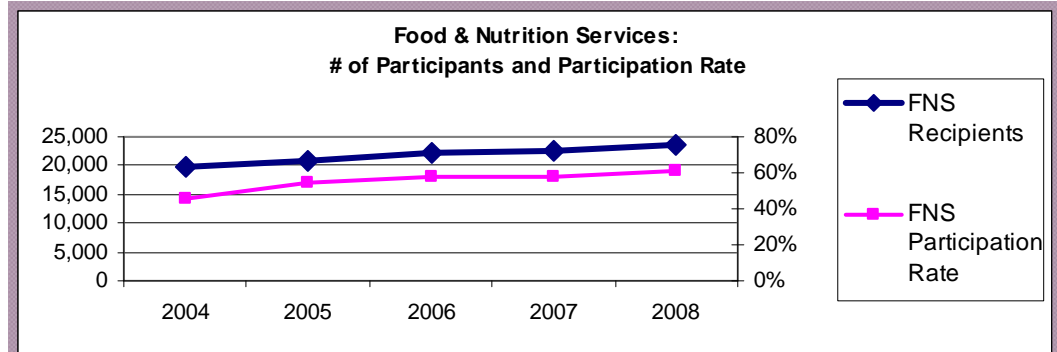
The good news is that the participation rate is increasing as well—at 60.76% in May. FNS staff work closely with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC and other food pantries. Staff participate in community fairs to encourage families to apply for assistance.

In addition, the federal Department of Agriculture has been running an aggressive advertising campaign to encourage families to apply for Food

Stamps. Their slogan is "With Food Stamps I can feed my family right when money is tight."

Hunger and lack of access to good nutrition are real. If someone you know is struggling to put food on the table, encourage them to apply for Food Stamps.

Donate to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC and other local food pantries. Participation in any local food drive is always welcome. During the school year, you can help families enroll in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.



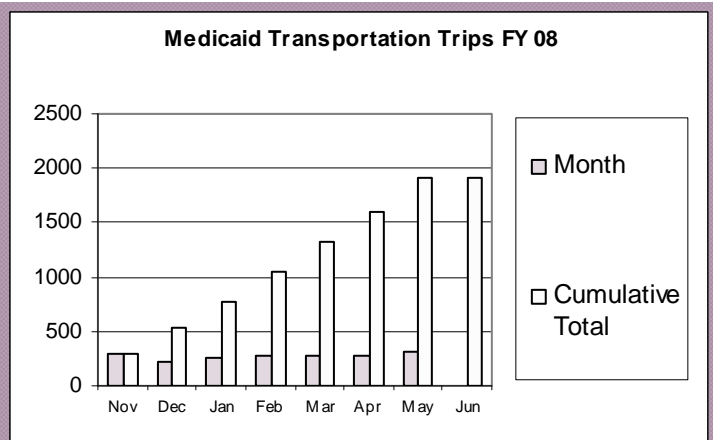
The number of trips to medical appointments provided by our Medicaid Transportation program is another indicator of customers' health. This data comes from our Community Assistance Data Base. Medicaid Transportation is integral part of access to health care for our customers. Medicaid recipients often have difficulty getting to and from medical appointments. Through this program, we can provide bus tickets, reimbursement for friends or relatives who provide transportation or a free ride through one of our contract

providers such as American Red Cross or ACCESS.

The data indicates that we provide 250-300 medical transportation trips monthly.

The Durham County Board of Commissioners has increased its support for Medicaid Transportation in FY2009 by \$21,500, which will enable us to provide services to more eligible customers.

If you are aware of an elderly or disabled adult who needs help getting to their medical appointments, have them contact us.



## DSS Customers are Self-Sufficient

Two programs highlighted this month focus on helping customers become self-sufficient: Child Support and Crisis Services.

In Child Support, the amount of child support collected, and collection rate are indicators. In addition the

number of families requesting crisis services to prevent homelessness is another indicator.

Our child support collections have risen steadily for the past few years. For the first time in years, our collection rate in Durham has

exceeded the statewide collection rate.

North Carolina's Child Support system has had a "Journey to Excellence" campaign. Aggressive goals and monitoring have motivated staff to improve results.



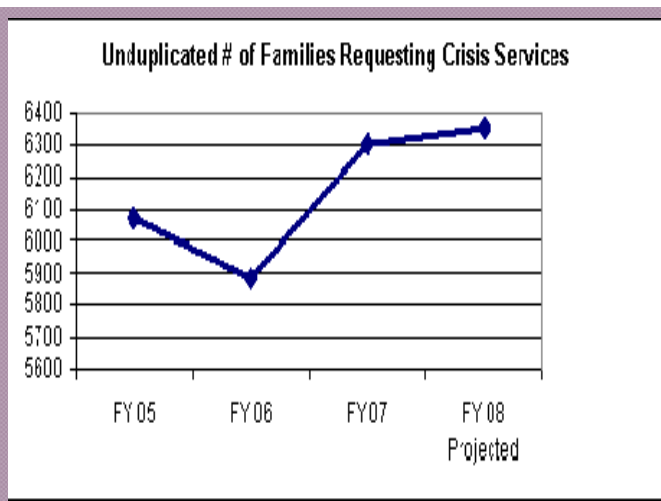
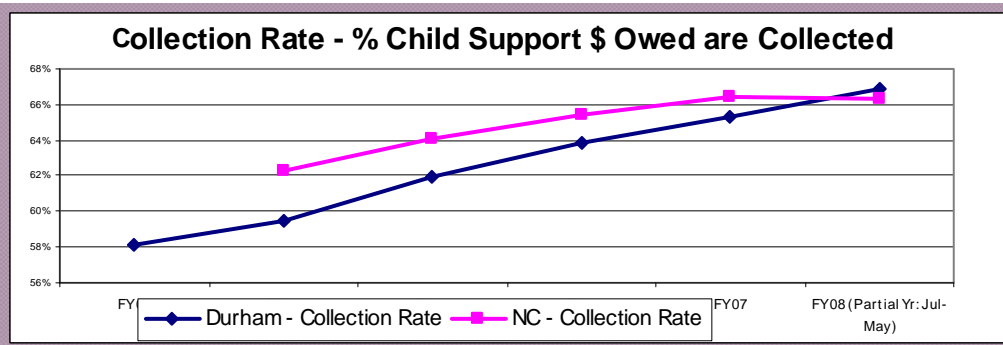
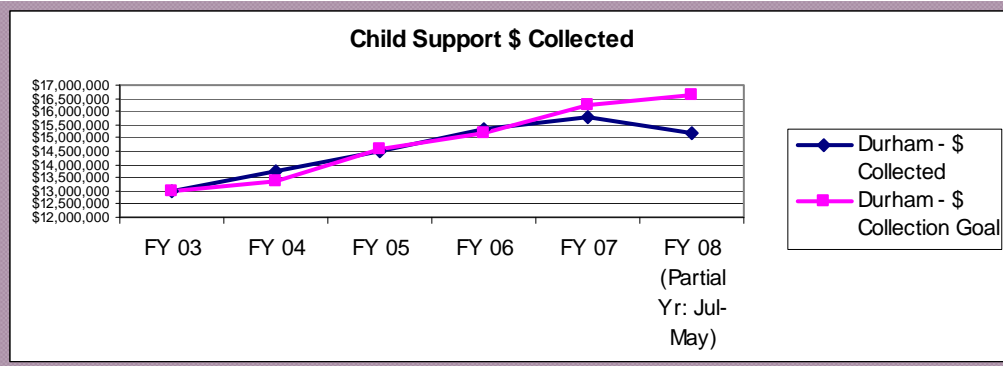
### Child Support Enforcement

Staff promote parental responsibility to provide for the financial and emotional support for children.

- Locates absent parents
- Establishes paternity
- Establishes support obligations
- Arranges collection and distribution of support
- Enforces support obligations

Literacy classes once a month for chronic users of emergency assistance beginning in August. The training focuses on basic financial management. Those clients will be required to attend training before they can receive assistance again.

You can help by making a donation to the Emergency Energy Fund through Duke Power to help families to pay their utility bills. You can add an amount to your own Duke Power bill or make checks payable to Durham County DSS, PO Box 810, Durham, NC 27702-0810. Write "EEF" in the memo line.



Providing assistance with rent and utilities helps families to maintain stability and provides a foundation for work and self-sufficiency. The agency has seen a significant jump in the number of families requesting crisis assistance to meet these needs (see chart at left).

This increase is directly attributable to the economic downturn with a rise in gas and food prices making it difficult to make ends meet.

DSS crisis services staff and partners at The Salvation Army will provide Financial



### Child Placement and Supportive Services

Provides foster care and adoption services to children, their families, kinship care (relatives or family-like relationships) networks, adoptive parents and foster parents when it is necessary to separate a child from his or her caretakers when the caretaker is unwilling or unable to provide adequate protection and care. Services include:

- Foster care and permanency planning
- Adoption
- Foster Home Licensing
- Transportation
- Referral to partner agencies
- Facilitation
- LINKS (independent living) for youth in foster care
- Guardianship Assistance Program



## Children are Ready for & Succeeding in School

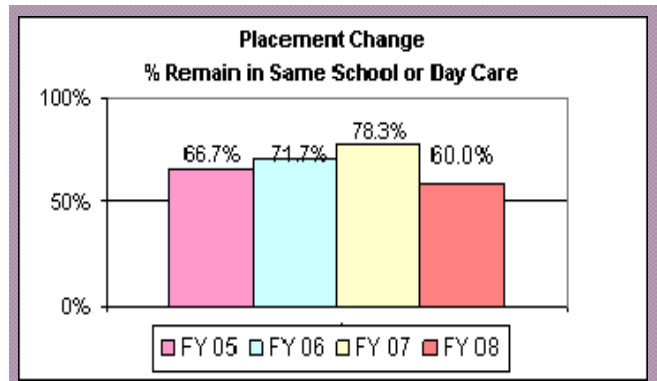
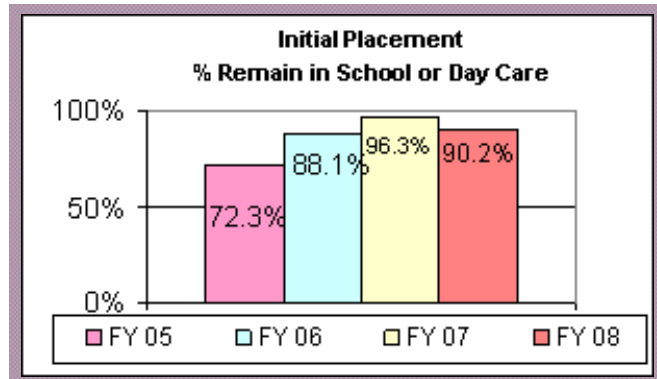
Keeping children in DSS custody in their same school or day care is an important piece of the puzzle to help foster children succeed in school. We measure this at both initial placement and when there are placement changes for a child (moving between foster homes or from kinship care to foster care, for example.)

The charts to the right indicate that we are doing much better at initial placement at keeping children in their own school or day care than when there is a placement change.

The process begins with the Team Decision Making Meeting or Child and Family Team Meeting. This is a commitment the agency takes seriously as the initial placement of a child can determine his/her experience in foster care. Keeping youth connected with their school or day care helps to minimize the trauma one experiences from being removed from family. The Social Worker and the Child Placement Coordinator and foster family partner to make this happen.

In addition our LINKS social worker works with youth ages 13-21 to provide support for school success as well as providing financial support and counseling.

There are many ways the community can support the



children in foster care to succeed in school.

The agency is always recruiting foster and adoptive parents. The box on page 6 explains the process for becoming a foster parent.

Children in foster care need the support of strong role models who can provide guidance and support as they grow. In partnership with The Volunteer Center of Durham, The Big Sibs program matches volunteers to children in our care. The

Volunteer Center also matches mentors to the girls who participate in the Adolescent Parenting Program which aims to help those teen parents finish high school. In addition, you can work with your faith community, work place or as an individual to support the Back to School Backpack program to provide school supplies for children in our custody. For more information about how to get involved, call Tasha Melvin at 688-8977 ext. 4.

The Durham County Department of Social Services Volunteer Program's **Back to School Supply Drive** needs your help to provide 400 disadvantaged children with back to school supplies. For just \$17 you can supply one child with a backpack filled with school supplies. You can send a check payable to The Volunteer Center of Durham (please specify that it is for the Back to School Supply Drive) and mail it to 324 Blackwell Street, Suite 1140, Durham, NC 27701. You can also donate through The Volunteer Center's website at [www.thevolunteercenter.org](http://www.thevolunteercenter.org)

## DSS Customers are Safe and Stable

One measure of the safety and stability of adults in our community is the average number of people receiving in-home aide services and Meals on Wheels each month along with their associated costs.

Keeping elderly and disabled adults safely in their homes is one of our primary goals. Most prefer maintaining some level of independence. Plus it is more cost effective for the taxpayers and family than institutional care. When help is needed to maintain that independence, we can provide in-home services such as in-home aides or Meals on Wheels to allow someone to stay home with support.

The number of people receiving in-home aide services has doubled since 2005. Nearly 100 more people are also receiving Meals on Wheels. Yet, both programs have waiting lists. The Meals on Wheels waiting list has 67 people on it and the In-Home Aides waiting list has 49 people waiting for services.

The County Commissioners

approved increased funding for this programs in the FY09 budget year. The additional \$110,000 in funds will allow us to take 15 people off of waiting lists for these important services.

The elderly population is growing in Durham and across the country as baby boomers age. We anticipate a steady growth in demand for these services to continue for the next 10-20 years.

Development of an adult "system of care" has begun to address this growth and to improve coordination of services. Many helping agencies, both public and private, are involved in providing vital services to this population. Coordination of services is critical. It is equally important to families that we make it easier to navigate the maze of service providers. Ask anyone who is helping an aging parent and they can tell you it is extremely difficult.

There are many ways that community members can support our elderly and disabled adults to live safely in their homes for as long as possible. If you would like to volunteer to deliver meals for

Meals on Wheels, call 667-9424.

The DSS Volunteer Program at The Volunteer Center of Durham coordinates a Friendly Visitors program to provide companionship for those living alone. Eligible clients are matched in one-to-one relationships with a dedicated adult volunteer willing to spend at least two hours per week for a minimum of one year with the client. Friendly visitors provide meaningful social relationships, provide access and awareness of local resources and assist clients with maintaining a certain level of self-sufficiency and independence. To learn more call Tasha Melvin at 688-8977 ext. 4 or go to [www.thevolunteercenter.org](http://www.thevolunteercenter.org).

If advocacy is more to your liking, you can participate in an Adult System of Care committee or in Care Review. For more information, contact Clay Holloway at 560-8614.



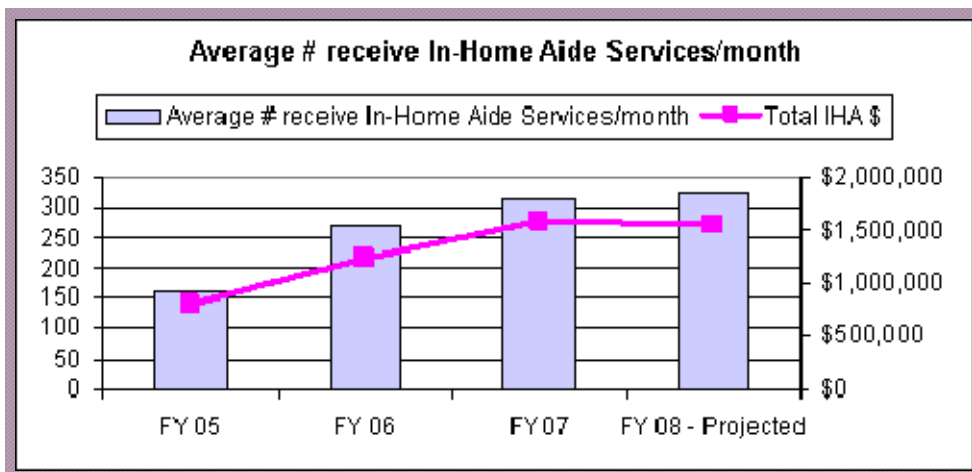
### Adult and Crisis Services

Services for elderly and disabled adults provided by DSS include:

- Adult Protective Services
- At-Risk Case Management
- Guardianship
- Representative Payee
- In-home Services
- Group Care including placement in assisted living or nursing homes, group care monitoring and case management
- Transportation for Medical appointments for Medicaid clients

Crisis Services include:

- Financial help for rent, utilities and emergency medical needs
- Burial funds
- Traveler's Aid
- DATA or TTA bus tickets for medical appointments for those ineligible for Medicaid





## DSS Customers are Safe and Stable

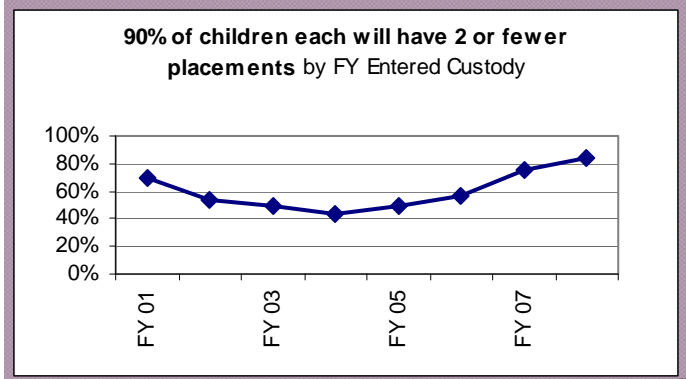
In Child Placement and Supportive Services two important performance measures of child safety and stability are the number of foster children who have two or fewer placements and the number of finalized adoptions compared to our State baseline goal .

The data reviewed is from State child welfare system.

Our goal for children entering foster care is for each child to have two or fewer placements while in our care. We have made significant progress toward this goal, but still have work to do.

While foster children across the country have historically experienced frequent moves, in Durham County foster youth do not have that experience. We have particularly utilized relative placements for children coming in to our care. Our experience has shown that children placed with their relatives experience fewer placement disruptions. Approximately 25% of children in foster care are placed with their relatives. (See our April issue for more about the Guardianship Assistance Program.)

If you become aware of a youth in foster care who is



related to you or who has a family-like connection, please contact us to discuss how you might help. If the child is in DSS custody and State requirements are met, you may become a licensed foster/adoptive parent. It is very important for children in foster care to maintain contact with members of their extended family.

Legislation is being debated in Congress to financially support kinship and guardianship care providers and former foster youth up to their 21st birthday, expanding training for the child welfare workforce, while also promoting greater health and educational stability for foster children. The *Fostering Connections to Success Act* passed the US House of Representatives in July. A companion bill in the US

Senate, *Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act of 2008* is under consideration. You can help by contacting Senators Dole and Burr to ask them to support this important effort to provide greater financial assistance to relative caregivers.

The second chart shows that Durham County DSS has surpassed the state baseline goal for the number of adoptions in the past two years. Our goal each of those years was 15 adoptions; in FY2007 we completed 27 adoptions and in FY2008 we completed 29 successful adoptions.

The primary reason why we are exceeding the State's goal is that fewer of our adoptions proceedings are delayed at the Court of Appeals level. In recent years this process had delayed adoption proceedings for as much as two years.

We currently have 45 children legally free for adoption who are not currently placed in their planned adoptive home. These children range in age from 2-17. Some have been in the foster care system for a number of years. See the red box to the left for more information about how you can become a licensed foster or adoptive parent.

### Do you have love in your heart and room in your home?

#### Become a Licensed Foster or Adoptive Parent

Our goal is to have a ratio of one licensed foster home for every two foster children. We do not need a 1:1 ratio because many children are placed with relative caregivers, in group settings or sibling groups are placed together. We need more foster families to reach that goal.

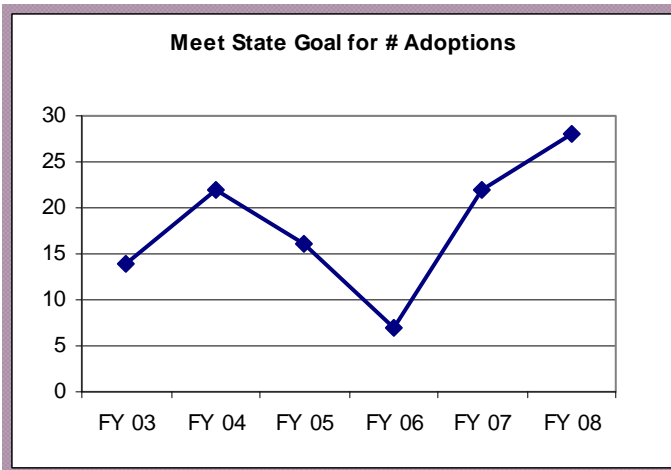
There are currently 261 children in foster care in Durham County and we have 86 licensed foster homes. We need 132 licensed homes to meet our goal.

Please consider whether your family has the love in your hearts and room in your home!

Call **560-8092** for more information and to learn about the training and licensure process.

**Free** Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) classes must be completed. The 5-week course is designed to help you learn how to handle the complex issues you may face as a foster parent. The goal is to help you and your family decide whether fostering a child is right for you and your family.

Classes are offered at night and on Saturdays to meet the needs of working families.



## DSS Customers Report Receiving Excellent Customer Service

Every customer that comes to the agency through our reception desks is given a customer service survey card. One of the indicators we review from that survey is the percentage of responses that indicate our staff treated the customer with respect and courtesy.

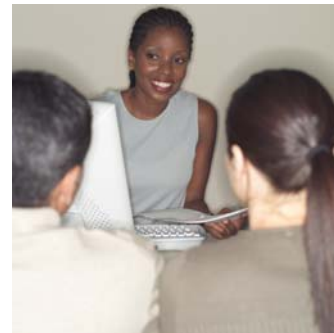
The chart below shows us those ratings in each of the

Protective Services staff.)

In most of the programs, we have received consistently high satisfaction ratings above 85% with most above a 95% satisfaction rating. However, the number of surveys completed varies widely by program and is especially difficult in Child Support Enforcement. We believe this is more

improving customer service. Finally, clear customer service expectations are included in every employee's annual work plan and performance appraisals are based on those expectations.

The agency has also worked this summer with two interns from the *DukeEngage* program to develop



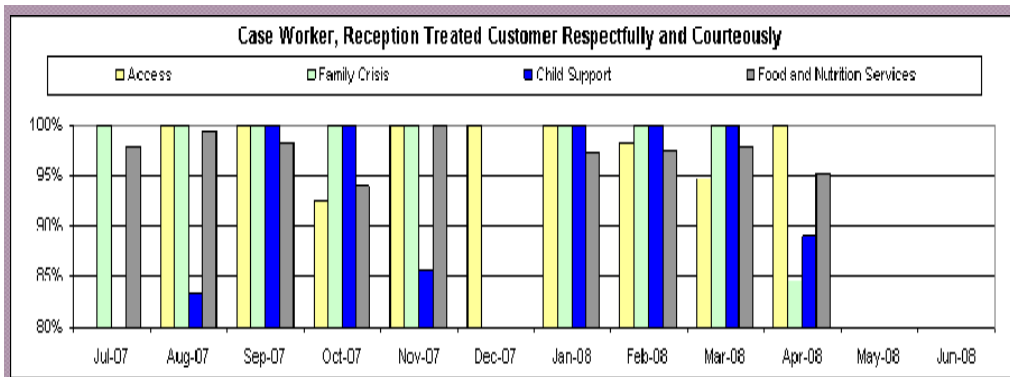
## Demand for Service is Growing

The number of people being served by the Durham County Department of Social Services is growing. While that is not an indicator of our performance in meeting goals, it is an indicator of demand and tells us about the economic stresses being faced by families.

In FY2006 there were an average of 7,078 requests for services per month. In this past fiscal year, the agency averaged 7,791 visitors per month—an increase of 713 visits per month or 34 more people per day.

Our goal is that clients wait for 20 minutes or less to see a worker after checking in at the reception desk. The chart to the left indicates that we often are challenged to hit that target, but rarely have average wait times beyond 25 minutes.

In addition to monitoring and reporting wait times by program area, we have also instituted appointments and reminder phone calls for Crisis Services, which has made it easier to manage and made time spent at the agency more predictable for clients.



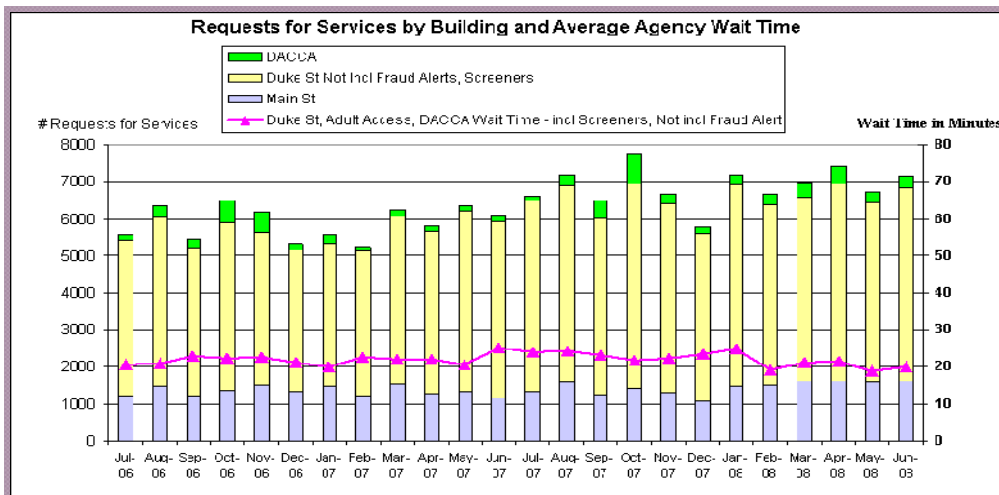
programs that we have profiled in this issue for which we have data: Child Support, Food and Nutrition Services, Adult and Crisis Services. (Child Placement and Supportive Services does not have this data because few people come to the agency requesting their services. Their services are initiated after a child abuse and neglect assessment is conducted by our Child

challenging because customers who visit the agency are often in confrontational relationships and are not seeking direct services, but rather child support orders.

The ratings on these surveys have improved steadily the past five years. Customer Service training is mandatory for all DSS Staff. In addition, an internal staff committee has focused on

recommendations for improving the quantity and quality of customer feedback that we receive. They are also recommending that we create a "Friends of DSS" organization to help us to advocate for the families that we serve.

Stay tuned for more information about how you can be involved to help us improve services to Durham's families!



## Durham County Social Services

220 E. Main St. (Child Welfare, Child Support & Adult Services)  
300 N. Duke St. (Public Assistance & Crisis Services)  
1201 S. Briggs Ave., Suite 101 (Child Care)

Phone: 919-560-8000 (English & Spanish)  
email: [dss@durhamcountync.gov](mailto:dss@durhamcountync.gov)

### *Investing in Human Capital*



**Durham**  
*Social Services*  
Neighbors Helping Neighbors  
Since 1918



### Vision

A community where families achieve well-being.

### Mission

Partnering with families and communities in achieving well-being through prosperity, permanence, safety and support.

### Upcoming DSS Events

#### August

- August 4**      **National Night Out**  
Events throughout community
- August 16**    **Back to School Backpack Distribution and Outreach Fair, Durham Farmer's Market Pavilion, 3-5 PM**

#### September

- September 25 Project Homeless Connect**  
Durham Bulls Athletic Park

## Contact Us

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### Child Protective Services:

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### Foster Care and Adoption:

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### Adult Services & Emergency Assistance:

Clay Holloway, 560-8600

### Community Initiatives:

Carol Hunt, 560-8124

### Child Support:

VACANT, 560-8980

### Durham's Alliance for Child Care Access (DACCA):

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### Food & Nutrition Services:

Pinkie Davis-Boyd, 560-8761

### Medicaid:

Cynthia Cason, 560-8740

### Work First:

John Myklebust, 560-8331

