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FAITH AND COMMUNITY TECHNICAL SUPPORT (FACTS)

A Project Funded by the
Office on Violence Against Women
United States Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization Grant Program Special Initiative:
Faith-Based and Community Organization Pilot Program
Grant Number 2006-WR-AX-K001

FAITH AND COMMUNITY TECHNICAL SUPPORT: AN INTERIM REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Faith and Community Technical Support (FACTS) project is a one-year project funded by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) through its Rural Pilot Program. FACTS is a collaboration between staff at the Office of Victim Services (OVS), Helena, Montana, and the principal project staff at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. FACTS team members have extensive experience working with rural programs and small faith-based and/or community organizations that serve victims of domestic violence and child abuse.¹

In conjunction with OVW, FACTS oversaw a national grant competition for small community and faith-based organizations from rural regions across the United States. This oversight entailed identifying potential applicants, widely disseminating the request for proposals, reviewing the proposals, and recommending programs for funding. FACTS then provided ongoing and various forms of technical assistance to the 39 funded programs (sub-awardees).

We launched FACTS at a conference in Denver, Colorado in September 2006. OVW staff and representatives from each of 39 sub-awardee sites actively participated. The FACTS team overviewed legal and administrative aspects of the project. It also informed awardees they would receive technical assistance through four regional meetings, selected on-site visits, focus groups involving program staff and clients, weekly teleconferencing, ongoing email communication and other means. Conference workshops addressed topics such as: listening to and working with battered women; domestic violence in rural settings; faith and domestic violence in rural communities; domestic violence and risk in rural communities; and, safety planning. We also presented attendees with a launch curriculum consisting of written materials addressing the aforementioned workshop topics.

The preliminary insights that follow derive from monthly progress reports from the 39 programs, on-going communications with the programs, two regional meetings involving 20 programs, and nine site visits. It is important to note that our insights draw upon detailed focus groups with clients at nine of the 39 sites (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. U.S. Map reflecting the 39 FACTS sub-awardees (in green).

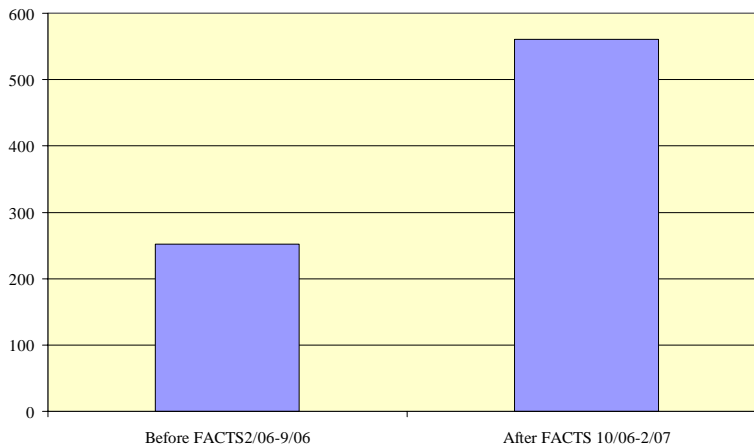


SERVICES PROVIDED

One of the most outstanding qualities of FACTS is the diversity of services offered to victims of domestic violence. Services and provisions include transitional and independent housing; assistance with down payments; job readiness and job leads/networking skills; counseling; child care; education; transportation; food and clothing; and furnishings and household goods. These services and provisions address the specific needs of rural victims. Many of these victims face geographical and social isolation; communication and transportation challenges; a delayed response time from state agencies including law enforcement, advocacy, and emergency medical services; and an often-hostile cultural climate that minimizes the impact and damage caused by domestic violence. Providing services in these regions offers women and families new opportunities to live free of violence. Our initial impressions are that FACTS funding, albeit fairly rudimentary, has made enormous in-roads into the lives of rural women.

FACTS funded programs offered their greater client base more services (see Graph 1). Before FACTS, programs offered roughly 300 services per month. After FACTS, they offered approximately 550 services per month. Simply put, programs offered a broader array of services. As a result of FACTS, program staff had more time to spend with clients. This meant more counseling, more assistance with transportation, and so on.

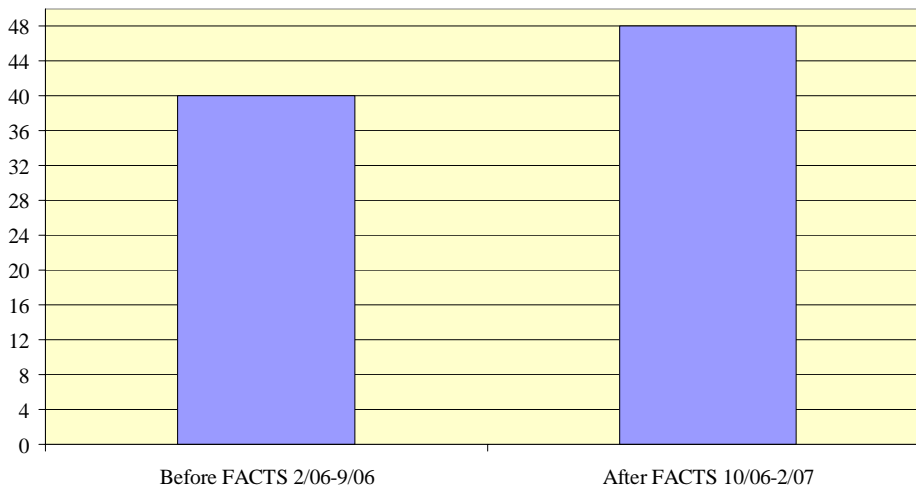
Graph 1: Average number of services offered per month by the 39 FACTS sub-awardees.



VICTIMS SERVED

The 39 sites receiving FACTS funds reported a surge in the number of clients they served (see Graph 1). Before the FACTS grant, from February to September 2006, the 39 grantees served on average 1,556 women or 40 per organization. After the FACTS grant, from October 2006 to February 2007, the 39 grantees served on average 1,903 women per month or 48 per site.

Graph 2: Average number of victims served per month by the 39 FACTS sub-awardees.



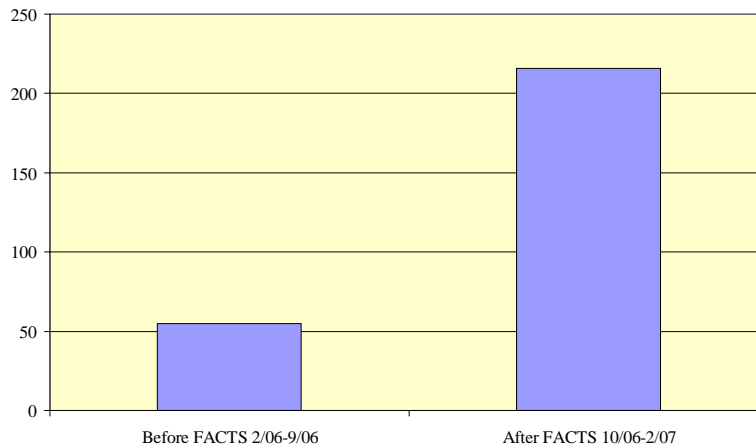
We know that if presented with viable alternatives in a humane, respectful, and non-judgmental manner, many battered women will not tolerate violence in the long term. However, it takes time and care for them to establish an independent, relatively autonomous life style. This is particularly true in rural communities where geographical isolation makes it harder to survive and tap into the various services women need to live free of violence. Our

focus group evidence indicates that more services have enabled a number of rural victims to extricate themselves and their children from violence.

AWARENESS/OUTREACH

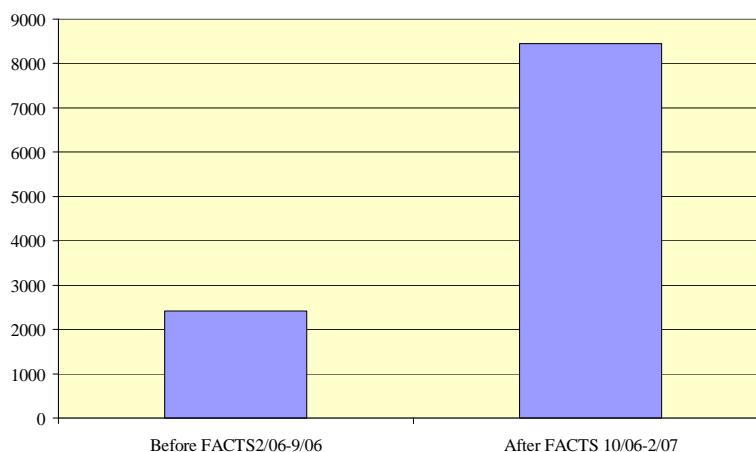
FACTS funding has contributed to a growing awareness of domestic violence in rural areas. Graph 3 shows the dramatic increase in the number of community education programs since the inception of these FACTS pilot programs.

Graph 3: Community Education Programs offered via the 39 FACTS sub-awardees.



Graph 4 attests to the increased dissemination of brochures accompanying the acquisition of FACTS funds.

Graph 4: Brochures Produced and Distributed by the 39 FACTS sub-awardees.



Our preliminary findings suggest these increases in public awareness through community education and brochure distribution perhaps encouraged more victims to call the 39 programs. Broader community awareness also likely rose with the publication of numerous media presentations associated with FACTS projects. However, increasing awareness and

surges in inquiries about programs or requests for services are difficult to trace precisely to community outreach through the sources mentioned.

Women we met in the field talked of both physical and geographical isolation. Some complained of having no friends. Public transportation is limited and it is sometimes difficult to engage in community life, especially if a batterer controls access to the family vehicle or the woman cannot drive. This isolation profoundly affects how battered women deal with their abusive situations. Fleeing a home in a remote rural location is a very different proposition than leaving an urban residence. Without a telephone or with limited cell phone reception, calling the police is often more challenging for a rural battered woman. Bearing these observations in mind, it is particularly pleasing to report that a number of programs reached women in extremely remote settings.

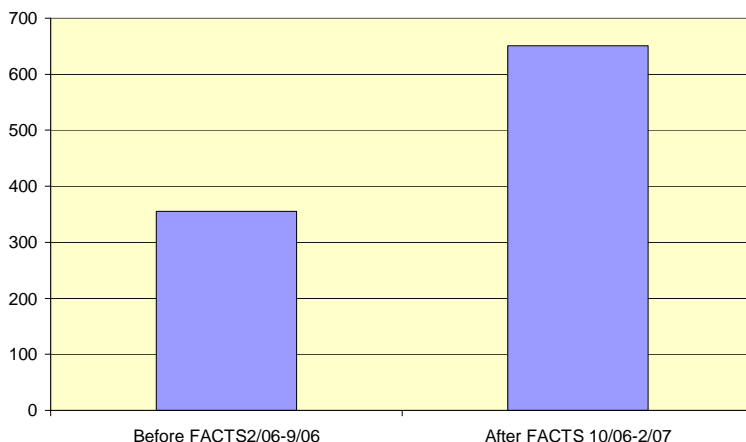
INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS

Orchestrating community-wide interventions and multi-agency responses is generally more challenging in rural communities. People must travel greater distances to meet. Rural communities are sometimes suspicious of government intervention and anything that flies in the face of self-sufficiency. It is also the case that the tentacles of government take longer to reach rural communities. For these reasons and more it is important to note the strident measures taken by FACTS sub-awardees to engage numerous community agencies in their support and prevention endeavors. Put simply, programs report engaging in multi-agency collaborations in ways that were not possible before the acquisition of FACTS funding.

VOLUNTEERS

FACTS funds generated an enormous increase in volunteer labor at the programs (see Graph 5). Much of this, although not all, reflects the ability of programs to tap into a reservoir of volunteers waiting in the wings in local faith communities. Needless to say this is a huge contribution to victims and the programs. It is not just the case that FACTS funding resulted in the hiring of staff that then recruited more volunteers. Clearly, this is a principal mechanism for generating volunteer labor. However, we also found that FACTS upgraded programs, rendering them more likely to attract volunteers and donors.

Graph 5: The Number of Volunteers at the 39 FACTS sub-awardee programs.



ROLE OF FAITH

A small body of research highlights the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of survivors of domestic violence. We know little about if or how faith, religiosity, and spirituality influence the coping, resilience, survival strategies, and long-term health and security of survivors of family violence. However, from our focus groups, regional technical assistance meetings, interviews with clients, teleconferences, and statistical data, it is clear that matters of faith loom large in the lives of victims. Many FACTS funded programs reach out to faith communities or are receptive to working with such communities.

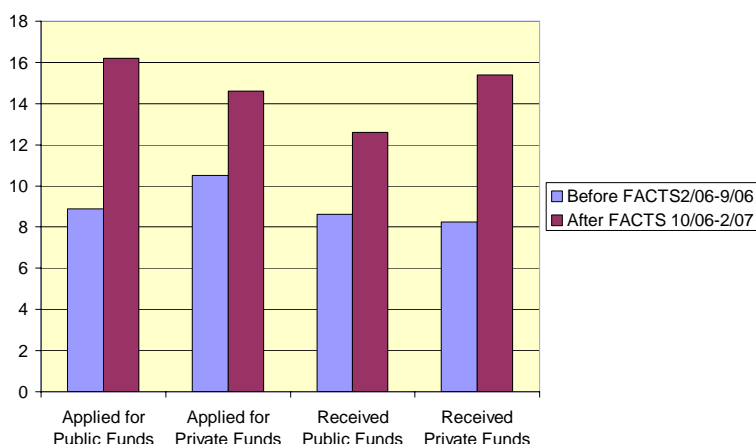
LEGAL ASSISTANCE

It is difficult for battered women in rural communities to find legal advice and affordable legal representation. As a consequence, the FACTS team provides legal assistance to the 39 programs through email communications, weekly conference calls, and other means. Programs and their clients find this particular form of technical assistance extremely useful.

CAPACITY BUILDING

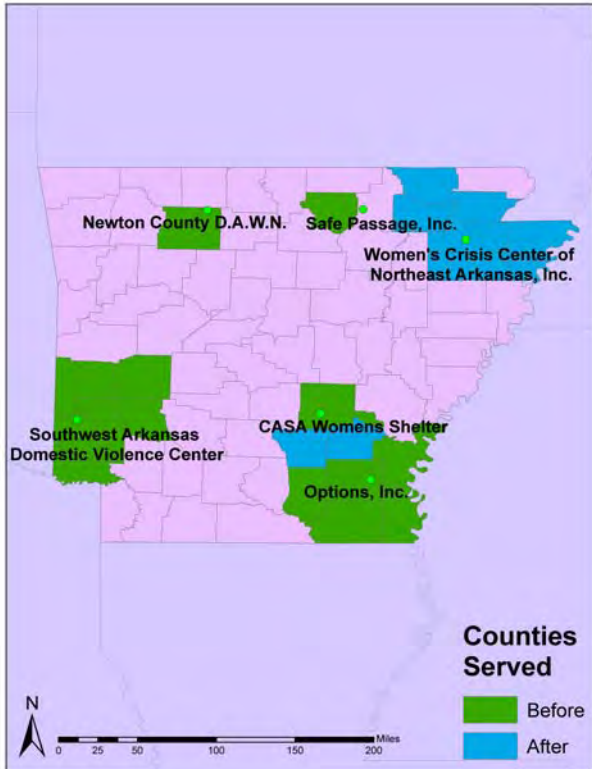
Sustainability is very difficult to measure in the short-term. Nonetheless, as shown in Graph 6, a number of FACTS sub-awardees are gaining additional support for their programs. This is a critical step in building sustainable programs. A number of programs have begun writing grants of their own to seek further funding.

Graph 6: Grant funds sought and received pre- and post-FACTS.

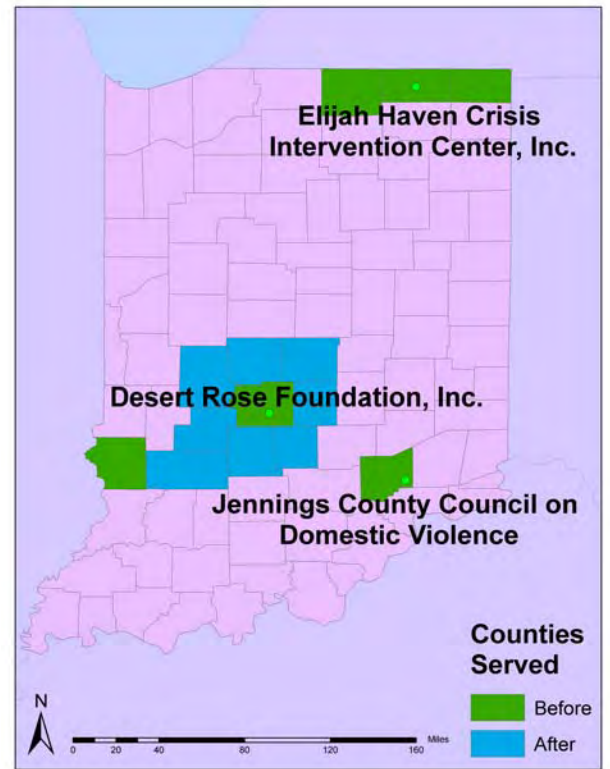


Perhaps the most encouraging of many positive developments within the first few months of the FACTS project has been the success in building initial capacity in these small faith- and community-based organizations in rural areas of the U.S. The geographic outreach in a number of these isolated communities has been substantial. As can be seen in Figure 2, we show the reach of several sub-awardees far beyond the boundaries of their local community. Many of these areas are otherwise without direct services to victims of domestic violence.

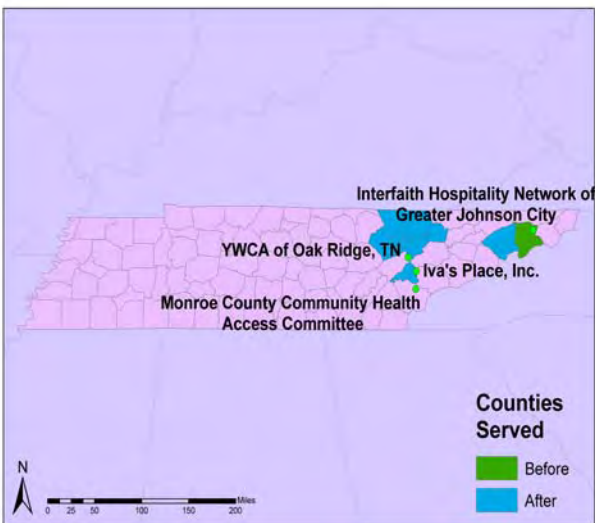
Figure 2: Geographic outreach for selected FACTS sub-awardee program sites.



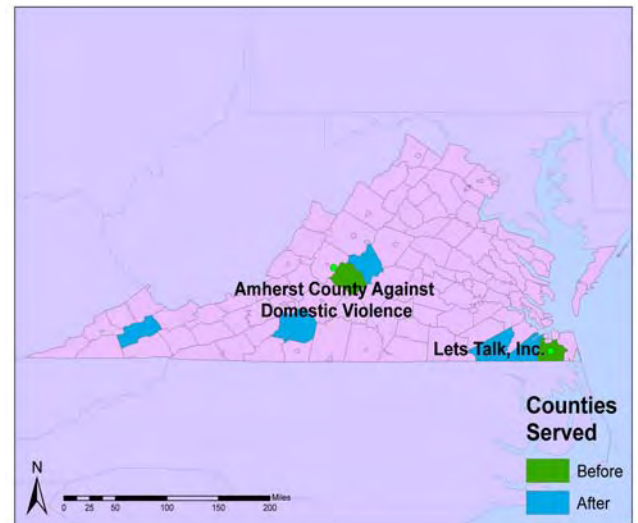
Arkansas



Indiana



Tennessee



Virginia

In spite of enormous progress in a short space of time, FACTS funded programs face challenges and difficulties. We have heard about these through our regional technical assistance meetings, site visits, conference calls, email communications and other monthly interactions. These matters speak to work that remains. For instance, we need to do more regarding turf issues between sub-awardees and existing domestic violence programs. Some Boards of Directors are inactive or disengaged. Clients presenting with first languages other than English, those suffering from mental illness, and those engaging in criminal behavior also present unique challenges. We need to do more in the arena of supervised visitation in rural communities. Much remains to be done in providing transitional housing. Finally, we need to find a way to hire and retain more qualified staff in rural communities.

In sum, FACTS is a groundbreaking rural pilot project that is only six months old. And yet, many remarkably encouraging developments have taken place in different rural areas in this short period of time. The program has allowed these small grassroots organizations to expand their staff, services, and geographic outreach to victims of domestic violence in rural and isolated communities. OVW support has allowed FACTS to assist these faith- and community-based organizations in building capacity and thus serving more people. Most of these sub-awardees have never had federal funding, and this initial investment has allowed many of them to not only build capacity and influence in these 39 different jurisdictions, but to also take intentional steps toward sustainability.