DHS Taps Experienced Executive as Behavioral Health Services Director

Little Rock, Ark. – The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) has selected Joy Figarsky, who has nearly three decades of experience working in behavioral health, to lead the state’s Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS).

Figarsky began her career in behavioral health in 1985 as a family therapist in New Jersey, working her way into administrative positions at inpatient psychiatric facilities and a multi-state health system before being named Chief Executive Officer of Ascent Children’s Services in Jonesboro in 2007. Today, that organization has over 500 employees and serves more than 800 children every day.

“Joy’s depth of knowledge about this field and her management skills made her an ideal candidate to lead this division,” said DHS Deputy Director Janie Huddleston. “She has a comprehensive understanding of the many facets of behavioral health.”

DBHS supports and funds the public behavioral health system in Arkansas, including mental health, substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery services. It also is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Arkansas State Hospital and Arkansas Health Center in Benton. Last fiscal year, about 110,000 people accessed DBHS’s services.

“Joy is keenly aware of what it takes to head an organization as critical as DBHS – dynamic leadership, an ability to motivate and work with staff, and a willingness to connect with outside stakeholders,” said DHS Director John Selig. “She has all of these traits and then some.”

Before beginning her career, Figarsky earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology and Psychology from the University of Hartford, a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work from St. Joseph’s College and a Master’s of Science Degree from Columbia University’s School of Social Work.

After working as a family therapist, Figarsky went on to serve as a senior psychiatric social worker in New Jersey and a program administrator at The Horsham Clinic in Pennsylvania, an acute psychiatric hospital. In 1994, she began managing an inpatient acute psychiatric unit at St. Luke’s Hospital in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Two years later, she accepted the first of four management positions at Horizon Health Corporation based in Texas. She left in 2007 for Ascent.

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“I look forward to working with so many dedicated professionals at the division,” Figarsky said. “I am genuinely humbled by the opportunity to serve the public in this role and to make a difference in the lives of others.”

Figarsky will assume her new role June 26.