



Media Release

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Determined White Hall woman succeeds despite visual impairment, earns achievement award

Debra Boykin of White Hall has the kind of work ethic people admire. She was a childcare worker and mentor to the children she supervised, continuing to work despite declining vision and diabetes that affected her feet and caused pain when she walked.

Boykin was with Sunshine Childcare Center for seven years. Her vision problems were corrected through surgeries. In July she changed jobs and is now employed in the housekeeping department of Hampton Inn and Suites in Pine Bluff.

"I love to work. I love to clean. I love kids," Boykin said. She's certified in child care and has won awards in both child care and housekeeping. Boykin was a housekeeping supervisor at another hotel chain before her vision became a problem.

Because of her determination to overcome adversity, serve others, and succeed at work, Boykin has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). She was chosen from the area that includes Arkansas, Chicot, Cleveland, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties.

"Ms. Boykin completed the 11th grade and has worked hard all her life," said Audrey Veasey, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, who nominated her for the award. Despite cataracts and diabetes Boykin continued to work the entire time she was on the DSB caseload.

Her employers, Sunshine Childcare Center and Hampton Inn and Suites, have been named as area Employers of the Year as outstanding business partners for their commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Boykin and the employers will be recognized at the Pine Bluff Downtown Lions Club's noon meeting on Dec. 6, at the Pine Bluff Country Club.

Boykin is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. An overall state Consumer of the Year will be named at the end of the year.

Describing her experience, Boykin said, "One day I was trying to read and my vision was blurry. It kept getting blurrier (over time). One day I was driving and all I could see was stars." She called someone for help getting home and made an appointment to see an eye doctor, who diagnosed her with bilateral cataracts and referred her to DSB.

"I was almost blind," Boykin said. She was pleased that DSB helped her pay for cataract surgery to maintain her employment. "I had surgeries on both eyes. I'm better now. I can drive again."

She gave this advice to other diabetics, "Make sure you have early checkups. Keep your eyes checked. Take better care of yourself. I try to exercise and not eat too much starch."

This is the sixth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB's programs and services, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 1-800-960-9270, 501-682-5463, or TDD 501-682-0093.