

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES
February 24, 2021
Conference Call

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held February 24, 2021 by conference call. The meeting convened at 10:35 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Chair Darrell Pickney, Randy Laverty, Suzann McCommon, and David Rosegrant.

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Stone, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Diane Keith, Mark Wargo, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Dale Woodall, Bryan Redditt, Thomas Tarpley, Shannon Roberts, Becky Burns, and Tom Hill.

OTHERS PRESENT: Rita Hoover, Jan Fortney, Rose Seawright, Paul and Deborah Rainwater, Carole Sherman, Tom and Janice Hanlon, Terry Johnson with FFCFR, Attorney General Representative Sara Farris, Kat Stromquist of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, and Tom Masseur and Chris Stewart of Disability Rights Arkansas.

Mr. Pickney called the meeting to order and recognized Terry Johnson as the new statewide President of FFCFR.

Mr. Pickney called for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 4, 2020 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Ms. McCommon made a motion that the minutes be approved. Mr. Rosegrant seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Mr. Pickney also called for a motion to approve the minutes from the December 7, 2020 called meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion that the minutes be approved. Ms. McCommon seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mr. Pickney advised the Board he'd recently spoken with Troy Clark of Stephens, Inc. regarding the Board's investment account. A five-year CD earning 2.75% scheduled to mature February 25, 2021 would then earn .6% over five years. Mr. Clark and Mr. Pickney determined the funds would be better invested in a one-year CD at this time.

The Superintendents presented reports for the human development centers and shared items of interest regarding campus activities. All noted the dedication of staff during the recent snowstorms and expressed appreciation on behalf of the staff for the Christmas gift cards.

Mr. Pickney also announced that the Board received thank you cards from the HDC Superintendents and staff expressing their appreciation for the Christmas gift cards.

Ms. Stone advised she and Mr. Pickney have been in communication regarding the promotion of Diane Keith from Interim Superintendent of Jonesboro HDC to the position permanently. Upon the recommendation of Ms. Stone and Mr. Pickney, Ms. McCommon made a motion to accept Diane Keith as Superintendent of the Jonesboro Human Development Center. Mr. Laverty seconded the

motion which passed unanimously. Ms. Stone will make the DHS Secretary's office aware of the recommendation and request internal approval.

Ms. Stone addressed questions/concerns submitted by HDC parents regarding visitation. She reached out to the Arkansas Department of Health for information regarding possible changes in off campus visitation guidelines now that vaccines have been administered. Ms. Stone was advised by AHD against intertwining vaccinations and visitation as data is not available to support that persons who have received the vaccine cannot carry the virus. As a result, clients who leave campus would be subject to the 14-day quarantine upon return. Alternative solutions, however, have been developed for increased visitation that will include weekends. On Saturday, March 13th the HDCs will host an outdoor Family Day from 1:00-5:00 with subsequent events to occur on the second Saturday of each month. A second option is to transport clients to a park, pond, or similar outdoor area and have family visit at these locations. A third option currently in the development phase is to strategically select a week designated for off campus visits. Following this week one widespread 14-day quarantine would be conducted as opposed to individual isolation. The Board was pleased with the efforts being made to address increased visitation but also expressed concern regarding the third option citing the staffing challenges it would cause for clients who did not leave campus. The Board also asked for clarification that during the outdoor visits, clients would interact with their family only. Ms. Stone advised the outdoor visits would allow families to safely distance.

Mr. Pickney requested updated information regarding current HDC visitation guidelines. Ms. Stone advised the Center for Medicaid and Medicare has federal regulations in place regarding visitation. The Arkansas Department of Health guidelines also mandate that staff be present. Currently, to accommodate as many families as possible, visitation is restricted to one hour due to the staff mandate and the room cleaning requirement between visits. DDS and the Superintendents are working to address visits on a case by case basis. In addition, Ms. Stone has worked with Representative Julie Mayberry to file HB 1061 aimed at expanding visitation at long term care facilities.

Parents Rose Seawright, Jan Fortney, and Janice Hanlon voiced concerns regarding the 14-day quarantine following off campus visits. They, along with parent Deborah Rainwater, offered suggestions which included increasing on campus visitation to more than one hour and increasing on campus activities. Another suggestion was for parents/guardians to provide a signed document confirming clients have not been in the presence of anyone other than their (vaccinated) parents during a home visit. Ms. Stone reminded parents of the Arkansas Department of Health advice to not intertwine vaccinations and visitation. Terry Johnson inquired if an end goal has been set for off campus visits for everyone whenever they choose to do so. Ms. Stone advised HB 1061 includes language that requires AHD to update visitation guidance every 60 days or sooner if federal guidance changes. Ultimately the decision to allow unlimited off campus visits would be determined by AHD and CDC.

Ms. Stone addressed concerns regarding staff coverage. The HDCs meet staff to client ratios but it sometimes requires staff to be pulled from other areas. There has been an increase in job fairs, building modifications are being considered, and employment retention incentives are being explored. AHDC and BHDC recently hired 10 new employees each while CHDC hired 20 and JHDC hired 21. SEAHDC has an architect exploring building modifications to assist with staff coverage.

The Behavior Consultation Committee reviews and evaluates restraint usage. As restrictions associated with COVID-19 caused increased behaviors, the committee was revamped in September 2020 to include outside stakeholders. It is comprised of four subcommittees; 1) Dr. Julie Howard leads the committee to develop a project plan for how data is collected, used, and reported; 2) DDS staff Shannon Roberts chairs the committee to implement best practices and communication devices for clients; 3) Dr. Carl Reddig's committee will provide recommendations to reduce the use of restraints; and 4) Tom Masseur will chair the committee to implement recommendations from Disability Rights Arkansas to DDS. Ms. Fortney asked if there are any new policies in place. Ms. Stone advised no new policies had been implemented and parents would be updated when it occurs.

Ms. Stone addressed HDC campus clinical structure. The state's position does not provide sufficient compensation for a full-time physician. Consideration is being given to hiring APRNs who are supervised by a physician. This would provide more on-site care. Mr. Pickney asked if there are plans to provide all HDCs with infirmaries similar to the one at CHDC. Ms. Stone advised the Superintendents are working with Dale Woodall and Tammy Benbrook to strategically build new campus structures as needs and budget permit. There are plans to eventually re-do the CHDC infirmary and construct infirmaries on each campus.

Ms. Hanlon requested information regarding efforts being made to encourage employee vaccinations. Ms. Stone and Ms. Roberts advised monetary incentives, educational flyers, HDC town hall meetings, influence from coworkers, and coworker testimonials are among the efforts being made. Ms. Benbrook provided the following statistics regarding employee/client vaccinations; AHDC 60%/93%, BHDC 38%/98%, CHDC 34%/81% (this number includes 40 children who are not eligible for the vaccine), JHDC 50%/99%, SEAHDC 35%/95%. Ms. Benbrook also advised employees cite fear and religious beliefs as reasons for not receiving the vaccine.


March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. DDS and the Governor's Office are unable to engage in the public activities this year, but a video commemorating the month will be released.

Mr. Laverty announced a zoom memorial is scheduled for HDC parent advocate Peggy Nabors on February 28th at 2:00. Anyone interested was advised to contact Mr. Laverty for additional information.

With no other business, Mr. Pickney called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Laverty seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

ATTEST:


Mr. Darrell Pickney, Chair, Board of DDS


Executive Secretary