

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES
November 16, 2022

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held November 16, 2022, at the Conway Human Development Center. The meeting convened at 10:33 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Suzann McCommon, Randy Laverty, Becky Mitchum, Linda Patterson and Stephanie Heidelberg via Zoom.

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Weatherton, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Ronald Baker, Mark Wargo, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Thomas Tarpley, Dale Woodall, Kathleen Hoskins, Raven Fuller, and Cathy Guffey.

OTHERS PRESENT: Jan Fortney, Deborah Rainwater, Kimberly Dodd, and Kristen Stewart of Disability Rights Arkansas via Zoom.

Ms. McCommon called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance.

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 3, 2022 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Laverty made a motion that the minutes be approved. Ms. Patterson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 12, 2022 called meeting of the DDS Board. Ms. Heidelberg made a motion that the minutes be approved. Ms. Mitchum seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

The Superintendents of the human development centers shared items of interest regarding campus activities, hiring efforts, and construction updates. Conway HDC Superintendent Sarah Murphy advised the Conway Expo Center was the site of a Special Olympics event attended by over 800 individuals. CHDC received the Special Olympics Partnership Award. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill announced Residential Services Program Administrator Tanyaka Conway was named DDS Employee of the Year during the annual AHSEA banquet. She also advised her assistant, Sheena May, who has worked at AHDC for 20 years is scheduled to retire this month. Jonesboro HDC Assistant Superintendent Ronald Baker advised there has been a focus on increasing client recreational activities and the indoor heated pool has been restored. Southeast Arkansas HDC Superintendent Mark Wargo announced the residents are starting a second book project which will bring attention to client expectations from the non-disabled community and include recipes. Booneville HDC Superintendent Jeff Gonyea highlighted upcoming holiday activities and noted the third new building is near completion.

Ms. Weatherton announced the launch of online purchasing for The Blue Umbrella. The event was well attended by local media and orders, both in state and out of state, have been steady. The Blue Umbrella Holiday Open House will be held on December 2nd in conjunction with the Division of Children and Family Services annual lighting of the Restore Hope Tree in the DHS lobby.

Act 193 by Senator Kim Hammer requires human development centers to undergo employee satisfaction surveys. Through a series of individual interviews and group sessions, the goal is to determine if the HDC structure should be changed or if different practices need to be implemented. Guidehouse, a vendor recognized nationally for doing this type of work for hospitals and other types of facilities, is responsible for gathering the data. A preliminary report is scheduled to be submitted to Legislative Council by December 1st. Following discussion regarding previous surveys conducted and how data collected resulted in steps taken to retain staff, Ms. Weatherton noted 150 direct care staff were hired since this time last year. She also noted that the upcoming budget is sufficient to support previous strategies put in place to retain HDC staff. When the National Public Health Emergency ends in April 2024 and the FMAP increase ends as a result, staff will work to develop a budget plan to maintain these retention strategies.


Effective November 15th vaccinated staff are no longer required to wear masks unless the county has a high number of COVID cases.


Conway HDC parent and advocate Jan Fortney expressed appreciation for the board, director, and staff prior to announcing that she and her husband will relinquish their officer roles with Families and Friends of Care Facility Residents (FFCFR). She noted, however, they will continue to advocate for and support the human development centers. Ms. Fortney also introduced Arkadelphia HDC parent and new FFCFR secretary Kimberly Dodd.

DDS Assistant Director Tammy Benbrook introduced her new assistant, Kathleen Hoskins.

With no further business, Ms. McCommon called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Mitchum made a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Patterson seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m.

ATTEST:


Suzann McCommon
Chair, Board of DDS


Executive Secretary