

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES**  
**August 3, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held August 3, 2023 at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway. The meeting convened at 1:05 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Suzann McCommon, Becky Mitchum, and Linda Patterson, with Stephanie Heidelberg and David Rosegrant attending via Zoom.

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Weatherton, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Diane Keith, Mark Wargo, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Thomas Tarpley, Victor Eackles, Kathleen Hoskins, Gretchen Baggett, Julie Howard, and Brannon Rushing.

OTHERS PRESENT: Martha Davis of Guidehouse, Brian Summerhill, Reagan Stanford and Amber Boyett of Disability Rights Arkansas.

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

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the May 3, 2023 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Rosegrant 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 June 6, 2023 called meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion that the minutes be approved. Ms. Heidelberg 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 shared news that CHDC staff member, James Winnen, served as a swim coach in Berlin for the Special Olympics. She also noted that over 400 registered for Beyond the Borders conference. Jonesboro HDC Superintendent Diane Keith highlighted recognition activities for nurses, teachers, and residential staff. Hearing screenings were recently conducted on campus for staff. Booneville HDC Superintendent Jeff Gonyea announced BHDC's upcoming annual golf tournament, and that construction is underway for Building 4. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill shared news of an AHDC client being invited to be a guest speaker at the Rotary Club following his victories at Sports Camp. Ms. Gambill also advised AHDC is encouraging their client employment programs and that clients earned over \$100,000 in 2022. Southeast Arkansas HDC Superintendent Mark Wargo announced the grand opening of the new dining room. The final draft of SEAHDC's second book has been approved and will be in print in October.

DDS Deputy Director Thomas Tarpley presented an overview of the current leases the Board oversees and entertained questions.

Martha Davis, Guidehouse Director of Operational Effectiveness, provided an overview of the DDS/Guidehouse project to target improvements in staff retention. The project began with a series of listening sessions comprised of staff from various positions. From those sessions design teams were

developed to focus on hiring, on-boarding, feedback/development, culture/respect/appreciation, and wellbeing. The teams continue to meet individually and successfully create optimistic plans to address these challenges.

Ms. Weatherton commented on the effectiveness of the project and noted staff numbers are at the highest they've been in eight years. She also noted, however, the RN and LPN shortage remains an issue and is due in part to salaries. Currently a facility nurse option is being explored. The Department of Transformation and Shared Services is also working on a new review tool for state positions that is specifically task driven. This will be an effective tool in recruitment and retention.

A component of the LEARNS Act required First Connections Part C to be moved from DDS to the Arkansas Department of Education. Part B was already housed under Special Education at ADE.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Farmers Market was held on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. DDS staff prepared/sold hamburgers and hot dogs and collected over \$2500 in sales to be utilized for the HDC Christmas fund. The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Food and Crafts Fair is scheduled for October 6<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Weatherton introduced DDS Asset Manager Victor Eackles.

With no further business, Ms. McCommon called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Patterson made a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Heidelberg seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:12 p.m.

ATTEST:



Suzann McCommon  
Chair, Board of DDS

  
Executive Secretary