



## *Director Melissa Weatherton's New Year Address*

### JANUARY

National Mentoring  
Month

Thyroid Awareness  
Month

National Blood Donor  
Month

1/1 New Year's Day

1/6 Epiphany

1/9 National Law En-  
forcement Appreciation  
Day

1/17 Dr. Martin Luther  
King, Jr Day

When appointed as DDS Director in 2016, I became part of a vision to better serve our clients. Never could I have imagined the accomplishments we as a division would achieve over the next seven years. Thanks to all of you for embracing change and sharing in this vision.

The programmatic changes we have made the last seven years, not only improved the quality of services our clients receive, but it has also set us up for future success. In 2023, we are likely to again embark upon a new wave of ideas and goals, but this time we have the framework. We have the team built. There are services we can improve upon (always), but we have such a stronger base than we did back in 2016. We have achieved substantial programmatic changes before and come out better on the other side.

I had the opportunity to attend an all-day leadership conference last month. While I've participated in multiple leadership trainings throughout my career at DHS, this particular session included only 7 employees and it took an intensive look at both my leadership skills (good and bad!) and the importance of leading a team through change.

During the training, we dissected a case study about a hospital ER nurse with a vision. She alone took that vision and secured private funding to transform an acute care unit into a more patient/family friendly unit that had potential to improve health outcomes. However, the new unit ultimately failed because her staff all quit. She had failed to get staff buy-in. What she was trying to accomplish was wonderful, but in the end, a plan is only as good as the team that implements it and helps it succeed. A team must be involved in every aspect of the change to implement the change. The nurse didn't adequately share the vision, nor did she get buy-in from her team. They didn't understand what she was trying to do. It was scary to them, and they left for jobs at other hospitals where the acute care unit looked familiar and had the old way of operating. Since they were not involved and didn't feel included, they didn't embrace the changes even though they were good changes.

This is an important lesson that we should all remember. As we get busier and busier in 2023, please be engaged with me and the DDS executive team. We respect each of you and value your unique opinion on the services we provide, and together we can embrace change for the betterment of our division, our programs and services, and, most importantly, our clients.

Finally, I have included the complete listing of our accomplishments from the past seven years. Please take the time to review it as it is a testament of the great work we have accomplished as a team.



## *Director Weatherton's address cont'd*

### **Efficiencies Through Non-HDC Staffing:**

DDS has increased the number Medicaid programs administrators previously owned and administered by other divisions.

- Developed and now administer Early Intervention Day Treatment program
- Developed and now administer Adult Developmental Day Treatment program
- Took over the administration of the Autism Waiver program
- Took over the administration of Occupational therapy, Physical therapy, Speech-language pathology programs
- Took over the administration of Day Treatment Transportation contracts
- Developed and now administer ABA therapy and Day Habilitation services under EPSDT
- Creation of PASSE model and new services for individuals with complex behavioral health and intellectual disability service needs.
  - Implemented third party independent functional assessment
- Increased the number of funded CES Waiver slots from 4,200 to 5,300 with 3,000 more slots being added currently
- Created a new Community Support Systems provider type to serve PASSE clients for all of their functional needs.
- Implementation of policy and procedures that limit in excess of 90-minutes/week of OT, PT, and Speech therapy without a prior authorization.
- Increased Autism Waiver slots from 100 to 180.
- Updated all DDS policies and repealed all outdated DDS.
- Established DDS Intake and Referral unit as single point of DDS entry which included the development of a new online Intake system reducing hours spent manually tracking paper-based submissions from parent/guardians, providers, and other community members. This has improved data quality and shortened the turnaround response time for the clients and families.
- Drafted and implemented emergency Covid 19 related policies and practices to protect clients with IDD.
- Applied for and now administer American Rescue Plan Act Section 9817 funding focused on expanding our HCBS programs for clients with IDD, BH, Aging, and Physical Disability needs.

### **First Connections (DDS Early Intervention Program)**

- The First Connections Early Intervention program is in the process of developing a new comprehensive data system and updating the program's website to be easier to navigate and more family friendly.
- First Connections is in the process of implementing a new online training system to provide 24/7 access for parents, providers, and agency staff.
- Arkansas' First Connection Program was a leader in the first cohort group of States to undergo new, intensive federal monitoring and has supported other states by sharing program-developed tools and organization strategies that were implemented nationally by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
- The DDS First Connections program in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education applied for Intensive TA from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA.org) and was selected as one of 8 cohort states to receive ongoing intensive support in developing strategies across agencies and programs to support the inclusion of children with disabilities 0-5 in settings and activities with their typically developing peers.
- First Connections collaborated with Arkansas Home Visiting Network, Arkansas Department of Education's Early Childhood Special Education Program, Head Start, DDS Title V CHC Program, and Family2Family to pilot a cross-agency collaborative initiative to support families jointly enrolled in 2 or more partner programs in supporting their child's health, early learning, and development.

## *Director Weatherton's address cont'd*

- First Connections' Outreach Team expanded the programs reach by participating in the Arkansas State Fair and the Pulaski County Drug Takeback event to share program information with families.
- First Connections created and developed the program's first mascots, Miles and Stoney.

### **Title V Children with Chronic Health Conditions Program (CHC)**

- The Title V Children with Chronic Health Conditions Program (CHC) conducted Statewide Needs Assessment and virtual stakeholder meetings to engage parents and other stakeholders in setting evidence-based program goals for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant reporting period.
- The CHC Program has the nation's longest running active Parent Advisory Council (PAC) that serves as a model for other State's Title V programs for Children with Special Health Care Needs.
- The CHC Program just hosted the 9th annual Famous Family Bistro, an annual parent education and provider networking event.
- The CHC Program updated their service categories and guidelines to align more closely with Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant goals nationally and developed information sheets for referral sources and for parents of children with special health care needs.
- Collected data from Primary Care Physicians on their practices' implementation of best practices to support youth with special health care needs in transitioning from pediatric to adult health care systems. Through interns, CHC also conducted outreach to education professionals including school nurses, special education coordinators.

### **Human Development Centers**

- Implemented a CNA Based Structure in HDC Residential Services Departments while implementing new direct care pay grid at Human Development Centers that also included launching an additional Trauma Informed Care training curriculum.
  - Brought all residential services staff up to a more competition GS03 level
  - Increased quality of care with CNA training
  - Higher pay for residential services department supervisors
  - Provides valuable credentialing to employees that is transferable
- Hired APRNs at the 5 HDCs.
- Instituted a Behavioral Consultation Committee with outside stakeholders (private providers and Disability Rights Arkansas) to actively work on reducing restraint usage at the HDCs.
- Opened the Blue Umbrella store to sell DDS client produced items and create a work program for DDS clients to work in the store and gain employment skills.
- Created and host the Annual DDS Fall Food and Craft Fair- this is our 6th year.
- Built 3 new residences at BHDC for 8 residents each with private rooms and bathrooms, as well as built and later expanded their recreational center.
- Built new recreational center and expanded the dining hall at SEAHDC.
- Developed and built Community Gardens at each HDC
- Started monthly summer farmers markets to sell HDC grown produce.
- Developed master construction plans for all 5 HDCs. (In progress)
- Created and installed uniform security camera platforms at all 5 HDCs. (In progress)
- Installing new Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system at all 5 HDCs. (In progress)

What a honor it is every time I read through this list. Please take a minute to see what we have accomplished and be proud of the work we have done. I can't wait to see what this team does next! Happy New Year!

## *Arkadelphia HDC 8th Annual Walkathon fundraiser*

The Arkadelphia HDC Volunteer Council held its 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Walkathon fundraiser on Sunday, December 11, 2022 at 2 p.m. The walkathon was held at the HDC's ballfield which has a walking track. The ballfield was decorated with Christmas displays for the walkers to enjoy. Approximately, 100 people participated (clients, staff, and community members). The Council raised over \$5000.00!



## *Children with Chronic Health Conditions (CHC)*



Children with Chronic Health Conditions (CHC) provides care coordination services (case management) to support families of eligible children and youth in accessing community-based, family-centered, and culturally sensitive services which will assist the child with special health care needs to reach their maximum potential.

CHC receives federal funding from the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant to address the health service needs of children with special health care needs.

CHC Services include:

- Identify children with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions
- Assist families in accessing community-based health care services
- Assist families by providing coordination of services
- Make referrals to specialists (for example: geneticists, sign language instructors, nutritionists)
- Link families to programs, services, and resources in the community to meet family goals and interests
- Establish a medical home for the child
- Assist families in obtaining medical equipment related to their child's special needs
- Assist families in coordinating payment for their child's special health care needs
- Transition from pediatric to adult health care systems.

How to Refer:

Families can make a referral for their child, or referrals can be made by medical professionals, therapy providers, early intervention professionals, early childhood educators, school district staff, or other programs or organizations. The phone number to call to make a CHC referral is 501-683-5687.

Once CHC receives a referral, the program will contact the family to answer questions about the program, learn about their child's and family's unique strengths and needs, and guide the family through the process.

To get in touch with CHC to ask questions or to apply, call toll free at 1-800-482-5850 ext. 22277 or locally at 501-682-2277.

In addition to their need for supportive services based on their condition, children and youth with special health care needs have the same needs as typically developing children- opportunities to learn and grow, to interact socially with peers, and to develop a sense of self in their community.

## Meet Rodney Farley

Rodney Farley was born in Ashdown in Little River County. He grew up in NLR and attended NLR **High School where he began training as a printer at Metropolitan Vocational Technical School.** Two years after high school graduation, he received his certification as a printer from Metropolitan.

He is married; has a son, a daughter, one granddaughter, three step-granddaughters, and a grandson due in February.

Rodney loves motorcycles, live music, dancing, Doberman's, chickens, yard work, rafting on a river, camping, and spending time with his grandkids. The love of motorcycles led to him being a collector of custom-built Harley's, Vintage Triumph, and Buell motorcycles. Many motorcycle events include contests, and he has been a winner of the slow race, board race, and balloon toss at many bike shows. Once Rodney won first place in a motorcycle drag race. He is a Charter member and lifetime member of Arkansas Bikers Aiming Towards Education (ABATE) and is current President of ABATE Central Arkansas. He is a lifetime member of DIXIE ABATE of Alabama and lifetime member of Harley Owners Group (HOG). He's the state coordinator for the Motorcycle Riders Foundation who educate Congress about highway safety concerns and has served on the Arkansas Motorcycle Safety Advisory Council for the Arkansas Highway Safety Office. Being a competitive person, he enters more than just motorcycle skill contests. He recently won best beard in the eight inches and over category at EJ's Restaurant in NLR.

When asked what he would like his DDS Family to know about him, he answered: "I attended the first Title V Children with Special Health Care Needs Parent Advisory Council Meeting at Petit Jean in 1990 and only missed one meeting in 32 years. My son who is 41 years old has Spina Bifida and received Title V Services as a child. My dream was to host a conference like one that I was a speaker at in Florida called Family Café. The dream came true when the Governor's Developmental Disability Council gave the Parent Advisory Council a grant ten years ago. The conference known as the Famous Family Bistro has been an annual event ever since, going virtual during the pandemic. I would also like my DDS Family to know that I had open heart surgery in August 2022 and Jesus held my hand and give me a good talking to. My favorite song is Way of the Triune God."

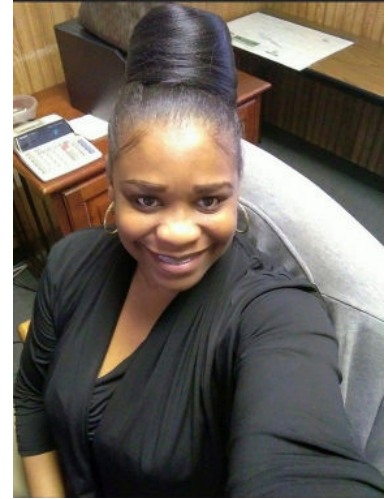
What makes this DDS Employee unique to the team? Rodney was hired in February 1995 as the first Title V Parent Consultant, and he has continued in that role throughout his DHS 28-year career. In his role as Parent Consultant, he has traveled many places in the United States and Canada while serving on several National Boards, including the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and Family Voices. He served on the AMCHP Board for six years on various committees. Rodney was the first Family Member to be in the AMCHP position of Director at Large position. Rodney received the Maternal and Child Health Dr. Merle McPherson award February 14, 2012, in Washington, DC. This award is given to a family representative, whose work with AMCHP and the State Title V Program has resulted in changes in policy and procedures related to partnerships with families, increasing family involvement at all levels. Rodney was appointed by Governor Beebe & Governor Hutchinson to sit on the Governor's Commission for People with Disabilities and served as chair by the request of Governor Asa Hutchinson. He has served on almost all the local disability non-profit boards and on several as part of the executive committee.

What does this DDS Employee bring to the team? Rodney brings advocacy from lived experience as a single father when his son with Spina Bifida was four years old. He is very self-motivated. Rodney has a vast knowledge of local, state, and national resources, and is known for having the "best resources that were ever carried in a box." He brings laughter to the team as he is a very funny guy.



## *Meet Tora Aldridge-Nelson*

Tora Aldridge-Nelson currently is a DHS PASSE Program Coordinator who works with Incident Reporting. Prior to working PASSE incident reporting she worked as a Waiver Program Coordinator. Tora has worked for DHS for 20 years; 16 of which has been with DDS. When asked how she feels about working for DDS, she replies, "Working for DDS has been a great experience. It has educated and inspired me to never take the little things for granted. Knowing that I have made a difference is rewarding in itself." Tora enjoys spending time with her husband, her two sons Broderick and Braylon, traveling with her best friend, and shopping with her mom. Tora is very active in her church serving as Director of the Youth Department and Usher. Tora's motto is the golden rule *treat people how you would like to be treated, because you never know when it maybe you on the other side.* Tora is motivated by her favorite bible verse, Ecclesiastes 9:11 which states: The race is not given to the swift nor to the strong, but to the one that can hold on and endure until the end.



## *December DDS Talks take-aways*

As we discussed on the DDS Talks meeting held on December 9th, attached is a video regarding legislative process and inclement weather policy (DHS Policy 1016). As stated during discussion, please be reminded that if you are contacted regarding proposed legislation by anyone that they are to be referred to the DHS Office on Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs.

<https://youtu.be/fROJVDMhu0I>

<https://youtu.be/XhN07zx6g4U>

Additionally, the mailboxes for the PHE wind down are:

[Dhs.phe.autism@dhs.arkansas.gov](mailto:Dhs.phe.autism@dhs.arkansas.gov)

[Dhs.phe.tefra@dhs.arkansas.gov](mailto:Dhs.phe.tefra@dhs.arkansas.gov)

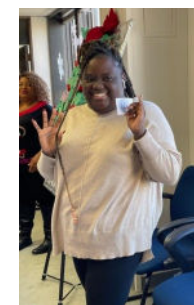
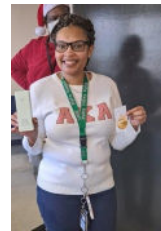
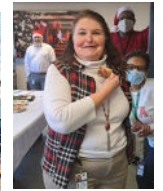
[Dhs.phe.ces@dhs.arkansas.gov](mailto:Dhs.phe.ces@dhs.arkansas.gov)

# DDS Holiday Party



Special thanks to the amazing DDS Holiday Party planning crew for an outstanding day of events, from brunch, to lunch, to games with prizes, to the ornament exchange! A good time was had by all.

Pictured from left to right: Yalanda Jones, Merinesa Morris, Susan Jackson, RaQueisha Washington, Rhonda Stewart, Gretchen Baggett, Lena Bethell, Sabrena Harris, and Jacoby Johnson. Not pictured: Simone Grice





## *Happy Retirement for DDS Administrative Specialist III*

Nancy Weaver retires after 30 Years of Service. The celebration took place at the Searcy County DHS Office in Marshall on December 16th.

Enjoy your retirement, Nancy. You will be missed!





## *Comments, Suggestions, and Q&A*

What would you like to learn more about or see featured? Please send all comments, suggestions, and Q&A to [Yvette.swift@dhs.arkansas.gov](mailto:Yvette.swift@dhs.arkansas.gov) by the 15th of the month.

# THE BLUE UMBRELLA



JANUARY 2023

## Thank you for supporting us in 2022!

The Blue Umbrella is extremely grateful for your support of the store and our artists! Because of you, our artists are provided not only income, but a sense of pride and accomplishment when an item they made is purchased. We look forward to introducing new artists and art work in the coming year!

AT A GLANCE:  
*Christmas Open House*

OVER 250 SHOPPERS!!! 

\$ 1,800.00 MADE FOR OUR ARTISTS!

242 ITEMS SOLD! *Sold it!*

*Thank You!!!*

The Blue Umbrella  
700 S Main Street, Little Rock, AR  
[www.blueumbrellaar.org](http://www.blueumbrellaar.org)

## Upcoming Events

**SUPER  
SALE**

### January 11: Art Sale on select items!

- Stay tuned to our website/Facebook/Instagram pages for more information
- Date is subject to change

### February 10: Reach "FOUR" the Stars!

- The Blue Umbrella's 4th Birthday celebration



blueumbrellaar



[www.blueumbrellaar.org](http://www.blueumbrellaar.org)

# New Artist Spotlight



What would you say is one thing people notice about you? For The Blue Umbrella's newest artist, Christy Todd, it's her kindness, thoughtfulness, and love she gives to others. Primarily self-taught, Christy enjoys photography, quilting, working with perler beads, and playing the piano. Despite the challenges she has faced, Christy knows she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to. Currently, she is working toward getting her GED and she says being a Blue Umbrella artist gets her one step closer to making her dreams come true. Read more about Christy, in The Blue Umbrella's January newsletter!



## Let it snow!

It's getting cold outside! Bring your snowman inside this winter without getting wet and cold!



Pictured: Home sign with 10 interchangeable pieces (Civitan Services); Let it snow footstool, paddleboard snowman, and Frosty's Hat arrangement (AHDC); Snowman painting (MelMel's Creations).

