

Arkansas 2018 State Report

June 2017 – June 2018

Arkansas' statewide parent-guardian association, Families & Friends of Care Facility Residents (FF-CFR) advocates for all 5 of our state's Human Development Centers (HDCs) and for all HDC residents. We monitor the Legislative Public Health Committee calendar and attend most committee meetings. We review documents and submit comments, objections and requests on issues that affect our HDCs.

Our Governor-appointed Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) board is involved with issues/concerns at our HDCs; members of FF-CFR attend the board's quarterly meetings; DDS board members listen to our concerns and supports our advocacy for the HDCs.

We are fortunate to have a DDS Director who is proactive and understands the need for the services that the HDCs offer and provide. DDS believes individuals and their families should have choices when selecting appropriate services. We have had many meetings with the DDS Director. FF-CFR goals include staying abreast of the key issues involving the HDCs including but not limited to, adequate funds and steady capital improvements on the grounds of the HDCs; hiring and retention of staff; wage increases for nurses and direct care professionals, and improved staff training. We work to stay informed about the issues before relevant Legislative Committees. Last year, under the reorganization of Arkansas' Department of Human Services (DHS) the Agency on Aging and Adult Services and Behavior Health Services were combined.

Under the direction of DDS, two dormitories that stood unused on the Booneville campus were demolished. The buildings built in the 1950s had to undergo an asbestos abatement before being demolished. The removal of the two buildings make way for two new buildings in the future if funding allows.

DDS continues to sponsor the Developmental Disabilities Craft Fair. This year will be the third year for this event. This annual event takes place in downtown Little Rock for individuals with DD to sell their crafts and this includes items made by our HDC residents. Items from the HDCs include woven rugs, vegetables from the gardens, home canned goods, plants and flowers and various other items. DDS also sponsored a "Famous Arkansan" day at the Capitol. Several HDC residents were highlighted as "Famous Arkansans."

In December 2017, FF-CFR sponsored a Christmas event to "light up" our campuses during the holidays. Fifteen lighted Christmas displays, decorations, lights and wrapping paper were distributed to the five HDCs. FF-CFR provided eighty gallons of chocolate milk for the annual Polar Express which is held at the Conway HDC campus. Attending the Polar Express were 400+ CHDC residents and staff, as well as residents from other centers. There were over 2,000 visitors from the general public who came to the campus to enjoy hot chocolate and a ride on the center's historic train.

FF-CFR produced three Public Service Announcements highlighting our HDCs. All PSAs were distributed to every television station in Arkansas and are being aired by the stations. The PSAs

are also being seen outside of Arkansas in bordering states of southern Missouri, western Tennessee, northern Louisiana, eastern Texas and eastern Oklahoma. The goal of the PSAs, which featured residents and family members, is to portray an accurate depiction of the HDCs as a community of care and remove the misinterpretation of an institution. The PSAs underscored that HDC placement is a choice, not a last resort.

Carole Sherman, FF-CFR Public Affairs Chair, has submitted comments to the Health and Human Services (HHS) Strategic Plan. In February 2018, Carole Sherman and Darrell Pickney, President of FF-CFR, along with Hugo Dwyer, Executive Director of VOR, at the invitation of leaders within the Administration of Community Living (ACL) met with the newly appointed Administrator, HHS and other ACL leadership. While in DC, Carole and Darrell also called on several members of the Arkansas congressional delegation. For the past 5 years or more, FF-CFR has submitted requests to the Arkansas congressional delegation for both “Report Language” and “Bill Language” in the final Federal appropriation bills. We have asked for relief from Federal programs which use public funds to undermine and eliminate institutional care. We are fortunate that two members of the Arkansas congressional delegation serve on relevant House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees. Members of FF-CFR visited with new staff in Congressman Hill’s office to educate on the HDCs. FF-CFR submitted comments to the U.S. House Committee on Judiciary/Subcommittee on Constitution and Civil Justice regarding Class Action Law Suits against Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Cognitive and other Developmental Disabilities requesting the halting of misuse of public funds for agendas of deinstitutionalization.

We continue to have tours of our HDCs by the Governor and First Lady, Congressmen, State Legislators, State DHS Director, area pastors and other leaders in our state. When someone speaks negatively of our HDCs, our ask is: “Have you toured an HDC?” We then extend an invitation to take them on a tour.

In April 2018, Carole Sherman and Jan Fortney attended a meeting with several private providers who operate Sheltered Workshops. This meeting was arranged by Sen. Tom Cotton. We hope there will be opportunities to work together.

FF-CFR secretary, Jan Fortney, maintains an active database of the HDC families. We work to inform our members about state and national issues. Recent actions by the FF-CFR Board include: presentation of a plaque of appreciation to the DHS staff (videographer Stephen Thornton) who assisted with the PSA project; plaques of appreciation to Sen. Tom Cotton, Sen. John Boozman and Congressman Steve Womack for their work on Appropriations language; funding of four representatives to attend the annual VOR meeting; funding new VOR membership for one family from each of the five HDCs; and approval of a new fundraising project called the HDC Tinsel Trail.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Hoover
Arkansas State Coordinator