

Arkansas Activities Since VOR Meeting of 2010

In June/July of 2010, the parents/guardians groups of the Arkansas Human Development Centers (HDC) met at each of the 5 development centers. Members of the statewide group (FF/CFR) met individually with members of the Arkansas Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) Board to discuss our concerns and national trends.

In August, the statewide parents group of Arkansas had a rally at the State Capitol in support of the Arkansas human development centers. This was in preparation for the Conway HDC trial with the DOJ and in contrast to the Protection and Advocacy organization's rally against the centers in May. Also in August, the parents/guardians filed an Amicus Brief with the court in the DOJ/CHDC case.

Starting in September, the DOJ lawsuit against the Conway HDC began. Many of the parents/advocates attended every day of the trial. Alan Fortney, the Arkansas VOR State Coordinator, was one of the few parent/guardians that were called to the stand during the trial that lasted 6 weeks (into the middle of October).

In November, we had a statewide parent/guardian meeting at the Conway HDC to update all parents/guardians regarding the events of the trial.

On December 3rd, over 20 of our parents/guardians went to a State Legislative Subcommittee Meeting on Public Health to discuss our HDC programs and ask for their continued support. Many legislators actually spoke passionately, regarding personal knowledge of friends and relatives who are residents at our HDCs.

In January 2011, the CHDC parents/guardians met to elect new officers and discuss the upcoming judge's decision to keep all parents/guardians informed and alert for any decision that may come about.

February 2 - Several members of the statewide parents group attended the DDS Board meeting where we witnessed the approval of the new DDS Systems Change Plan. This Systems Change Plan will eliminate the children's services from the state HDC programs and send 50 beds from CHDC to the private sector – further downsizing CHDC.

March 8 - Many of our statewide Board members met with DDS Commissioner, Dr. Charlie Green; State Representative Linda Tyler; DHS Director, John Selig; DDS Board Chair, Suzann McCommon; and DDS Attorney Jim Brader. We had many questions regarding the DDS Systems Change Plan, which would remove all "school-aged" children from the CHDC and move them to private facilities for younger people. We expressed our concerns and expressed them passionately!

March 17 - was our 1st Capitol Day. Three of parents/guardians met with the Governor, others met with their various legislators, and we were recognized from the floor of the Senate and the House. Also, in March we sent out a statewide newsletter to keep our parents/guardians as informed as possible.

During the 2011 Legislative Session (January – April), many of parents/guardians walked the halls discussing pressing issues with legislators. I believe Carole Sherman was there almost daily. We watched for and reviewed many documents and legislative bills, along with doing a “budget analysis” regarding the DDS Budget.

In April, we had a parents/guardians meeting at CHDC where we were told that the results of the judge’s decision could be any day, or up to 60 days away. As of this document, we are still awaiting the judge’s ruling. ([Editor’s Update: Read about the families’ court victory on VOR’s website](#)). Also in April, we sent out a statewide email newsletter with the latest updates from the legislative session.

Several of our statewide parents/guardians went to the DDS Board meeting on May 4, 2011. We are making a strong effort to attend every DDS Board meeting, now. We have been told that the DDS Board is “our seat at the table” when it comes to HDC issues.

Continually, we have been trying to keep everyone updated, especially through email. In May, the DOJ sent a request to the state of Arkansas, requesting that the DDS Systems Change Plan be halted. Their contention is that instead of moving the children from the CHDC to a private ICF/MR, they should be moved to a “least restrictive environment”, namely a private home or group home. The state, with the attorney support from Tom York has replied to this DOJ request by stating that the individuals are being served in the least restrictive environment for these individuals. Again, until we hear from the judge, we don’t know how all of this will turn out.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Fortney
Arkansas VOR State Coordinator