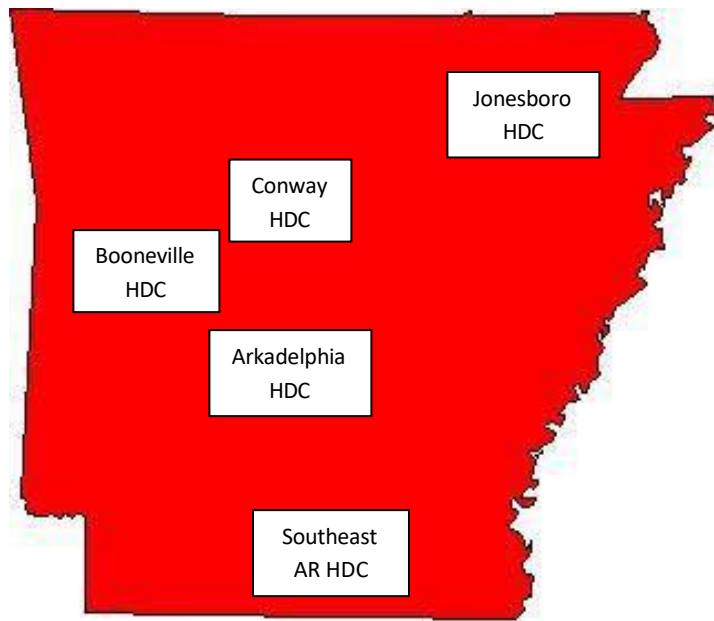


ARKANSAS

Human Development Centers



Families and Friends of Care Facility Residents (FF/CFR)

Advocating for vulnerable Arkansans with life-long developmental disabilities

2026

This material has been prepared and submitted by Families & Friends of Care Facility Residents.

Paid for with FF/CFR funds.

Neither Federal, State, nor HDC funds were used in the printing of this material.

Dear Member of the General Assembly,

Thank you in advance for reviewing the enclosed materials, which will introduce you to some of the vulnerable persons who live in Arkansas' state-operated human development centers, and which will also provide information to assist you as you make decisions which affect our loved ones with severe and chronic disabilities.

About Our Organization:

We are members of Arkansas' statewide parent-guardian association, Families & Friends of Care Facility Residents (FF/CFR). Since 1991, families have advocated for our loved ones who live with cognitive and other life-long developmental disabilities through FF/CFR.

FF/CFR is a volunteer organization, comprised of families, guardians and friends of people with cognitive/intellectual/developmental disabilities, most of whom live in one of Arkansas' five human development center programs;

FF/CFR is a 501©3 non-profit corporation registered in the State of Arkansas;

FF/CFR has no paid staff; we advocate at our own expense;

FF/CFR does not employ a lobbyist;

FF/CFR is dedicated to securing, maintaining, and improving services for Arkansans with all levels of developmental disabilities. We advocate for a full range of services and a full continuum of living arrangements – home, community-based waiver, and private and public ICF/IDD programs (human development centers).

Thank you for your service to our state. Please let us know how we may assist you in your work.

Sincerely,

Terry Johnson, President of Families & Friends of Care Facility Residents*
15 Eagles Nest Trail
Norfolk, AR 72658
Cell: 479-270-3191
terryjohnson7154@gmail.com

*FF/CFR Board of Directors' contact information is found on the last page of this booklet.

Seeing is Believing: We Invite You To Tour a Human Development Center

HDC residents living with extreme care needs, HDC trained staff and HDC specialized programs designed to assure residents' health and safety may only be fully understood by in-person meetings - "Seeing is Believing". If you would like to set up a tour, please contact our FF/CFR Secretary, Kimberly Dodd at (501) 590-8129 or kcdodd1@yahoo.com. You may also call the Division Manager, Kathleen Hoskins, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS), 501-371-1329 to schedule a tour or for additional information.

There are 5 human development centers across the state of Arkansas.

They are:

- Conway Human Development Center
- Arkadelphia Human Development Center
- Jonesboro Human Development Center
- Booneville Human Development Center
- Southeast Arkansas Human Development Center in Warren



HDCs serve approximately 850 residents from throughout the state, and every county has a family represented at the HDCs. HDCs are foundational components of the Arkansas Developmental Disabilities Service System (DDS).

Services offered at the HDCs:

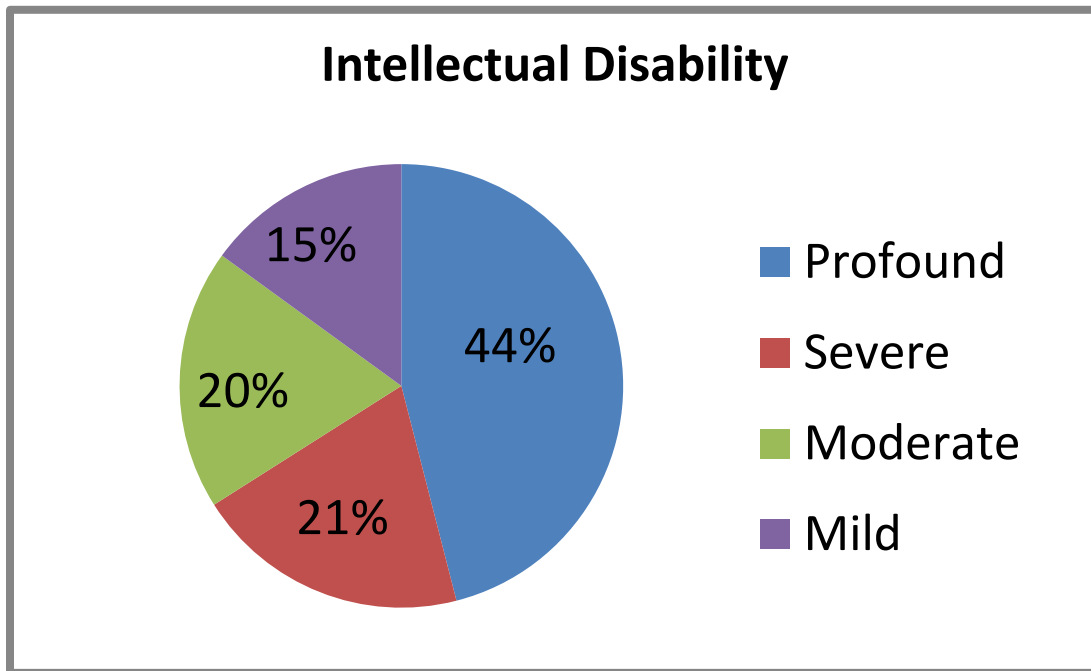
- Spacious, secure campuses where residents move about safely and have easy access to on-site comprehensive services.
- Residential Services (includes room & board)
- 24/7 Direct Care Awake Staff
- Interdisciplinary Teams with Person Centered Program Plans
- Case Management
- Health Care Management
- Bone Density – DEXA
- Total Drug Management
- Wheelchair & PTO Shop (utilized by others with DD around the state)
- Medical & Dental Clinics with Lab Services
- Dietary Management, Including Specialized Eating Equipment
- Alzheimer's Care (Conway HDC)
- 24-hour Infirmery (Conway HDC)
- Transportation
- Life Skills Habilitation/Instruction & Job Training
- Professionals with Experience
- Recreation/Socialization Activities
- Occupational, Physical, Speech Therapies
- Psychiatric/Psychological Services
- Positive Behavior Support Services
- And so much more!

FACTS:

All Arkansas HDCs are licensed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMMS) in order to operate.

Furthermore, all the HDCs are accredited by the Office of Long Term Care, and are accredited by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities). CARF is an independent, non-profit organization that provides accreditation services world-wide at the request of health and human service providers.

Level of Intellectual Disability of Residents



Class – Intellectual Disability	IQ
Profound	Below 20
Severe	20-34
Moderate	35-49
Mild	50-69

Arkansas Development Center Client Statistics – March 2026

Total Residents
819

Total Direct Care Staff
897

Ambulatory
538

Non-Ambulatory
274

Health Fragile
319

Hearing Impaired
90

Vision Impaired
321

Physician Ordered
Modified Diets*
561

Fed by Tube
104

*Due to dysphasia, choking and swallowing issues

The ADA and Olmstead Do Not Support Deinstitutionalization

Legislators often hear that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Supreme Court decision in Olmstead *require* community placements. Such interpretation is not accurate.

The Supreme Court, in its landmark Olmstead v. L.C. ruling, embraced the need for a range of services to respond to the varied and unique needs of the entire disability community.

A majority of Justices in Olmstead recognized an ongoing role for publicly and privately- operated institutions:

We emphasize that nothing in the Americans with Disabilities Act or its implementing regulations condones termination of institutional settings for persons unable to handle or benefit from community settings . . . Nor is there any federal requirement that community-based treatment be imposed on patients who do not desire it. *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581, 601-02 (1999).

Unjustified isolation, we hold, is properly regarded as discrimination based on disability. But we recognize, as well, the States' need to maintain a range of facilities for the care and treatment of persons with diverse mental disabilities, and the States' obligation to administer services with an even hand. *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581, 597 (1999).

Each disabled person is entitled to treatment in the most integrated setting possible for that person - recognizing on a case-by-case basis, that setting may be an institution. *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581, 605 (1999).



Family

Stories

&

Letters

July 2021

How can anyone write a few words and accurately reflect a lifetime of attention to the care and wellbeing of their child with a disability? Harder still, if you are blessed and fortunate enough to never have had to deal with this challenge, how can you possibly understand and absorb what it means?

In spite of all the challenges and tough decisions that have been made along the way, I wouldn't trade my life with my son Danny for anything else in the world. Most parents probably feel the same way. Sure, the bad times were pretty brutal, but the good times...oh man....provide us with the best feelings this planet can dish up.

I would say some of the toughest times were when Danny finally was "on his own", meaning beyond the legal age of his K-12 years in public school. Once a disabled person reaches this age, they seem to be standing on the edge of an abyss with no clear path forward. And the pressure falls onto us parents, who now have to make life altering choices for another adult person! No stress there!

It was my experience to give just about everything a try. Over about 10 years, Danny belonged to FOUR different "Community based" Medicaid Waiver programs, and we even built and ran our own Group House. Although these programs work well for some, they were nightmares for Danny and our family. By definition, these programs assign a single care-giver to a single client, usually going through 3 shifts of care-givers every 24 hour period. This creates a one-on-one situation that produces extreme tension and responsibility for care-givers that by financial default, are not trained professionals. Most are retirees or College kids making some extra money. Again, fine for some, but a formula for disaster for many, like my son, who are complicated and demanding to say the very least. The administration of tightly controlled medicines...the proper and safe handling of extreme behavioral episodes....not to mention the day to day personal hygiene requirements of an adult, are just too much to lay on a single care-giver, regardless of training.

The answer? For us it was finally finding the Jonesboro Human Development Center. There are about 100 Medicaid Waiver programs in Arkansas, but only FIVE HDC's. An HDC provides a real Community atmosphere, right there on campus. Sure, Danny takes trips all over town for special activities, dances, haircuts, McDonalds and what have you...but the HDC serves as his "College", complete with a wealth of friends, classroom learning, baseball teams and workshops. And instead of just one care-giver per client, at any time, there are at least 3-4 staff within verbal distance of Danny. He loves the structure and daily routines and faces. He has genuinely thrived in this environment. He loves his "College".



What is the future looking like? Well, none of us are sure. There are several misguided organizations who are constantly trying to defund our HDC's and redirect those funds to their "alternative" care models such as the Community based Waiver Programs. And of course our own Federal Government has several groups preaching "least restrictive environment" laws that have little to no knowledge of the damage they would cause if they actually won what they believe they are fighting for.

I hope...and pray...that all those in authority within our society's leadership will understand and take the time to fully appreciate the human value that our HDC's provide to those of us who depend on them.

Respectfully,

Terry Johnson (Danny's Dad)
terryjohnson7154@gmail.com

Cell: 479-270-3191

August, 2023

Hello,

This is a photograph of our dear son John, the oldest of our three children, who was born 54 years ago. In still photographs, our son's disabilities are not apparent; you would need to meet him in person to have a sense of the realities attendant to his devastating and life-long disabilities. From birth, John has lived with the effects of an unknown syndrome which prevented speech and cognitive development. Our son functions on the level of a young toddler. He exhibits profound thinking deficit and autism. A large middle-aged man, John is mobile, non-verbal, and has little awareness of danger. In extensive tests (December, 2018) at the National Institutes for Health (NIH) Undiagnosed Diseases program, in Bethesda, Maryland, no known causes were found for John's severe deficits. At times, our son exhibits mania, self-abusive behaviors and pica (eating inedibles). Although he can walk and feed himself, our son has never called us by name and cannot report his hurts and needs. John may be frightening to an untrained person, especially when his behaviors spiral out of control.

All of his life, John will rely on the humanity of others for his health and safety.

We are grateful for Arkansas' state-owned and operated human development centers (HDCs). These five Medicaid-certified facilities provide competent and compassionate residential treatment services for over 850 at-risk citizens, including our son. When John was younger, Conway HDC provided our family respite care services for over 7 years. As our son grew to manhood, his care became beyond our capacities. For many years now our son's safe home has been the Arkadelphia HDC, where the center's trained staff, close care and specialized services have met his intense care needs.

Our family supports the great human development center staff system. We will always be grateful for the HDCs whose staff during the COVID emergency worked tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of residents. During the terrifying ordeal of the outbreak, only one resident and one staff member from the five centers died from the disease. Given the realities of our loved ones' inability to understand contagion or infection – my son, for example, does not understand how to use a tissue, does not understand to cover his nose and mouth while sneezing and he must be prompted to wash his hands – the fact that over 850 individuals with profound and severe conditions and their staff survived the epidemic is truly laudable. The HDC staff and the staff of the Division of Developmental Disabilities deserve the highest praise.

Members of the General Assembly and our Governors have had a clear understanding of the challenging job which our state has in carrying out its responsibility in providing adequate care for our most difficult citizens to support, those who through no fault of their own require close assistance 24 hours a day. We are grateful.

Please join with us in doing what is required – in humanity – and support the human development centers' residents, staff and programs.

Thank you.

Carole L. Sherman
Mother and Guardian of John
President, Arkadelphia HDC Families &
Friends Association
carolelsherman@sbcglobal.net



October 2023

I want to introduce you to our son, Mathew. He is a fun loving 29-year-old. He loves movies, preferably Disney. He memorizes entire movies and loves to speak in movie lines. He enjoys swimming and jumping on the trampoline. He loves to be in the boat and go tubing on Lake Ouachita. He loves to sing and dance. He is a joy to our family, and we are blessed to be his parents.

Mathew was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder as a 3-year-old. He has also been diagnosed as Bipolar. Genetic testing revealed a chromosome deletion as well. Mathew has sensory processing issues. He can speak but does not express his needs, thoughts, or feelings well. He can answer simple questions, but his answers may or may not have meaning.

In 2017 we realized Mathew needed a change. He had proudly graduated from high school in May. Soon after, he was no longer thriving. He wanted something different and was expressing that with behavior that was creating a crisis in our home.

Mathew knew his older brother had moved to college after graduating high school and he wanted the same experience, kind of. He never wanted or enjoyed academics. He just knew leaving the house was next. He could not explain this to us due to his disability. He knew it was time for something else but didn't have a way to express that or achieve this goal.

We knew we needed to find a safe place for him where he could grow and mature. It also had to be a place with proper assistance in place for his needs. We found his place at the Southeast Arkansas Human Development Center (SEAHDC). It became Mathew's "college."

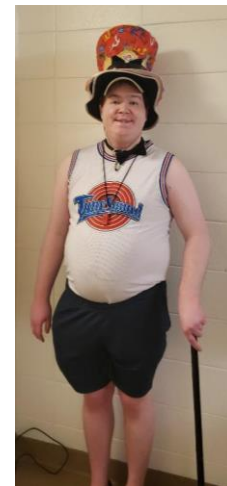
The staff was awesome. They also referred to the campus as his "college." Mathew has grown so much there. He is so much happier. It provides a small community with activities, education, and work opportunities where he can thrive. He has friends, too.

In 2022 he graduated from "college." After 5 years, it was time to move. Once again Mathew had watched his older brother and knew that college doesn't last forever. He needed to move on.

Arkadelphia HDC presented him with a signed graduation certificate from the SEAHDC "college." He now calls Arkadelphia home. It gives him even better opportunities for employment and more activities he is interested in. He has friends. He has community. He is more confident. Mathew was proud to graduate and move to a new home. He is so proud of his accomplishment. He is thriving there and much more independent than he was in our home.

The HDC is where our son has found his best life. It gives him as much independence as he can handle while providing all the supports he needs. It is where he is gaining skills and achieving goals. My family and I are witnesses to the success of the HDC program.

Sincerely,
Walter and Kimberly Dodd
35 Gloucester Drive
Little Rock, AR 72227
kcdodd1@yahoo.com



In 1981 my husband and I adopted two beautiful children through the Arkansas Department of Human Services: Stephen 6, and Stephanie 4. We knew they both had challenges, but it quickly became evident to us that Stephanie's challenges were more severe than we had first understood. While she exhibited a mild intellectual disability, she also had emotional issues that became apparent as she screamed her anger at me one minute and begged that I take her everywhere I went the next. She also began to show a pattern of running away for a variety of reasons that were often not apparent. As she reached puberty, the running resulted in Stephanie's putting herself and others in danger, so she had a few brief hospitalizations.

In the summer of 1995, Stephanie was quite strong and much larger than I was. When she became angry at someone else, she attacked me. This resulted in the first in a series of long-term placements through eight different agencies. While each agency was staffed by trained individuals and various medications were attempted, Stephanie's behavior became more and more dangerous for herself and those who were attempting to care for her. In 2006 Stephanie ran away from her placement in a duplex where she lived with another client in Northwest Arkansas, putting herself in serious enough danger that she was imprisoned simply for her safety. No one really knew what to do to help her. Finally, it was determined that she should be placed in a behavioral unit at the Warren Human Development Center specifically for women like Stephanie who had dual diagnoses. The structure, behavior management, and medication seemed to work for her. A year later the behavioral unit was moved to the Booneville Human Development Center where Stephanie was treated by caring, compassionate staff. In 2010, the diagnosis of schizophrenia was added to Stephanie's long list.

Due to the severity of her medical issues, Stephanie is now living at the Conway Human Development Center. I have been so impressed with the staff there. They genuinely seem to like Stephanie and frequently tell me funny things she has said or done. In any interaction they have with her, she is always treated with positivity and love.

Human Development Centers are definitely the least restrictive environment for Stephanie. We have tried less restrictive environments, and she is not safe there. In fact, in one of her more lucid moments following her placement in Warren, Stephanie said to me, "Mom, if I ever tell you I want to live back in the community, remind me that I can't handle that." I urge you to strongly support the Human Development Centers in Arkansas where my daughter and many like her are safe and well cared for. There are no other alternatives for these individuals. Please show the same compassion for them that is shown by the HDC staff members who serve my daughter.

Julia Frost, mother and co-guardian of Stephanie
juliafrosta@gmail.com



2023

October 2022

Our youngest of four children, Kirk was born September 13, 2001.

Kirk is profoundly autistic and lives at Conway Human Development Center. Kirk has lived at CHDC since he was 10 years old. Before finding CHDC we were at a loss as to what to do to ensure Kirk had a safe and secure place to live. We as a family could no longer take care of all his demanding needs.

Because Kirk functions on an 18-month-old level mentally yet is an adult in body he requires 24-hour care. He cannot be left alone for even a few minutes. Kirk is completely nonverbal, not potty trained and has self-injurious behavior. He has no sense of fear. He will eat or drink anything not knowing if it is edible or even poisonous. He would walk into traffic without hesitation. Just as any toddler would not know how to keep himself fed, clean and safe Kirk is not able to do these things for himself.

Because of this we are so very grateful that we found our way to Conway Human Development Center, where Kirk has been able to have a much more fulfilling life.

Moving Kirk to CHDC has not been restrictive on him but the opposite, living where he has classes to go to, a park on campus to enjoy and many more people to interact with has broadened his world.

Thank you for your support,

Deborah and Paul Rainwater
5400 Chenonceau Blvd #635
Little Rock, AR 72223
(501)251-5774
deborah.rainwater@yahoo.com



Pierce



Our son Pierce is sparkly, social and loves to talk about Star Wars. However, he was also born with severe developmental disabilities that became apparent soon after he was born. He was eventually diagnosed with severe intellectual disability and autism, in addition to other physical and mental health concerns. He did not walk until he was 3 and did not speak for several more years. Thankfully due to many wonderful physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists, he overcame many physical limitations and is conversational (on the level of a 3-year-old). However, as he got older we came to the difficult realization that Pierce could not live safely at home, even with substantial assistance. He needs 24/7 expert care in an extremely structured and closed environment to be able to function and to enjoy life safely. He has intense anxiety problems that his intellectual disability and autism compound and which result in emotional and physical outbursts that are unmanageable by his family or caregivers except in controlled settings. After much searching, we realized that Conway Human Development Center is the only Intermediate Care Facility in Arkansas that could meet his level of need.

Our family is extremely grateful for the loving care provided by his team at the CHDC. Pierce loves his teachers, all of his caregivers, and his “boys” who he considers family. He moved to the CHDC 2 years ago at the age of 12. Since then, we have been amazed at the activities he participates in because the environment meets his needs so well.

The staff at CHDC is completely devoted to its mission and works to help every resident reach their full potential. Because of their caring and expertise, Pierce is able to do things at CHDC that he could never do in a less- contained environment. In fact, if you attend a service at the CHDC Chapel, you might even get to hear him sing.

Lee and Kathy Watson
PO Box 1016, Fort Smith, AR 72902
LeeWatson@me.com

June 2021



Chris

These are photographs of our youngest son Christopher (Chris). He is 47 years old and functions as a three-year-old. After numerous trips to doctors in Arkansas and Tennessee, he was diagnosed at the age of two and one-half with a chromosome translocation. Because the doctors had no knowledge of anyone with this same translocation, we had no idea how this would affect Chris in the future. We now know he has profound intellectual disabilities. At the age of thirteen, the school he was attending could no longer accommodate individuals under the age of eighteen. He resided at Easter Seals for a year then another community-based facility before Jonesboro Human Development Center had an opening. JHDC is one of five Medicaid certified facilities in Arkansas.

JHDC has been a blessing to Chris as well as our family. He is mobile only with help, non-verbal, often incontinent, and cannot bathe or shave himself. He can help dress himself but is unable to put his shoes on and when he is sick, he can only point to what hurts. At JHDC he gets to participate in numerous activities such as swimming, bowling, Miracle League ball program, trips in the community, eating at restaurants, picnics, rodeos, and his job is shredding paper. He has an infectious smile and never meets a stranger.

Because of his gait, he is prone to falls and therefore can never be on his feet without someone holding on to the gait belt he has to wear. He thrives in the structure of JHDC, and the medical staff is excellent. It seems that in recent years the Federal Government has decided that community-based programs are the perfect choice for everyone. NOT TRUE! Community based programs are great placement for some individuals because their disabilities are not as severe as those like Chris. The HDC's are the perfect placement for those who require the constant monitoring and intense care that Chris requires. There is no such place as a one-size fits all program for individuals. We need the HDC's as well as community-based programs. Please realize that assistance is absolutely necessary for those disabled citizens who require close assistance twenty-four hours a day and whose support is way beyond those of aging families.

Thanks so much,

**Charles and Gloria Holden
607 Lakeshore Drive
Newport, AR 72112
gh@holdenscorner.com**



Isaiah Seawright

Isaiah has resided at Conway Human Development Center for nine years. Isaiah is diagnosed with Autism PDD/NOS, intellectual challenges, self-injurious behaviors, aggression and is non-verbal. Our decision to have him live at CHDC was not an easy decision but after many years of struggles and hardships, it was the best choice that we could make for him. He has come a long way in nine years, although he still has behaviors that put him at risk, he is in an environment where he is much safer and better cared for than if he were here at home. At CHDC he has opportunities that he could never have had otherwise, I am proud to say that we are part of the Conway Human Development Center family.



Sincerely,

Rose and Isaiah Seawright

roseseawright@gmail.com

My brother Ron Zimmerman called the Arkansas Human Development Center in Arkadelphia *Home* from the young age of 7, back in 1972, just 4 years after the center opened. It remained his home until his death in 2020. For 47 of his 54 years on this earth he was cared for by the staff at the HDC/DHS.

Ron was 6th in a line of 7 boys that my parents Frank & Rose Mary brought into this world. Early on they knew something was not quite right with Ron as his development both physically and mentally was impaired. It was a godsend when my parents learned of the HDC that had just been recently established in Arkadelphia. My dad went to great lengths to call upon friends and professionals in support of Ron's application for admission to the HDC. He knew this most difficult decision was the best decision for Ron and the rest of the family.

One of my brothers recounted the day the whole family went with Ron to his new home: "I'll never forget the day we first took Ron to the HDC in Arkadelphia. He was 7 years old, and as we left it was the first time I ever saw my mother cry." Sacrifice that it was, it was also the very best place for Ron to receive training and treatment and quite frankly best for the rest of the family as well. Ron's needs had far surpassed the attention he could be given at home. He was epileptic, could not talk, and had very poor balance; he was a fall risk and was restricted to a wheelchair for the last few years of his life.

Growing up with Ron was as you might expect with a house full of seven boys all born within 13 years of each other. The brothers fought a lot and Ron was just another "one of the boys". They all teased each other, as well as Ron, and continued to tease him throughout his life all in loving fun.

Ron's mother was devoted to being part of his care for his first 50 years, but when she passed in 2014 his brothers assumed that role. The pictures below were taken on his 50th birthday; his brothers and dad came to Arkadelphia to the HDC to celebrate. Each brother visited at least annually after their mother's death and had 2020's visit already scheduled when Ron passed.

His brothers and Dad also all attended the last 5 annual review meetings at the HDC that Rose Mary had faithfully attended until her death. The care and compassion the HDC staff showed to Ron was unprecedented; there is no other venue where he could have received the attention he needed and where he had lived such a fulfilled life. Ron was very happy at the Arkadelphia HDC; it was apparent every time the family went to see him and especially apparent when they left.

He was loved dearly by his biological family and the family who cared for him at the HDC. How can a person who has a limited vocabulary, the intellectual ability of a four-year-old, has been bound to a wheelchair for the last several years, who needs care around the clock affect so many people so positively? His family had seen him only a few days a year over the last few years he lived, yet his impact on them was tremendous; his siblings attribute their close relationship with each other to Ron. I can't imagine what type of life Ron would have had were it not for the HDC. Families must always have the right to choose what setting is best for their loved ones, please help me fight for that right for Arkansas Families.

Tim Zimmerman
501-580-4225
t.zimmerman@firstchoice-testing.com



Makayla is a rambunctious little girl with a lot of passion for her sippy cup, a good meal, her recliner, comfy socks, and her favorite blankie. She is what I like to call a “popular loner”. She gets along just fine with or without company. She finds great joy in clapping and playing patty cake. She smiles even when no one else is and before you know it, you will find yourself laughing as well. She has Microcephaly, swallowing dysphagia, mild hearing loss and a mild case of cerebral palsy. You would never know it because she is so full of life, and she never meets a stranger. Everyone falls in love with her upon meeting her.

She thrives at CHDC in a way that I never thought she would. There were physicians that even thought she wouldn’t thrive like this, but she has been taken off a lot of meds and her regimen is one that she can handle. She is growing, learning, and making friends. She is what we call “the baby of the house” in her unit. One of the smallest, but one of the loudest.

I can’t thank CHDC enough for all that they have done. We have a story, and I would like to share that story with the world. It is because of CHDC that we now get the chance. MaKayla is loved and she knows it. She is loved by her family at CHDC and her family outside of CHDC. Any chance that we get to share “our story” we take it head on. The joy that CHDC brings MaKayla is something that I can’t put into words. She now has a chance in this world now that CHDC has welcomed her. She has been at CHDC for almost 5 years now.



Candi Ward
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72227 Phone: 641-274-
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August 2023

Our youngest child and only son was born in November 1998. His name is Matthew, which means “Gift of God”, we didn’t know what a gift we had been given. Matthew was first diagnosed with PDDNOS (pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified) because he was too young to be diagnosed with autism. At the time Matthew was 2 years old. As time went on the doctors told us he was autistic and that at the age of 3 they would change his diagnosis to severe autism with sensory disorders.

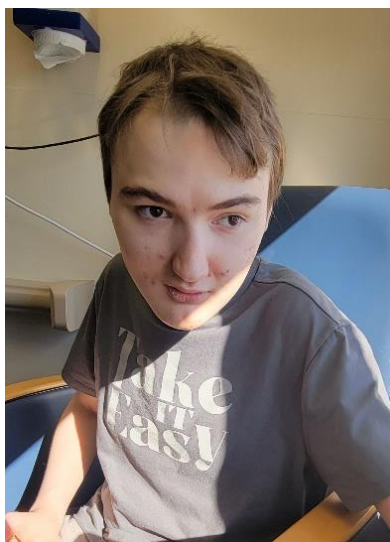
Matthew is non-verbal and is incontinent. He has never spoken a word in his life. We were able to get Matthew on the waiver list at the age of 5. My husband and I both work full time jobs and the waiver program was a God send. We had a couple of dedicated employees, one of which worked with Matthew for 15 years.

We have had many ups and downs over the course of Matt’s life. It is hard to raise a child that is non-verbal. He knew in his mind what he wanted but could not tell us. He would get frustrated and act out if we did not understand what he wanted. We tried everything we could as parents to help Matt become the best individual he could be. It seems as if everything we wanted for him, we had to fight to get. It should not be that hard-to- get help for an individual with disabilities. Matt functions at a toddler level. He cannot be left alone so he needs constant supervision.

Matt attended public school in a self-contained classroom setting until the age of 21. He enjoyed being around others his age and on his level. He graduated from high school in 2020. They had been practicing with Matt on walking the stage for graduation and the teacher told me he was doing well. He was walking up one side of the stage and down the other side of the stage. Then covid hit and they did not get to have a traditional graduation ceremony. After graduation Matt had nowhere to go. He just stayed home with his waiver worker and his father and me. He no longer got to be around others like himself or his age. Matt is now 24 years old.

I had hoped to keep Matt at home with us until I was no longer able to care for him. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen. We were having trouble getting staff to work with Matt through the waiver program. We both still work full time jobs, and we needed staff to be able to care for Matt while we went to our jobs. At this point is when I knew something had to change and we started looking at HDCs. We toured a couple of HDC’s. We really like the HDC at Booneville. Matt moved into the facility in February 2022. I am not going to lie...this was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my life (to turn loose of my baby that I had protected and love). Matt seems to be doing well at BHDC. We visit him every weekend. The other guys in his “college” dorm at BHDC have also become our family. He is now in an environment that he is used to and with others his same age.

Supportive and loving parents of Matt, Treasea & Duane Ray ~604 N 3rd Street~ Dardanelle AR 72834



June 2021

Darlene Pickney, my first of three lovely daughters, was born December 12, 1965 in Garden Grove California. Shortly after her birth we learned that she was severally mentally retarded, and we spent 45 years trying to provide her with the best life possible in an environment that is best suited to meet her special needs.

During Darlene's first year of life we moved back home to Hoxie, Arkansas determined to raise our baby to the very best of our ability. We were successful in caring for her until she reached school age at which time we enrolled her in a special school in Jonesboro known as Helen Dudley. She was completely unable to function in that environment and we were forced to move her to the Cottage of Hope, a facility providing basically daycare for the severe mentally retarded. At age nine her mother graduated college and began teaching in the Trumann public school system and Darlene was enrolled in special education classes there. Even though we were striving to do what was best for our daughter, this was a big mistake. Darlene was unable to function in the public school system and that experience culminated in a complete emotional and mental breakdown for her.

Shortly after the public-school fiasco, we were successful in getting her placed in a 24-hour facility that was then known at the Children's Colony in Conway, Arkansas, a school and home that later became the flagship facility of the Arkansas Human Development Centers. She lived there until age 14 and functioned wonderfully during her five years in Conway.

By this point in her life her mother had relocated to Harrison, Arkansas and had a strong desire for Darlene to lead a more "normal" life in a less restrictive living environment. She moved her into her home in Harrison and enrolled her in school at the Boone County Learning Center, a facility for students with special needs, and operated by the state. Darlene functioned fairly well in Boone County but had to disrupt her life a year later when her mother's work necessitated her relocation to Little Rock. With no suitable facility in the Little Rock area, Darlene was placed in the Jackson County Learning Center, a privately operated facility in Newport, Arkansas. Without going into details, I will just say that her two years spent in Newport was the biggest mistake we ever made in Darlene's life and she continued to have damages from her experiences at that facility.

At age 17 we were, through an emergency enrollment, able to get Darlene out of Newport and transferred back into the state system with placement in the Human Development Center in Warren. She lived there until 1985 at which time our request for closer placement was honored with her move to the Jonesboro Human Development Center.

For over 30 years the Jonesboro Human Development Center was the place that Darlene proudly called her home. Every year during her annual plan review I witnessed a scene that was both heartwarming and truly amazing. Even though her severe mental condition prevented her from providing substantial plan input toward her daily needs and wishes, when asked where she wanted to live she loudly and proudly exclaimed, "At my home in the Human Development Center".

Darlene passed away on February 9, 2018.

Our desire had always been to have Darlene living in the least restrictive environment that would best meet her needs. Based on over 45 years of trying to achieve this goal, there is no doubt in my mind today that place was the Jonesboro Human Development Center. Our family will be forever grateful for JHDC!

Sincerely,

Darrell D. Pickney
Father and co-guardian of Darlene L. Pickney
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Darlene (left) and my youngest daughter, Heather
(right) taken at JHDC Family Day





Hot tears streamed down my face and the anger boiled inside me as the disability rights person continued on the phone, “We can help him get two caregivers. He just needs more community supports in place. Everyone deserves to live with dignity in the community.” I swallowed hard but my anger was impossible to mask. “Have you ever tried to care for an adult with profound and complex disabilities? An individual with BOTH intellectual disability AND mental health diagnosis or what about complex medical needs?” There was no response from him, and he evaded the question. I hung up the phone feeling like a failure and with guilt overwhelming me. I’d nearly killed myself, and brought harm to many, trying to integrate Noah into the community. Now he was sitting in a jail cell, after being in a homeless “shelter” for months and then at a hospital ER for 45 days because of no placement options. We were now waiting for a bed at the Booneville Human Development Center. Noah eventually got that bed after funding was made available for additional beds for these more complex cases.

Fast forward about nine months after Noah’s placement at the BHDC and I made a trip there to see him participate in a talent show. He excitedly told me about this talent show for weeks on the phone, making sure I would be there. I reassured him I would. When I arrived that day and made my way to the building it was to be held in, I found Noah. He said a quick hello but then scurried off to meet with staff and other residents. I saved him a seat next to me in the auditorium but then realized he had no interest in sitting with me, he wanted to be with his friends...his peers. I sat toward the back of the room and watched, again with tears streaming down my face, as Noah gave participants standing ovations, cheered them on, danced in the aisle, and then himself got up and sang “How Great Is My God.” Noah WAS living with dignity in the community, THIS community, with HIS peers. Don’t we all do that? Gravitates towards those who are like us? I left with my feelings of failure gone. I had done good for Noah, my fight was not in vain.

Fast forward another 9 months, 18 months since Noah’s placement and I stood in a courtroom on Noah’s behalf. I held in my hands a report written by a psychiatrist, advocating for Noah to stay at his placement. It is 11 pages long but starts and ends with, “...Therefore, by the very nature of his mental disease and mental defect, he can be considered a potential danger to others, himself, and personal property. What mitigates that possibility is that he is in the most appropriate placement possible for his diagnosis; he is in a well-controlled, total care environment, so any potential for acting out is handled by trained staff, medical staff, and security staff. As long as he remains there, he presents no danger to persons or property outside that facility.”

The Booneville Human Development Center has been a Godsend to our family and Noah.

Katrina Robertson, 148 Lakeshore Terrace, Hot Springs, AR 71913, 501-282-6885

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Our son, Aric, currently lives at the Arkadelphia Human Development Center. He has lived there for six years and is thirty-seven years old. Aric has intellectual disability and generalized anxiety disorder, along with behavior extremes. He was born very premature and had complications, including a stroke. He is unable to read or write, but is very social and never meets a stranger. He loves his family and talks about them often.

Aric attended high school in Bryant where he had the most wonderful special education teachers. As he reached his later high school years, his behavior in the home became more extreme and episodes happened more often, making it unsafe for Aric and the family. Aric moved into a group home setting in Bryant which we all loved. The staff and other clients were great, and he was able to do many activities. He lived there for ten years until his behavior deteriorated to the point that he could not live there anymore. They were very helpful and even moved him to some homes in different locations to see if a change might help. Group homes are not set up to handle extreme behaviors, so when that happens, it puts the clients and staff in an unsafe environment. That is why this less restrictive environment did not work for Aric. They sent him to a couple of inpatient mental facilities for respite, but we found out that they are not really set up to handle patients with intellectual disabilities, and honestly, they had a very hard time even finding one who would take him.

Aric was finally placed at the Booneville Human Development Center on a temporary basis which later became a permanent placement. It was in a beautiful part of the state, and we loved the staff there. It was very far from our home so we requested a transfer to Arkadelphia. The staff at Arkadelphia HDC has been great, and we love the setup of the facility as well. Unlike the group home settings, they are equipped to handle Aric's behavior problems professionally without putting Aric and others at risk. When on campus with Aric, we seldom ever pass a staff member that does not greet him by name. He is very well cared for there, and they are attentive to his needs and wants. He loves participating in Special Olympics events also. It brings us much joy and peace knowing that Aric is in a suitable and stable environment that meets all his needs

Steve & Michelle Gladden michelle.gladden@att.net
Parents & Guardians of Aric



Gentry Schroeder – First ever HDC Warren AR. Feb. 2024

My name is Steve Schroeder, the father of Gentry. Our journey has been so incredible we are writing a book about what happened. Gentry is severely autistic, 6ft 300 pounds of complete innocence. There is no malice in Gentry. He does not know evil or lying or trying to hide things for his own benefit. He is non-verbal, non-potty-trained, requires 24-7 care and requires me (the caregiver) to be on 24-7 alert knowing I could be called into life threatening situations at any time. I found out after years of being on this type of alert 24-7, it's not healthy. It is only by the Grace of God we are here today.

When Gentry would have meltdowns due to frustration, hunger, or slow internet or no internet, or bathroom issues, (FBI, Food, Bathroom, Internet 😊) he would often lash out, break things, hit his head through the walls of the house or school, or through the car seat, or attack who happened to be in the room or car, it was a very dangerous situation.

On many occasions his mother Sherrie would take a lot of physical abuse from biting, hitting, and would curl up in a ball as Gentry hit her. When G recovered, he hated his meltdowns, he would often go to his mother and hold out his hand as if he was saying he was sorry. He could not understand his autism.

The emotional, mental, and psychological damage is much worse than the physical damage.

We drove pretty much blindly into Arkansas on May 18, 2020, from Cumming, Georgia. The only family who could help was in a town called Dardanelle AR.

There was no school, no church, no friends, no life, no family, for a long time. I learned such remarkable things from Gentry, I can't even begin to share. But even though I see the fruits of what Gentry has taught me, I never would have volunteered to receive the benefits had I known the cost. I found out that I needed a 4-year journey in the desert before I could be let into the promised land and then taste freedom to a greater degree. Without Gentry, I don't think I would have ever seen or learned this on my own.

I was able to get G into SEA HDC for the first time ever in February of 2024 and as of September 26th, 2024, G is being transferred to Conway HDC which is 2+ hours closer😊 The HDC's are a lifesaver for both me and for Gentry. If anything would have happened to me, it would not have been good for Gentry. Thank you to all the HDC's. The service HDC's provide is a lifesaver for everyone involved. These facilities are incredibly important to so many people. We must do everything we can to not only ensure their continuance but to expand their services to others in dire need of these facilities.

Thank you.





These photographs highlight our oldest son, Lucas, who was diagnosed with Level 3 autism at the age of two. He is non-verbal, fully incontinent, and has significant sensory-seeking behaviors. During puberty, Lucas also began experiencing seizures, further emphasizing his need for ongoing care and support. Despite these challenges, Lucas is a loving and joyful child whose smiles, hugs, and cheerful spirit bring light to everyone around him. He struggles greatly with transitions and everyday activities that many take for granted. Overstimulating environments—such as crowded stores with bright lights and loud noise—can quickly overwhelm him and increase his anxiety.

As puberty intensified, Lucas experienced severe emotional outbursts and developed dangerous fixations, including a compulsion to break glass. He shattered windows and televisions and even attempted to break vehicle windows by punching, kicking, or running into them. These behaviors led to multiple emergency room visits, stitches, and escalating aggression due to pain and injury.

When Lucas enrolled in CHDC at age 12, our lives changed dramatically. He developed a genuine excitement for school and therapeutic activities, which has had a profound impact on his well-being. He has made meaningful progress toward self-sufficiency and can express his needs more clearly, improving communication with those around him. One of his proudest milestones is taking responsibility for cleaning himself during bath time—an important step toward independence.

Lucas has also made his first friend at CHDC and now participates in special events such as fairs, proms, and dances. These experiences have given him opportunities to socialize, connect, and create joyful memories we once feared might never be possible.

Most remarkably, Lucas no longer engages in harmful behaviors such as breaking windows, or exhibiting aggressive actions that once endangered himself and others. The transformation is astonishing; he is a child we barely recognize compared to where he once was.

If not for CHDC, we honestly do not know where Lucas would be today. The compassionate staff, structured environment, and individualized support have not only changed his life—they have saved it. We are forever grateful.

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Arkansas' Human Development Centers

