



**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

Media Release

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First Children's Mental Health Summit Held in Little Rock

Meeting Aimed at Getting Input from Families

(Little Rock, Ar.) The First Children's Mental Health Summit was held Saturday at the Arkansas Historic Museum in Downtown Little Rock. Seventy families from around the state traveled to Little Rock to discuss their concerns over mental health access for their children.

"Many of us have struggled for years to overcome the barriers in getting the right kinds of services to our children," said Joyce Soularie. "We began this process when my granddaughter was 3 years old and now she's 14. Although she has physically changed over the years, her mental illness has remained an integral part of her development."

The summit marks a joint effort of the National Alliance for Mental Illness - Arkansas Chapter, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and the Arkansas Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council (AMHPAC), with support from the Department of Health and Human Services. The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health also contributed resources to the effort. The summit will bring families together to create a collective voice in the reform of the children's mental health system.

"Parents and children are not just one stakeholder in the mental health system; they are the most important stakeholder," said Kim Arnold, Executive Director, NAMI Arkansas. "Their input is essential to creating the system."

The summit is part of an ongoing state initiative to create a system of care for Arkansas children with mental health issues. Act 1593, enacted by the legislature during the 2007 legislative session created the Children's Behavioral Health Care Commission. The commission is tasked with the redesign of the children's mental health system with a core focus on youth and family involvement. Summit organizers hope that the dialogue generated at Saturday's meeting will translate into more families getting actively engaged in the state's mental health network at the state and local level.

Although the state plays a pivotal role in the system's design, the true measure of our success will come from the momentum generated by community participation," said Georgia Rucker-Key, Training

Coordinator, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. "As a parent you become an expert in diagnosing system gaps, but you also become a valuable resource in finding a solution."

First Lady Ginger Beebe also spoke to the group today about her upcoming "listening tour" during the month of May where she will travel around the state meeting with families about their experience in the mental health structure.

"As a state, this is a conversation that needs to happen," said First Lady Ginger Beebe. I want families to know that they have a place to turn to where they will be heard."

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