

HISTORY OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, INC.

(S: Administration/Agency Brochure/SDS History.doc) Revised for 5/02

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Skills Development Services, Inc. was chartered in November 1979. The charter brought together two programs serving individual with mental retardation in Coffee County, TN. The two programs merged were Coffee County Skills Adult Activity Center, Inc. and Coffee County Skilled Living Centers, Inc.

Coffee County Skills Adult Activity Center, Inc. (CCSAAC) was chartered in 1972 to provide day training services to people in Coffee County. CCSAAC began in an unoccupied rural schoolhouse with four staff and an enrollment of ten individuals. The aim of the program was to provide services “for handicapped persons too old to stay in school but unable to qualify for vocational training because of the severity of their handicap”. The center operated on a shoestring budget with primary funding being received from the county, the local ARC, and the Tennessee Department of Public Welfare.

Coffee County Skilled Living Centers, Inc. began in June of 1962. The forerunner to this program began as The Jaycee Community Home for Special Education, Inc. The Jaycee program was licensed and funded by the Tennessee Department of Public Welfare until approximately 1968. This home served five mentally retarded male children who attended the public school system during the day. The program was set up as a five day a week situation, with the children returning home on the weekends.

In 1968, the program was unofficially changed to the Tullahoma Home for Retarded Children and began receiving funds from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health. From 1969 through 1972 the program continued to serve five retarded male children with funding from the Department of Mental Health, Coffee County Quarterly Court, local donations, the Coffee County ARC, and monies raised by the Jaycees Tabloid Sale.

In 1972 the Tullahoma Home for Retarded Children was operating the Lincoln Street Group Home. It was receiving \$150.00 per month per resident. During this time, the state department also contracted with the Coffee County ARC for services to the retarded population of Coffee County. In 1973 the Charter of the Jaycee Community Home for Special Education, Inc. was amended and the name changed to the Coffee County Skilled Living Centers, Inc.

In 1973 negotiations were under way to serve more retarded residents until a court injunction blocked the use of the home on Washington Street for purposes of housing mentally retarded individuals. This home had been bought by the Coffee County ARC for the purpose of group home living. The Coffee County ARC chose to defend itself in a lawsuit on behalf of retarded citizens throughout Tennessee and the country. The lawsuit involved a zoning question regarding the establishment of a group home for retarded citizens in a residential neighborhood. The lawsuit was lost in Chancery Court, won in the State Court of Appeals and at the State Supreme Court but then lost again after a re-hearing in the State Supreme Court.

While the injunction barring the use of the Washington Street facility was in effect, the ARC purchased another house on Eddy Street and rented it to the Coffee County Skilled Living Centers, Inc. for their use as a group home.

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The years following saw little growth in number of individuals served (seventeen in February 1975) but saw great improvement in quality of services. Three group homes were now in operation.

As stated earlier, Skills Development Services, Inc. was chartered in November of 1979 and brought together the existing residential and adult activity center programs of Coffee County.

In 1980 a sheltered apartment arrangement was developed with three men moving into a local apartment. This program allowed significant individual freedom, as residents were able to live much more independently and begin working in the community.

In 1981 there was the addition of a Tennessee Housing Development Agency that sponsored group home living that served eight women. Again, a lawsuit was brought about questioning appropriate zoning and Tullahoma again fought a battle on behalf of all retarded individuals. This battle was won – upholding the retarded citizen's rights to live in neighborhoods in normal settings without being segregated or isolated.

In 1982 the Tennessee Housing Development Agency approved a second group home facility and in 1985 this home was completed and serves ten men in rural Coffee County. This brought Skills Development Services, Inc. residential program service to 28 local individuals.

After several years of persons in Lincoln County attempting to begin a program to serve individuals with mental retardation in their area, an appropriation from the Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation, through the State Legislature, was approved in 1982 whereby funds were made available to initiate such services. Also in July 1982, the Tennessee Department of Human Services approved “expansion monies” for Skills Development Services, Inc., enabling the program to serve more individuals. These two things made possible for Skills Development Services, Inc. to expand its program to operate and provide services through a satellite adult activity center for individuals with mental retardation citizens of Lincoln County in November of 1982.

In 1985 Skills Development Services, Inc. was asked to take over a local children's program serving handicapped preschoolers. By obtaining State Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation funding Skills Development Services was able to triple early childhood intervention services available to local infants and toddlers. After several moves, including an arrangement whereby the Skills Development Services School for Childhood Development was integrated with a local day care center, SDS, through funding by Coffee County ARC, erected a building in 1987. With the new SCD building, again funding was increased and services were made available to children of a three county area.

1987 brought the purchase of a residential facility in Lincoln County. This purchase also began the agency's involvement with a new funding source – Medicaid Waiver. Residential services – group home living – became available for eight women in a large remodeled home in the community.

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In 1990 the Tullahoma Adult Day program facility expanded. Again, through the help and support of the Coffee County ARC, a 4500 square foot expansion project was completed. This project enlarged the workshop facility and capabilities, including loading dock access.

1991 brought additional growth to SDS, as they were asked to enter into a management contract for the operation of the Shelbyville/Bedford County Adult Activity Center. In 1993 that center became a satellite of Skills. This program provided adult day training and residential services to approximately 30 individuals from Bedford County. Since becoming a part of SDS a new group home was purchased, remodeled and put into operation. This group home served 4 residents and began the first step in our efforts to downsize residential facilities to house fewer individuals and provide more individualized, home like services.

The 1990's continued to be a time of growth and a time of quality change for people with mental retardation. Programs became more person-centered. The Individual Support Plan was developed by the state of Tennessee and implemented in the agency. The average population of people being served by SDS in the three counties was 140. Tennessee was in a class action lawsuit that assisted in better supports and services for the Service Recipients. The agency took on additional individuals who were class members from the lawsuit. They were from the Clover Bottom Developmental Center in Nashville. By the end of the decade SDS had 19 homes and three day programs.

As the 21st Century dawned the agency took on a new challenge with Supported Employment. The agency worked at having more Service Recipients supported to have jobs in each of the communities that are supported. Thanks to dedicated employees, the agency made good progress in this arena. As the agency moves toward 2009 there are 125 adults served, approximately 25 children per month served, 125 employees in three day programs and 18 homes. Skills Development Services, Inc. was chartered in November 1979. The charter brought together two programs serving individual with mental retardation in Coffee County, TN. The two programs merged were Coffee County Skills Adult Activity Center, Inc. (chartered in 1972) and Coffee County Skilled Living Centers, Inc. (chartered in 1962).

In 1973 negotiations were under way to serve more residents with mental retardation until a court injunction blocked the use of the home on Washington Street for purposes of housing these individuals. This home had been bought by the Coffee County ARC for the purpose of group home living. The Coffee County ARC chose to defend itself in a lawsuit on behalf of retarded citizens throughout Tennessee and the country. The lawsuit involved a zoning question regarding the establishment of a group home for retarded citizens in a residential neighborhood. The lawsuit was lost in Chancery Court, won in the State Court of Appeals and at the State Supreme Court but then lost again after a re-hearing in the State Supreme Court.

In 1981 another lawsuit was brought about questioning appropriate zoning and Tullahoma again fought a battle on behalf of all retarded individuals. This battle was won – upholding the retarded citizen's rights to live in neighborhoods in normal settings without being segregated or isolated. And then in 1982 the Tennessee Housing Development Agency approved a second group home facility.

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