

COVID-19 Update

April 20, 2020

North Metro Community Services

I know everyone is getting tired of being at home and anxious to know when we might reopen and when Day Program will get started again. We will have a better idea of the answers to those questions after the Governor speaks at 3:30 this afternoon. Currently North Metro is closed for regular business until May 4 and if we do reopen on that date it will be for staff only with a Day Program opening to follow later that week or the following Monday, May 11th. Please note, all of those dates are tentative at this point and subject to change, we have not yet committed to a firm reopening date.

The bigger question might be what will reopening look like? What we know for sure is that even if we are allowed to reopen it is going to be with a lot of precautions and a heavy emphasis on social distancing. Staff will continue to work remotely for the most part with scheduled times in our building to keep the numbers of people down so that we can follow social distancing recommendations. Masks will be required for anyone entering the buildings and there will be a strict “no visitors” policy. We will continue using Zoom for meetings and person to person contact and gatherings of more than a handful of staff won’t be allowed.

Once we get things in place for staff then we’ll start reopening Day Program. Robert, Tracy, Gary and their program managers are currently working on plans for the reopening of Day Program so I’m not in a position to tell you exactly what it will look like but I can assure you it’s not going to look like Day Program prior to March 13. We are working on an approach with smaller groups where people will be picked up at home, go to their activity and returned home without coming to one of our facilities. In the case of people who receive in-house programming there will only be a limited number of people and staff in those areas at one time. There will also continue to be Day Program offerings via Zoom. Again we are still finalizing our plans for Day Program but when it starts you may only have one or two days of programming a week so that we can maintain social distancing and keep people as safe as possible.

So stayed tune; we have already begun planning for reopening but whether that happens in a couple of weeks or another month is going to hinge on the direction we get from our Governor.

Another issue came up last week that I need to address. We all have different roles at North Metro and because of that you may get different direction from your supervisors. The job of a Resource Coordinator is very different than that of a DSP or someone working in accounting. In some ways Host Home Providers look a lot like Family Caregivers but in other ways they are quite different. Because of these differences you may not get the same direction on a specific topic as someone in a different department or someone who works in a different job. If you have a question call your supervisor or program manager; don’t rely on the direction given by a different supervisor in a different department.

Last week I was one of many people on a conference call with the Director of Health Care Policy and Financing, Kim Bimestefer. HCPF is the State agency that oversees and pays for the services we provide. I

have to thank Kim and her staff for going above and beyond to help agencies that provide services to people with IDD during these trying times. They have taken a number of steps to make our lives and the lives of the people we support easier like making sure no one loses eligibility during this crisis and waiving requirements for face-to-face meetings. There are times when I've complained about HCPF but this isn't one of them. They have really stepped up to make sure people continue to get what they need.

I know pretty much everyone just wants things to go back to the way they were before all of this started but unfortunately that isn't going to happen anytime soon; until there is a vaccine for COVID-19 or a cure that simply isn't possible. So far there is no miracle cure on the horizon and the development of a vaccine will take at least 18 months so social distancing and the other precautions we are taking are going to be the new "normal" for some time. Please don't start thinking there is going to be a point in a few weeks when you can let down your guard and start going to concerts or throwing a big party. If we are going to keep COVID -19 in check we're going to have to make some sacrifices and stick with those sacrifices for the long run, not just for a month or two. That's not to say that things won't start to reopen but when they do they are likely to look a lot different than what we knew before.

Until next week stay healthy and thank you for everything you are doing to support people with IDD.

Randy Brodersen
Executive Director