

## COVID-19 Update

May 11, 2020

### North Metro Community Services

You may know the Governor has really focused on the problem of COVID-19 in nursing facilities because of the number of deaths that have occurred there. This push has resulted in a higher level of scrutiny for all congregate living facilities including Group Homes like Clayton House. Part of this scrutiny includes in-person surveys to make sure we are following all the proper protocols. We weren't too thrilled when we heard this news. So far we've had no illness at Clayton House among staff or the people who live there and the idea of letting an outsider into the facility was anxiety provoking at best. This last week we finally had the survey and the facility passed with flying colors. The surveyor was impressed with the facility and all of the steps staff is taking to protect the people living there. So my hat is off to Residential in general, our nursing department and all the staff who are working at Clayton House; thanks for the great work you are doing and keeping people safe.

There is a growing level of frustration among people who attend our day program, their families, providers and the staff who work there over the fact that day services are only operating remotely. People are tired of staying home, they want to go out and do things and see their friends. I understand and I appreciate your frustration. However the people we support are defined under the Governor's order as a "vulnerable population". As such they are still expected to remain in their homes except to engage in "essential activities" and day program is not one of those activities. Our oversight agency at the State is Health Care Policy and Finance (HCPF) and they have made it clear that they do not want to see day programs reopen yet. Earlier this month North Metro began looking at ways it could start to phase in day services but HCPF made it clear they were not yet ready for that.

However last week on their briefing call HCPF informed us that they are working on guidelines for how day programs can reopen and that those guidelines could be released as early as this week. Hopefully this will allow us to restart day program relatively soon. I do have to temper this information with a statement that was made by HCPF on the call, which was that reopening congregate day program settings is "probably a long ways off". In other words we may be able to get people out into the community sometime soon but we won't see large gatherings of people at our facilities any time soon. Remember gathering of more than 10 people are still prohibited so any kind of day programming is going to be done in small groups in the community. The days of large gatherings and "socials" at day program are going to be off the agenda for the foreseeable future.

Rest assured though that we too want to get day program open again and are doing our homework on how we can accomplish that. However we are also committed to only providing programming if we can provide it safely. This is not a simple task but it is part of the puzzle every organization that is trying to reopen faces in today's environment and we will do our best to solve it as soon as we can.

We continue to watch as the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) crafts this year's state budget. As you may know the JBC, which is made up of three senators and three representatives is tasked with creating the budget that the legislature will submit to the Governor. The JBC began meeting again last week and though they haven't started making the hard decisions yet they have shown a lot of support for funding services for people with IDD. How that support will translate into the actual budget is yet to be seen. Tomorrow the latest revenue projections will be coming out and the rumor is that they will be worse than the ones we saw last month. Some are saying that instead of a \$3.2 billion revenue shortfall it may be closer to \$4 billion which would be nearly one third of the State General Fund. Consequently everyone will be getting cuts and about the best we can hope for is that the support we have at JBC will mean that our cuts are not as deep as others.

We have started making plans for how we will deal with the cuts when they come and I expect the entire agency will be impacted in one way or another. This could include the programs we can offer, staffing levels, salaries and provider rates. I don't raise these things to alarm you but I feel an obligation to make clear what I believe is on the horizon. Our Agency, our State, our Country, our world in fact is in for the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression and we all need to be getting ourselves ready for that as best we can. It is not a time for panic but a time for resolve and responsibility. North Metro has done a lot of great things over the years and my goal, as well as that of our management team and the board of directors is to make sure that we can continue that legacy and continue to bring supports to people with IDD and their families.

Thank you for everything you are doing for people with IDD during these trying times. Stay healthy and you can look for another update next Monday.

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