

## COVID-19 Update

May 11, 2020

### North Metro Community Services

North Metro has now been closed for 9 weeks, though I have to say it feels like a lot longer than that. Last week Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) released guidelines for re-opening Day Programs, however those guidelines are very restrictive. First off they do not want us serving anyone who falls into a high risk category or the housemates of those individuals. We cannot provide transportation except on a one on one basis for “essential activities”, which makes it difficult to get people in and makes any kind of community participation difficult. There is also a limit of 10 people in any group including staff and the real problem; only one group of ten in any single building and that would also include any other staff that happens to be in the building. This means if we have a two people in Finance, two people in Administration, someone from maintenance or janitorial or a couple people in Data Safe then they too count against the 10 person limit. This effectively makes our main building unusable for Day Program.

I raised this issue with HCPF staff last week and as a result I am having a phone conference with them tomorrow. This is not only an issue for North Metro but for a number of agencies that have larger facilities or facilities that house both Day Program and other staff functions. I am hopeful that the fact that this impacts a number of providers will work in our favor and HCPF will be open to considering some alternative to their cap of 10 people per facility.

Currently Robert Hunter, our Day Services Director and his staff are working on options for how we can safely resume Day Program but it is going to take a while as we work through all of the direction that has been provided. I am reluctant to offer any timelines until after my call tomorrow but I am hopeful that we can start offering Day Program again in the coming weeks.

The State budget continues to move forward slowly. The revenue projection that came out last Tuesday was not much different than the April projection; instead of a \$3.2 billion shortfall it is now projected to be \$3.3 billion. At this point we are expecting an across the board cut to all Medicaid provider rates, which would include all of our rates. No one can be sure what that cut will be until the JBC makes their final decisions but those decisions have to come yet this week. As one lobbyist said the JBC has worked 3 weeks and cut \$1.3 billion from the budget and now they have 3 days to cut the remaining \$2 billion. This means there just isn't enough time for surgical cuts, which is why we believe across the board cuts are coming. The question is how large will the cuts be? The rumor is that there will be a 5% cut. That would be miraculously minimal given the scope of the revenue shortfalls but we should know for sure by the end of this week.

You may have heard that last week we furloughed 15 people and laid off 4 more. By placing people on “furlough” we can continue their health insurance but at the same time those people will be able to draw unemployment benefits. Best case scenario we could bring these people back but given what I've

just been talking about I don't think it is realistic to think that all of them will be able to return. Under the Day Program guidelines I mentioned earlier we will not be able to serve at least a third of the people we've served in the past in Day Program because they are at high risk with COVID 19. The harsh reality is that if we lose a third of our Day Program we simply won't need as many people to provide that service. Though we hated taking this step we have to start preparing ourselves for the hard times ahead.

The good news is that actual infections of COVID-19 among staff or the people we support have been almost non-existent. I think that is a testament to how seriously you all have taken this disease and the precautions you've taken to protect yourselves and the people we serve. Thank you for all of your efforts.

I'm not certain holidays really apply at this point but since next Monday is Memorial Day you can expect another update on Tuesday May 26. Until then stay safe and healthy.

Randy Brodersen  
Executive Director