



Serving Children and Adults with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities for 70 Years

May 29, 2020

PAUL TORRES
Executive Director

Dear AHRC Suffolk Individuals, Families and Staff:

Our day programs have now been closed for eleven weeks due to COVID-19, and as each week passes we recognize the many ways individuals we support are impacted. While those who reside in AHRC Suffolk group residences continue to receive Day Habilitation services in their homes, and services are available to individuals living with family or loved ones, we recognize this does not replicate the true experience of attending a day program on-site each day. Unfortunately, there are many aspects of “pre-COVID-19” daily experiences that are more challenging to accommodate during this time of staying home and socially distancing, such as emotional connections with peers and staff, seeing friends face-to-face and sharing hands-on experiences.

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Thanks to the creativity and advocacy of one of our house managers, we recently hosted a Town Hall-style meeting via Zoom with the spectacular residents and staff at one of our IRAs. Residents expressed how much they are missing family members, friends and the meaningful interactions with those who are important to them. This call is a stark reminder to all of us of the significance of tactile and face to face interactions that are temporarily lost. Our essential residential and day services teams continue to develop and support creative ways for individuals to connect with family members, friends and staff. Phone and video calls continue, virtual and interactive classes are offered, and there have even been some special socially-distanced visits to residents from family members, who remain outside the houses and interact through windows, across driveways or across porches. Discussions continue about how we can better meet the desires to interact with loved ones and friends, while still recognizing the importance of keeping people safe and protected. It is a delicate and challenging balancing act AND it is also important that we get it right. Our incredible staff endeavor to continue to find new and creative ways to maintain that delicate balance.

As I have mentioned in recent updates, we anticipate OPWDD inspections of our residences to begin soon. These inspections aim to assess that the proper procedures for infection prevention and control, health status monitoring and utilization of appropriate cleaning supplies and PPE are being maintained. I am happy to say that for the third week in a row, we have no new COVID-19 positive cases for individuals or staff. That is a true testament to the quality of our programs, the procedures we have in place and the vigilance of our residential and day staff partnership in upholding safety protocols.

We just launched a fun and easy new initiative called Send A Smile, which asks people to write a message of encouragement that can be shared with individuals and staff to help keep spirits lifted during this time. Using this [link](#), people can send a favorite quote, a story that’s inspired them, or a meaningful and personal message which will be shared with our staff and individuals. I encourage you all to take a moment and send a special message to our community. I am sure each and every note will be appreciated. You can even send links to favorite online activities like quizzes and games for others to try out.

As optimistic as we are that we are all doing the best that we can, we must recognize how hard things have been even in the face of how well we have been doing as a team. The last few months have challenged us all in ways we never expected or could anticipate. I recognize that *just because someone carries it all so well doesn’t mean it’s not heavy*. Please know that we support each and every one of you, and if you are in need of help, please do not hesitate to ask. We may not have all the answers, we may not have a solution for every circumstance, but we are a true team, we support each other and we are #Inittogether.

Stay Well,

Paul H. Torres
Executive Director



Your gift to our COVID-19 Relief Fund helps us purchase personal protective equipment, provide expanded medical and mental health services, increase our technology, and so much more. To donate, visit www.ahrcsuffolk.org/covidrelief (donations, marked Covid-19 Relief Fund, can also be mailed to the address at the top of this page)