

March 28, 2020

Dear Charles River Community,

I want to assure you that our residential programs, support to families, and in-home supports are fully operational and will continue throughout the pandemic. Rest assured there are robust measures in place to keep our staff and residents healthy and to develop creative activities to engage our residents while in their homes. Even during the challenging times of the last few weeks, there are many, many heartfelt moments occurring throughout the agency. Families are connecting with their loved ones via technology; virtual activities are being done such as Zumba, exercises and music; neighbors are sending well wishes with chalk images on the driveways and beautiful cards.

Managing a large organization during a pandemic requires the coordination of every aspects of operations. The coronavirus outbreak is exponentially complex because the information from the medical community changes, as they struggle to fully understand how to contain the spread of the virus. We have been working rigorously to implement the current guidance from the CDC, DPH, and the Board of Health in our communities.

Our primary concern is for the welfare of our persons served and our employees. With these priorities in mind, allow me to explain how we have organized, the procedures that are in place, and what we are currently focused on.

Programmatic:

- In keeping with our COOP Plan (Continuity of Operations Plan), we formed an interdisciplinary Leadership Team that meets daily and communicates weekly with the entire residential management team.
- Formed centralized teams to organize supply orders, nursing supports, food supplies, recreational/activity planning, IT hardware and infrastructure, purchasing cleaning/disinfecting and protective equipment, staffing, training, and human resources.
- Implemented the COVID-19 guidance from DPH for Residential and Congregate Care Programs.
- Trained and implemented proper cleaning/disinfecting procedures per the DPH guidance and universal precautions.
- Trained staff in the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and how to monitor persons served.
- Developed and implemented assessment procedures for screening staff as they come on shift.
- Our nursing team developed and trained staff on regular wellness check procedures for the persons served.
- Family Support staff are in regular contact with the families and provide assistance as needed.

- In-home supports staff are contacting the residents daily and provide assistance as needed.
- Developed communication plans in the event, staff or persons served are symptomatic, awaiting test results, confirmed positive, or quarantined.

Administrative:

- Day programs closed March 17, 2020. Day staff were reassigned to residential programs.
- Imposed a “No Visitor Policy” on March 20th, which included family members, vendors, neighbors, Charles River support teams, and all delivery services.
- Inventoried our available Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) and prioritized buying more to add to our supply.
- Adhered to the Governor’s Stay-at Home Order which expires April 7th. Day programs will be closed until then, pending further developments.
- The business office is fully operational. As it happens, we are also in the process of converting our payroll system.
- Human Resources and the Leadership Team are working on the implementation of the new Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which takes effect on April 1, 2020. This expands paid sick leave and paid leave policies to our employees with issues related to their work schedules during the pandemic.
- Communicated with the Board of Health and DPH Nurses within each of our communities to let them know what we are doing and to discuss communication expectation throughout this healthcare crisis. We are required to follow their guidance when anyone displays symptoms, have tests pending, or tests positive.

Advocacy:

- I am working with the Arc of Massachusetts as well as trade organizations such as the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers and the Provider’s Council to advocate for the needs of the people served and our agency. We face tremendous challenges in ensuring adequate funding with the loss of revenue from the day programs, additional staffing costs, and increased expenses as the pandemic continues.
- We are fortunate to have a very involved State Representative in Denise Garlick. As a friend of the Charles River Center, she is keenly aware of our concerns for the health and safety of our staff, families, and persons served. In her new role as a member of the five-person House leadership work group, we are in regular contact about the challenges that are before us and needed advocacy.

Our commitment to our families, residents, self-advocates, and employees is to have open and transparent communication throughout. We will communicate directly with you and officials to discuss exposure risks identified by the Board of Health and DPH, while maintaining strict confidentiality. During times like this, trust is critical, and we will

continue to earn your trust with our communication and provision of care to your family member.

We are thankful for the many community partners that have connected with us offering their assistance with food delivery, care packages, PPEs and virtual activities.

I am eternally grateful for the amazing efforts of so many people. The Charles River Center is fortunate to have a dedicated Board of Directors, leadership team and staff that are continuing to work hard to ensure that the needs of those we serve are continuing to be met. Despite the unprecedented circumstances, we are optimistic that our community will navigate these uncertain times with a spirit of empathy and understanding.

Our community always pulls together when we face difficult challenges. While this may be one of the greatest challenges in our lifetimes, we are committed to the well-being of those we serve.

Stay well,

Anne-Marie Bajwa
President and CEO