

LETTER TO FAMILIES

MAY 10, 2021



Dear DDDS Service Recipients and Families,

I hope this letter finds you well as our seasons change, once again, and we start getting into the late spring and summer months. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact the state and our DDDS network as a whole. This letter serves to update you on the status and next steps as we continue to navigate uncharted waters while the virus remains active in Delaware.

### Residential Habilitation Update

Over the last 14 months, 300 service recipients receiving Residential Habilitation services have tested positive for COVID-19. Of those 300 service recipients, tragically we have had 23 deaths. Among the direct support professionals (DSPs) who work in residential and day services, we have had a total of 422 positive cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. DSPs have worked extremely hard to minimize the spread to each other and to service recipients using mitigation tools such as PPE, frequent handwashing, and social distancing. The hopeful news is that the number of positive cases has seemingly stabilized. We have not had a new case with a service recipient in the last two weeks! This is the first time since the fall surge, and hopefully a trend that will continue.

Due to what appears to be a stabilization among service recipients and the mass vaccination of over 2600 service recipients and family caregivers in March & April, I am thrilled to announce that effective Friday May 14<sup>th</sup>, we will begin **Phase Three of Visitor Access** in residential habilitation sites. Phase Three Visitor Access hinges on the continued excellent communication between provider organizations and family members. Please be sure to contact your loved one's provider in advance to be sure it is safe to enter the home. The specific details are outlined below:

- Visitors must call ahead to ensure no one is on quarantine in the home. If anyone is on quarantine or pending testing results for an exposure, no indoor visit may occur.
- If 70% of the service recipients in the home have been fully vaccinated, visits may occur in any of the common spaces in the home. Visitors must wear face masks the entire time.

- If less than 70% of the service recipients in the home have been fully vaccinated, visits may occur in the private bedroom of the service recipient only. Visitors must wear face masks during the visit and while walking in any of the common spaces.
- Providers may require temperature and COVID symptom screening before visitors are allowed into the home.
- Visitor logs must be kept in case there is a need for contact tracing should a home have a COVID exposure.
- To reduce cross exposure, visits will be limited so that only one service recipient has visitors in the home at a time.
- Providers have the discretion to limit the number of visits occurring so as to not disrupt the household. This means, initially, multiple visits per week may not be permissible. We need to be mindful of the other families who want to visit as well.
- Outdoor visits and home visits are encouraged, as detailed in Phase Two.

I am sure the move to indoor visits in residential habilitation sites is welcome news to you. Please keep in mind that during the pandemic, for the health and safety of service recipients, there were limited people permitted in the homes. Emergency maintenance repairs were completed, but routine non-urgent maintenance issues may still exist. Providers are working to resolve these issues with contractors and technicians, but the internal state of the home may appear less maintained than would typically be expected or permitted. Additionally, having people back in the homes may be overwhelming for your loved one and their housemates.

### **Congregate/Facility-Based Services**

Again, in conjunction with what appears to be a stabilization in positive cases and a large number of fully vaccinated service recipients, we are working with our provider network to plan for more service recipients to come back to their day programs in-person over the coming months. Our provider network is using this time to recruit and fill vacancies while training staff on COVID protocols. Expect to hear updates in the next few weeks from DDDS and your loved one's Support Coordinator, Columbus Community Navigator, and/or their day service provider. We are planning for a staggered transition, focusing initially on those who are fully vaccinated. Virtual day programming will continue to be provided as it has been by your loved one's day service provider during the pandemic.

While the news that we are progressing and moving towards a new normal is exciting, we cannot forget that the pandemic still exists. Please continue to follow the guidelines from the CDC and the Division of Public Health. Wear facemasks indoors, wash your hands, and maintain the recommended social distance from anyone not in your household. If you are symptomatic or have been exposed to anyone with COVID-19, get tested at one of the many locations around the state. Use this link to find a site: <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/testing/>. And remember, the COVID-19 vaccine is readily available to anyone over the age of 16 in Delaware right now. You can find vaccine locations at <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine/where-can-i-get-my-vaccine/>

As always, please do not hesitate to reach out to your loved one's Support Coordinator, Columbus Community Navigator, or the DDDS Family Resource unit should you need any assistance.

Thank you for your on-going patience and understanding as DDDS and our provider network continue to plan for the safe resumption of services, in a deliberate, methodical, and cautious manner. We want

nothing more than for your loved ones to be able to fully engage in their good lives once again, safely.  
We are all in this together and will get through it together.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP

Director of Community Services