

NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

Thursday, March 26, 2020

To Our Community,

First and foremost, I hope that this letter finds you and your families safe and healthy. Here at NCSS, in the Developmental Services (DS) division we find ourselves in the midst of a National Pandemic that is unprecedented. We are committed to continuing to provide all essential services, as ordered by our Governor and the department of Developmental Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). I want to give you straight forward and honest information; I apologize if it feels delayed. The fact that our information has been changing hourly has given me reason to pause, wanting to hold off on sending out information until we had a clear long term support plan in place.

To date NCSS has had significant community service hours canceled by you the families, individuals and shared living providers. I applaud you for putting the safety of your families and individuals served first. We have had a week to evaluate this and to await clear directives from the VT. Department of Health and the Governor. We have been ordered to pull back all face to face services as of this Friday, so that means that **ALL COMMUNITY SUPPORTS provided by direct staff is SUSPENDED.**

Gov. Phil Scott ordered Vermonters Tuesday to “stay home” and “stay safe” to slow the outbreak of the coronavirus in Vermont.

“The Governor’s order directs Vermonters to stay at home, leaving only for essential reasons, critical to health and safety,” “Effective March 25, 2020 at 5:00 p.m., all businesses and not-for-profit entities not expressly exempted in the order must suspend all in-person business operations” (VT Digger 3/24/20)

We recognize there will be emergent needs; DS is developing a drop in site at 27 Lower Newton Street (Academy of Learning) that can be utilized (Starting April 1st) by all families, individuals, guardians and shared living providers. By calling **802-393-6628** you can leave a message to pre-schedule a drop off time for individuals served where we can keep “social spacing”, and have staff available while you attend to emergent needs, e.g. doctor appointment, grocery shopping, attending to family members. Cleaning protocols will be in place in all areas, before and after individuals are served. This is not a drop off site for the entire day, it is meant for emergent needs, and screening questions will be required to be sure no one entering is symptomatic.

This number **802-393-6628** can also be used to get staff to be deployed to support individuals that are considered “high risk”, providing well checks. Our Service Coordinators have identified individuals that have acute medical needs, live alone, and need medication delivery, meal preparation etc... We will assign our core emergency staff to do check in’s or onsite assistance as needed.

NCSS has offered a voluntary lay off for our *direct staff* that has their own family emergencies to tend to, children without child care, elder parents, and their own compromised health. The staffs that have asked for the layoff have been granted a 30 day period. We still retain staffing that is willing and able to deploy and keep our residential programs up and running.

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You need to be aware that your Services Coordinator's, their Team Leaders and DS leadership are all still connected daily and providing full services. If you need help, information, respite or any assistance you need to contact your Services Coordinator immediately or call the emergency number **802-393-6628**.

If you are a family member and need respite services and do not have access to supports let us know. If you are now isolated as shared living providers without community supports or respite in your home let your Service Coordinator know. The State has granted us the ability to move funding within waivers to support these emergent needs, we will prioritize these needs. ***To all Shared Living Providers you should also be aware that all respite providers who are out of work should contact the unemployment office. They should be eligible for unemployment services and this may help you to retain your contracted employees.***

Finally, I wish I had a crystal ball and could tell you all how this will look a week or month from now, I do not. What I can tell you is that as an Agency we are working round the clock to be sure essential needs are met. As a Division we have a core staff that is absolutely committed to providing supports to keep everyone wrapped safe. I personally ask for your patience and some grace as we navigate the unknown path that COVID-19 is leading us all down.

I want to personally promise we will be honest, forthright and committed to you all. My personal number is 802-782-3621 if you have an emergent need I want to know. The enclosed emergency contact number will be manned by experienced staff that can help resolve your daily challenges. Your Service Coordinators are remotely armed and available and our **Crisis Team** is accessible at **802-393-6688**.

Be Well Stay Safe
Deepest Regards,



Kathleen M. Brown, MA
Director Developmental Services

Important State Information is available at:

<https://dail.vermont.gov/novel-coronavirus-information>

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>

Also on NCSS website Governors updates:

<https://www.ncssinc.org>