



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

August 25, 2020

Dear DDDS Families,

As we move into the fall months and the start of the school year, whatever form it may be in, I wanted to write to provide a status update on the operations of services for your loved one(s). To say COVID-19 has disrupted our lives is an understatement. As each day passes and the news continues about new cases and community spread, I know that we will not have a quick return to life as we knew it. After almost six months, what we do know is that all of us are in a sort of holding pattern for the time being, which I know feels frustrating.

For those living in provider managed residential habilitation settings, those sites continue to not allow anyone in except for direct support staff who are providing essential services. Family visits can occur outside in an open air environment or in the family's own home, provided there are no underlying health issues to contend with and no positive COVID-19 cases in the provider managed setting or in the family home. During a visit, face masks must be worn by family members and social distancing, as much as possible, must be maintained. For those service recipients who have not had a chance for a family visit due to underlying health conditions in either party, I encourage you and the provider to consider virtual/remote visits using Skype, Facetime, Teams, Google, Zoom or your medium of choice. Starting in September, Consultative Nurses will resume in-person visits to a select subset of provider managed residential settings. Consultative Nurses will only be going to sites where no one has an underlying health condition that makes them more vulnerable. It goes without saying, but the Consultative Nurses will be wearing facemasks, practicing hand hygiene, following social distancing guidelines and not touching anyone while in the home.

For those who attended day services before COVID-19, I know service recipients have had very limited access to programming. A very small number of service recipients are able to comply with the face covering and social distancing mandates to return during Stage One. Additionally, some providers are not permitted to re-open in-person services due to their national organization's rules. We are working through all of these issues and trying to find viable alternatives. I have asked day providers to explore the option of remote/virtual services which would entail service recipients logging in from a device at home to participate in some of their usual day program activities. Most providers are still in the exploratory phase of this option right now, but I'm hoping this will become a feasible offering this fall. At this point, I do not expect any day provider will be able to support any service recipient in-person if they cannot wear a face covering and practice social distancing for quite some time. We know COVID-19 is spread via droplets and face coverings and social distancing are the only strategies that exist to reduce the spread, aside from a complete lockdown. This is why I'm hoping a virtual/remote day program option will be attainable. It is important to note that remote/virtual day services are shorter in duration than a full in-person service day; interested providers are looking to create schedules of virtual/remote programming for an hour or so at a time. If your loved one's provider is able to offer virtual/remote programming, the service recipient will be notified. Again, most providers are just getting into the details of exploring if and how they can operationalize it; more details will be coming out in the coming weeks.

In closing, while life as we knew it has come to a halt in most ways, DDDS Support Coordinators and Columbus Community Navigators continue to work daily to support service recipients. Using video technology, text messaging, email and the old fashioned telephone, they remain available to assist your loved one. Do not hesitate to reach out to them or the Family Resource Unit for support or guidance. Thank you for your patience as we navigate this uncharted path. Please continue to wear your face mask, practice social distancing and wash your hands often. We will get through this 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