



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

July 15, 2020

Dear DDDS Families,

I hope this letter finds you well in these on-going challenging times. I know these past four months have been full of upset, chaos, confusion and questioning what the future looks like. We are all in this same pattern of not being sure when it will be safe to move forward to resuming life. Watching the number of COVID-19 positive cases increase around the state causes me great concern about when we will ever get back to the new normal.

At this point, we have had 50 service recipients who live in provider-managed settings test positive for COVID-19 and tragically 7 have lost their lives. Others continue in their struggle to beat the virus. This again highlights just how great the need is to follow the basic rules and guidelines we've all become familiar with during this time: wearing face coverings; avoiding unnecessary group gatherings; and washing hands on a regular basis with soap and water or using hand sanitizer.

We have been working with our provider network to begin planning for Stage One of re-opening congregate day services. Attached to this letter are two documents with more details about Stage One, which is tentatively scheduled to begin on August 3rd. Please note that August 3rd is the *soonest* congregate day services may re-open. Not every provider will re-open on this date. Life as we know it looks very different than it did before March 13th and the same is true about how day services will be offered during Stage One. The initial group of DDDS service recipients to attend congregate day services during Stage One must be healthy with no underlying health conditions that puts them at risk, must wear a face mask/face covering/face shield for the duration of their program each day, and must be able to abide by social distancing guidelines of staying six feet away from other people. These details are spelled out further in the "DDDS Stage One of Congregate Settings Re-Opening Guidance" document. The other document, "Service Recipient Acknowledgement Return to Day Services During COVID-19" is a required form for the service recipient or legal guardian to sign, acknowledging the requirements and expectations to participate in Stage One resumption of congregate day services. This signed form needs to be returned to your loved one's Support Coordinator, Community Navigator or MCO Care Coordinator before they will be allowed to attend their program. Individual providers may have their own form they require as well.

As you can imagine, planning to begin services in the midst of the pandemic is a daunting task. The DDDS provider network has been working around the clock to troubleshoot and anticipate needs. Because this is a brand new ballgame for us all, I ask your patience as providers work through the process. There will be many bumps in the road. There is a lot to be learned from this staged approach, which is why we are starting with the service recipients who are considered least vulnerable and who can follow the face covering and social distancing rules. My hope is that once providers get into a routine and pattern of how to best support service recipients in this new way, we will be able to begin inviting more service recipients back to their programs. This will take time for sure.

Speaking of time, the August 3rd timeframe is a goal we are working towards and is tentative. That is, if the number of COVID cases increase or the Governor issues an update to the emergency order, we may have to delay this re-opening date. I encourage you to work with your loved ones during these next few weeks to get them used to wearing face

coverings and practicing social distancing, if possible. Providers will be in contact with you in the coming weeks to talk about their own program plans and how your loved one fits into the plan.

DDDS continues to limit access to provider-managed residential settings to only those staff who are essential personnel. I do not plan on having other team members enter the sites unless it is absolutely necessary, again, with the goal to limit exposure. We do still have a fair number of sites where, due to the vulnerability of the people who live there, there have been no exposure to the outside world beyond their direct support staff.

Please continue to reach out to your loved one's DDDS Support Coordinator, Columbus Organization's Community Navigator or Managed Care Organization's Care Coordinator if you have any questions or need assistance. I appreciate your continued patience during these unprecedented times and truly believe we will get through this together.

Thank you and 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