

## Family Services Coronavirus Response

\*\*\*UPDATED June 15, 2020\*\*\*

Dear Friends,

We hope this letter finds you healthy in body and spirit! As the world, our country, and our community continues to grapple with the evolving COVID-19 crisis, we want to let you know how Family Services is responding. As you can imagine, the health and safety of Family Services' staff, and all the individuals and families we serve remains our top priority. Because we share in the collective duty to strengthen and care for our community, we want you to be informed about how this pandemic has affected our operations and our programs.

Since March 13, 2020 Family Services' staff have been working remotely and delivering as much programming and support as possible. **Although COVID-19 is primarily a physical health crisis, the toll it's taking on mental health is enormous.** Fear and isolation are the hallmarks of this pandemic. Family Services cannot treat a fever, but we can help people manage anxiety, cope with stress, and maintain self-care. To that end, we are taking the following steps to protect the health and build the resilience of our clients, volunteers, staff and stakeholders:

- Family Services' leadership is working closely with a large group of other nonprofit and municipal leaders **to coordinate a community-wide response** to COVID-19 and ensure that services for nutrition assistance, housing, health, education and emotional wellness are being ramped up and effectively coordinated. A comprehensive guide to resources in the Greater Lawrence community can be found here: [wearelawrence.org/coronavirus](http://wearelawrence.org/coronavirus)
- We are collaborating **with the Merrimack Valley YMCA to coordinate the distribution of essential items for babies** through their existing food pantry. More info here: [mvyymca.org/pantry](http://mvyymca.org/pantry)
- **Crisis helplines** are being provided by trained volunteers and staff to support individuals struggling with the emotional toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Online trainings and workshops** are being provided, including: self-care, mental health 101, parent support, virtual child welfare screening, and relationship education.

Since the statewide Phase 2 re-opening announced by Governor Charlie Baker in June, 2020, Family Services has modified its [COVID-19 Safety Guidelines](#) to allow some flexibility to serve individuals and families that were unable to access quality services remotely. In the current phase, program supervisors may allow in person service provision, under strict guidelines for distancing and face mask usage, to meet the needs of children, adults and families in need. These exceptions are made for individual service provision only. All group programs and meetings will remain virtual until further notice.

Family Services entered this crisis in a strong financial position. The organization has not yet had to cut back on staffing or service provision. Many of the organizations funders (private foundations and government grantors) have been very understanding and flexible in the use of funds, enabling us to shift operations and priorities. Several of our fee for service programs (mental health clinic and court mandated parent education) are feeling the financial impact of not being fully open for business. Most notably, Family Services fundraising activities have been dramatically impacted, as our annual gala and two additional fundraising events have been delayed.

In the short term, we feel confident in our ability to maintain all staff and all services. Although the volume and effectiveness of many of our services are greatly diminished, especially those that rely on group activities, each week **our staff connect with over 1,000 clients!** As the future of the virus and the economy remains uncertain, we will continue to be creative, flexible and resourceful to do all we can to support individuals and families.

There will be a long-lasting impact on our communities and there will surely be an increase in demands for services and programs. At Family Services, we stand ready to respond as needed. To date, we have been inspired by the humanity and determination we've have seen from all corners of our local and larger communities.

Thank you for supporting Family Services as we work to support others. We wish you good health!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth Sweeney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Elizabeth Sweeney  
Chief Executive Officer