

Family Services Coronavirus Response

UPDATED September 15, 2020

Dear Friends,

As the world, our country, and our community continue to grapple with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, we want to let you know how Family Services is responding and how the pandemic is changing our operations and programming. As always, in all decisions, the health and safety of Family Services' staff and all the individuals and families we serve is our top priority.

Since March 13, 2020 Family Services' staff have been working remotely and delivering as much programming and support as possible. As summer turns to fall, we will remain largely remote, while slowly bringing back some in person services.

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, Family Services has implemented many initiatives aimed at building the resilience of our clients, volunteers, staff and stakeholders in the face of this crisis:

- Family Services' leadership has been 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
- 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
- **Crisis helplines** have been provided by trained volunteers and staff to support individuals struggling with the emotional toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Online trainings and workshops** have been provided, including: back to school stress management, self-care, mental health 101, parent support, virtual child welfare screening, and relationship education.

Since Governor Charlie Baker began the phased "re-opening of the state in June, 2020, Family Services has modified its [COVID-19 Safety Guidelines](#) to allow some flexibility to serve individuals and families that have been unable to access quality services remotely. Currently, Family Services' 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.

Each of Family Services 20+ programs have implemented flexible and creative solutions to providing services. Below is a broad overview of each program area's plans heading into the fall 2020:

- **Youth Development:** Family Services' youth development programs include community and academic based mentoring as well as group programming for health and wellness. The focus of our youth development efforts is on facilitating healthy relationships between youth and adults and peers. While we remain largely virtual in that effort, this fall may see some in-person activities. Youth mentoring services continue to recruit, train and match youth and adult mentors virtually, and are allowing some in person contact following strict guidelines. Academic mentoring will take place virtually to begin the year. Group programs that traditionally take place in a school setting will continue virtually, with occasional small groups meeting at Family Services as needed.
- **Parent Education:** Most of Family Services' work to support parents is happening on a one-to-one bases and happening virtually. Since the onset of the pandemic in March, the focus of parent education and support efforts have shifted from providing education and training on parenting skills, to focusing on helping parents navigate their child's education employment and basic needs. However, virtual group programming has taken place and the organization is planning to hold small in person group programs onsite beginning in October, 2020. These groups will be kept below 10 persons and involve strict health and social distancing precautions. Child care and meals will not be provided at this time.
- **Mental Health:** The most concerning secondary effect of the COVID-19 pandemic may prove to be a mental health crisis. The pandemic has caused many people to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, and has erected obstacles to care for people who had previously been struggling. In March, 2020, Family Services' mental health clinic began providing telehealth sessions for all clients. Beginning with the state's phased re-opening, the organization is now seeing some clients in the office when telehealth sessions are not accessible or useful. Family Services also continues to operate it's suicide crisis helpline, which has seen an increase in calls and requests for support.

We, along with the rest of the country, are adapting and changing our practices ever week as we learn more about effective precautions and as the risk levels fluctuate. What has remained constant is the need to ramp up new service models to help children and families navigate these extremely stressful circumstances. As the pandemic continues, we know there will be a long-lasting impact on our communities and there will surely be an increase in demands for services and programs. We stand ready to respond as needed.

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

Warmly,



Elizabeth Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer