

June 9, 2020

## **An update from our COO to parents and guardians about visits**

Dear Bethesda Parents and Guardians,

We know how difficult it has been over the past two months without being able to see your loved one in person. We very much want to be able to allow in-person visits. But as you know we need to balance that with the need to keep the people we support and our staff safe and healthy.

We have developed a plan to begin to allow for visits starting as early as next week – this is a target date only. This will be determined largely by the following criteria:

- Local regulations
- Health risk factors of the people we support
- Community data trends
- Program readiness

Whether visits are permitted will be a local and regional decision based on the team's judgment using the best information available. Please note that for now, visits will be tightly controlled, with safety protocols in place. People will gather outdoors on our property while maintaining social distancing. Everyone will wear masks and avoid physical touching or hugging.

**Next steps:** We will reach out to you personally when a visit is possible. At that time, we will provide details about when it may happen and what it will look like. Please review the FAQ below for additional information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to your local team. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate this challenging time together.

Regards,

Dave Sneddon

Chief Operating Officer

### **FAQ**

#### **Q. My state/community is opening up. When will Bethesda return to business as usual?**

A. We truly understand and sympathize the desire to go back to normal. We want that too. But the risks presented by COVID-19 are real, and they have not vanished. What may be right for a retail shop may not be right for a group home. Every state, county and community is different, and their status can change by the day.

Because the people we support often have comorbidities that make them especially vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, we need to be extra careful before we change how we operate. We are keeping close tabs on each of our homes and people supported and are actively planning for in-person visits as soon as possible, with proper precautions in place. This will be a home-by-home and individual by individual decision – not all will open at once.

**Q. What is the current status of Bethesda’s programs?**

A. As of June 9, 2020, all Bethesda homes are at Level 3 or higher, meaning “high risk” (see below for a description of all levels). Therefore, no visitors are allowed in person. Bethesda Day programs continue to be closed. We monitor each local situation to make a home-by-home determination of level, balancing the need for safety with the need for people we support to see their loved ones in person.

**NEW:** Ordinarily, it would be necessary to move to Level 2, meaning “precaution,” before any visits could be allowed. However, we feel it is prudent to allow for a loosening of restrictions in what we are calling a “Phased Down Level 3.”

**Q. Can you remind me about the various levels of risk and what they mean?**

- Level 1 is “prevention,” meaning an initial concern is noted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) but not occurring in any states in which we operate.
- Level 2 is “precaution,” when the illness/disease has been confirmed by the CDC in a state in which we operate.
- Level 3 is “high risk,” when the illness/disease has been confirmed by the CDC in the local community in which we operate as determined by the local health department.
  - *All Bethesda homes are at this level or higher as of June 9, 2020.*
- Level 4 is “exposure/isolation,” when the illness/disease has been confirmed by a physician within a program that we operate (person supported or employee) or the team has reason to believe there has been direct exposure.

**Q. What will guide your decisions?**

A. We will consider four official “gating” criteria to allow for a move to Phased Down Level 3 and visits:

- **Local regulations:** We must comply with federal, state and county regulations. Depending on the type of licensure they have, two homes in the same county may differ as to whether they can have visitors.
- **Health risk factors:** This is perhaps the most important consideration. We will look at comorbidities that make individuals more susceptible to infection, or if the result of infection could be more severe due to a condition. We do not want people to become sick or even die as a result of visits.
- **Community data trends:** Specifically, we will look for a 14-day downward trend in new cases within a county. Please note this does not mean each day has to show a decrease – just a trend.
- **Program readiness:** We will assess if the facility would physically allow for sufficient social distancing, with a preference for homes that have adequate private or outdoor space.

**Q. If all four criteria are met, does that mean a visit is guaranteed?**

A. Not necessarily. We will rely on the judgment of the local team and regional leadership, as they know the people they support and the home situation the best.

One reason we would not open would be if we suspect a big spike in community cases is coming – for example, following a holiday like Memorial Day or other large gatherings where it is apparent that social distancing and hygiene recommendations were not being followed. Data on this wouldn't show up officially until it was too late.

**Q. What will a visit look like?**

A. Once an individual home moves to a Phased Down Level 3, a visit will be tightly controlled, with safety protocols in place. People will gather outdoors on our property while maintaining social distancing. Everyone will wear masks and avoid physical touching or hugging.

**Q. When will visits begin?**

A. We are hopeful to allow for visits starting the week of June 15. This is a \*target date\* only. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case and person-by-person basis.

**Q. How will I know if a visit is possible?**

A. We will be in touch as soon as we have determined it is safe to visit. You are also welcome to call us to inquire.

**Q. How many people can visit at a time?**

A. While this is at the discretion of the home and leadership, generally speaking, two people will be permitted.

**Q. What days/times will visits be possible?**

A. Visits will take place when it is least disruptive to the home. Times to be avoided include mealtimes or when medications are being distributed.

**Q. How long will visits be?**

A. That will be determined by the team in the home, in concert with leadership, but an hour is a good guideline. We want to make sure there is enough time for a visit to be meaningful, while being mindful of staffing and other considerations.

**Q. Can a person supported go for a walk up the street during a visit?**

A. Not now. Outside of the controlled environment it is more likely to be exposure to the coronavirus.

**Q. If visits are not allowed, what is my loved one doing to stay active/engaged?**

A. We have a wide variety of activities in each home to keep the people we support engaged physically, intellectually and spiritually. This includes a growing list of online classes and events such as our Friday night dance party. You can learn all about what we are offering at our website, [BethesdaLC.org](https://BethesdaLC.org), and please check

with your home about what activities are taking place there. Feel free to drop off games and crafts for your loved one and others as well.

**Q. If visits are not allowed, how can I connect with my loved one?**

A. We strongly encourage video visits via Zoom, which have been popular, or phone calls.

**Q. Can I just wave to them, or knock on their window?**

A. While that sounds harmless, it really isn't. It can be disruptive to others in the home and potentially confusing or concerning to your loved one. So we cannot permit this. Thank you for understanding.

**Q. Can I take my loved one home for a visit? We will just be at home and not go anywhere.**

A. Unfortunately, we cannot allow at-home visits, even for a short period of time. This is for the health and safety of everyone involved. Our staff provides support under strict health protocols. While parents and guardians have the best intentions, we simply have no way to know whether a person supported has been exposed, and thereby poses a risk to others in a home if they return.

**Q. When will day programs reopen?**

A. This is to be determined in the future, on a program-by-program basis. Day programs present challenges with having multiple people supported in a closed, indoor environment. We may change programs to include fewer people or to add outdoor activities to promote social distancing. It is possible that some day programs will not reopen. However, we recognize the value of programs like this to keeping people we support active, and we are committed to finding safe ways to do so.

**Q. My loved one is really struggling. Can I remove him/her from their home?**

A. Of course. But we strongly discourage this. Please understand that they will not be able to return to their home for a minimum of two weeks. It is possible that those who leave will not have a place to return to later on – it depends on the local situation, including the managed care organization responsible for funding and placement. That said, we are open to exploring options if necessary.

**Q. How can I stay informed?**

A. There are many ways to stay in touch with us. You are always welcome to talk with your local Bethesda team. We have information on our website, [BethesdaLC.org](https://BethesdaLC.org). Look for the "COVID-19" information link. At the site, you can sign up for regular email updates. Each Tuesday at 3 p.m. CT and Wednesday at 7 p.m. CT Mike Thirtle hosts live town hall meetings exclusively for parents and guardians, where he provides the latest information and answers questions. You can access the call-in information at the website. Finally, we have established a toll-free hotline (866-468-6960) with regularly updated information. We welcome your feedback and ideas on any additional ways we can keep you connected with us.