July 30, 2020

Dear Devereux Families:

We hope this note finds you and your family and friends doing well, and staying healthy during this difficult time. We know how hard the last months have been on all our Devereux Families. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the whole world, and like most complicated societal and health issues, caring for a loved one with a special need adds an even greater level of complexity and worry. Your dedication to your loved one in our care is humbling, and we work hard to honor it every day.

For our families and individuals in care, we know one of the most challenging and frankly, painful, aspects of this pandemic has been dealing with the healthcare sector’s restrictions on normal, and very necessary, family visitation with their loved ones in healthcare and long-term living settings. This struggle is not specific to behavioral healthcare providers; all medical and congregate-care settings across the country have had to at least temporarily suspend visitation to protect the health and safety of everyone – clients, staff and families in the community. Regardless of the universality of visitation restrictions, it is a terrible hardship on families not to see each other whenever they want.

Family visits and consistent engagement in treatment are among the most important aspects of quality care. Devereux is committed to this issue, and short of a deadly pandemic the size and scope of COVID-19, we are hard-pressed to think of an issue that would require temporary visitation restriction. We know our families expect us to be doing everything possible to create safe opportunities for families to be together, both remotely and in person. We also know that your chief concern and highest focus is the same as ours – doing everything possible to ensure that, together, we continue to protect your loved one, and everyone in our care, from COVID-19.

We wanted to share a few documents with you today to ensure you have all the details on how we are reviewing issues of health and safety – to support increased family visitation and all other matters of great programming – wherever and whenever it is safe to do so. Devereux is using a highly data-based approach to this issue, grounded in the best medical science available in the field. Specifically, our Operations, Clinical and Strategy leadership meet every single day to review all the new research available regarding COVID-19, its health impacts and its spread.

In those daily meetings, we review community infection data in every county in which we operate across the country. Decisions regarding family visitation, and all other aspects of programming, are reviewed every day, on a county-by-county basis. We are not taking a one-size fits all approach to this issue, as that would not serve our clients and families well. Every decision made for each unique residential campus, group home, day program or school program is made based on local data, and is responsive on a daily basis to all changes in that data.

Attached for your review, are a set of our daily data dashboards specific to the state in which your loved one receives programming from Devereux. Devereux built these very helpful electronic data tools in March, to ensure we have the latest and most useful data available to our operating teams on a real-time basis. These dashboards are updated daily, and we review them
every morning. In this way, we can be informed regarding what is safe, or not safe, for our clients and staff.

Our Chief Medical Officer, Yolanda Graham, M.D., has worked with the best research on COVID to establish a three-tiered review system to support the good use of this data. When any of our programs operate in a county meeting any two of the following three benchmarks, we begin to gradually relax restrictions, especially regarding family visitation:

1. Fewer than an average of 3.5 cases per 100k individuals in a 7-day rolling period
2. Total number of daily hospital deaths are declining in a rolling 7-day period
3. State hospitalization rates for COVID are declining in a rolling 7-day period

In some states or counties, these tiers of review may not align exactly with government guidelines for business re-openings – and this may be a cause of frustration for families. It is important to keep in mind that general municipal and state guidelines regarding business operations are designed to re-engage the general population in working and recreating in the community. Any guidelines designed to serve the needs of the general community, by definition, cannot be the identical guidelines healthcare providers use to protect the health and safety of clients in medical or therapeutic congregate care environments. The individuals Devereux serves are at higher risk for contracting COVID-19 due to a wide variety of behavioral and physical health issues. They need greater protections from COVID-19 than the general community, and these review tiers are designed specifically to provide for that.

The last document attached to this note is a community activity risk guide, which we have prepared to help support good decision-making regarding community activities during the time of COVID-19. Devereux is ensuring we do everything we can to keep our clients and staff safe through consistent mask wearing, physical distancing and hygiene and sanitization protocols. We ask our families do the same in their own activities. If we are all working together, as a unified team, on these matters, we will more quickly be able to reduce and eliminate visitation restrictions in a safe manner. We know this is your goal – and it is ours, as well.

Please know we are doing everything possible to protect the health and safety of the entire Devereux community – our clients, our staff and all the families of both. This pandemic has changed the way we all live – and caring for the health and well-being of our individuals and staff is our absolute highest priority.

If you have specific questions about any of the content in, or attached, to this letter, we are very happy to discuss them with you directly. Please reach out to your loved one’s Devereux staff member. We are always available to answer questions and help address any specific concerns.

Sincerely,

Carl E. Clark II
President and CEO
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health