Family Q&A

How has Devereux approached the issue of keeping clients and staff safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?

At Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health, nothing is more important than the health and safety of our clients, staff and families. All Devereux centers have formal infectious-disease and emergency-management plans, which were tailored to specifically address the unique aspects of COVID-19 prevention. At the onset of the pandemic, Devereux created a COVID-19 Planning and Response Task Force to ensure the nonprofit addressed every issue brought forth regarding its programs, as well as its protocols to protect the health and safety of its clients and staff.

Across the country, Devereux’s national and center leadership teams rallied to maintain programming, with the least disruption possible, while ensuring the health and well-being of clients and staff. While the organization discontinued in-person visitation and certain in-person services in the community, to help flatten the curve, Devereux immediately launched telehealth services to ensure all clients and families continued to receive the behavioral health services they needed – and deserved.

In addition, Devereux felt an intense obligation to connect with families, caregivers and the public – on a daily basis – through the following activities:

1. Ongoing communications between staff members and families.
2. Launching a COVID-19 preparedness site that includes a comprehensive list of news and announcements, including tools and resources to help families manage through stress and anxiety, and stay safe, during the pandemic.
3. Multiple, private Facebook group pages for families/caregivers offering news and updates regarding center-based programs and services.
4. Working with community supporters to build a supply of handmade PPE (personal protective equipment).
5. Creating the industry-leading purchasing cooperative, led by international procurement experts, to ensure Devereux (and our fellow providers across the country) are able to buy the highest quality PPE at fair prices with guaranteed delivery times. This has been an absolutely critical aspect of keeping our clients, staff and families safe.
6. Developing an “Inspiration” page to share messages of hope and resilience from Devereux’s families, caregivers, employees and supporters.
7. Creating a video series to help clients, staff and families build and nurture their resilience.
Why does Devereux need more restrictive protocols than, for example, some public high schools?

Devereux cares for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, complex mental health needs, and traumatic life experiences, and often in congregate living environments. The behavioral health struggles and/or disabilities our clients live with can make it particularly difficult for them to cope with and/or understand the challenges presented by COVID-19. Practices such as social distancing, using personal protective equipment, and using videoconference technology in the place of in-person visits can be particularly difficult for the individuals we serve. Additionally, regardless of the diagnoses of individuals served, the medical community has learned that COVID-19 spread particularly quickly in all congregate living environments.

Our dedicated staff members – our very own Healthcare Heroes – are taking special care to educate our clients about healthy practices and precautions in a way that respects their unique styles of learning – and their understanding of the world around them.

What are some examples of enhanced protocols Devereux has created because of COVID-19?

All Devereux centers have formal infectious-disease and emergency-management plans, which were tailored immediately, and at the start of the pandemic, to specifically address the unique aspects of COVID-19 prevention. In accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization, just a few of these precautions have included:

1. Enhanced regular and professional cleaning and disinfection across all campuses and sites
2. Implementing physical distancing protocols across all programs whenever possible
3. The use of personal protective equipment including masks, gloves, and gowns as indicated by the CDC
4. Daily temperature and symptom screening for all staff and clients
5. Telehealth programs launched as way to continue supporting our individuals and families remotely
6. Holding videoconference sessions to keep families connected and engaged throughout this time of modified visitor access
Why are these protocols still in effect when many states have “re-opened?”

Devereux continues to follow guidance from the CDC, WHO and the communities/states in which we operate to limit the spread of COVID-19 – and protect our individuals, families and staff – through enhanced cleaning and disinfection, social distancing, use of personal protective equipment, daily client and staff screening and temperature checks, restricted visitation, and postponing in-person medical appointments, where it is necessary to protect health and safety.

We are using real-time data to assess which programs can reduce, and ultimately, eliminate restrictions. Unfortunately, in 40 out of the 50 United States, the rates of COVID community infection are dramatically rising. We monitor community infection rates from many perspectives – including positive tests, numbers of hospitalizations, and unfortunately, numbers of deaths due to COVID. In more states than not, this data is currently telling medical providers it is not safe to reduce restrictions, especially in congregate living environments, regardless of any decisions individual states have made regarding the re-opening of their business community.

We are carefully following the best available science and are working to reduce and/or remove restrictions as soon as the data tells us it is safe to do so. As the COVID-19 situation evolves, Devereux will continue to adapt its response (and protocols) in real-time to meet any challenges and to ensure the safety of those we are so privileged to serve and support.