Dear Parents and Guardians of ACDS Residents,

Happy Fall! I hope that you and your family remain healthy and continue to manage during these ongoing challenging circumstances. I wanted to provide with you some important updates and share some reminders with you.

**Updates on Schedules and Activities**

Although COVID infection rates on Long Island are at a stable low rate we are still being abundantly cautious with our residents and staff. ACDS’ management team feels that the month of September and early – mid October are a pivotal time and we are using this time to monitor the infection rates and the impact of schools & programs reopening. Accordingly, many of our guidelines from the summer remain in place. Please continue to contact the house management team to plan your visits to the house or to inform them of any days and times you are picking your loved one up for an outing. Visitors to the house are limited to one family at a time so we must be aware of your intended plans in advance.

With a focus on keeping our residents active, engaged and getting them out of the house regularly we have increased the frequency of community outings and expanded the places that the houses may go. Each house has the opportunity to go to the Queens or Bronx Zoo and the Aquarium if they choose to in the next few weeks. We are also looking into a drive through dinosaur exhibit and some fall/ Halloween outings such as farms for apple or pumpkin picking. The houses are regularly going for walks and picnics at a variety of parks, to the boardwalk at the beach and to the Nautical Mile. We are encouraging low risk activities and are staying away from indoor dining in a restaurant, trips to the mall, bowling alleys or movie theaters as these are considered higher risk activities due to prolonged time spent indoors.

We are not yet ready for our residents to attend their day program or to resume attending church or temple services. We intend to revisit the plan on returning to day programs in the next two weeks. If all remains stable it is the residential department’s intention to start sending residents back to their day programs (if the day program is able to support their return) in mid-to-late October.

**NY State Budget Cuts**

Before coronavirus, New York State had a $16 billion dollar shortfall and was looking for spending cuts. Governor Cuomo proposed cutting $2.5 billion from New York's Medicaid budget. There are two very
Effective immediately, all New York State authorities and agencies will be subject to a 20% withhold of local aid payments that are made entirely with state funds. This mandate includes OPWDD and other similar state agencies, who have begun to implement a withholding of 20% of payments for non-Medicaid local assistance programs. This withholding impacts recreation and respite programs, Self-Direction and Fiscal Intermediary services and other funds that come solely from state dollars. In residential this includes the bi-annual clothing allowance that our residents receive. Agencies have to either absorb the withholding or pass it along to the individuals we serve and neither is a good option. At this time ACDS is taking it on a month by month basis to monitor any changes made by provider and family advocacy as well as the financial impact on our agency.

Another very significant change that begins today, 10/1, is a reduction in funding for days when a resident is hospitalized or on a home visit. In the past, if a resident went to their family’s home for an overnight or weekend visit or went on vacation with them, the agency was able to bill a therapeutic leave day and still get paid the agency’s full rate. Therapeutic leave is considered a non-medical visit outside the facility most commonly used for overnight visits with family or friends. There was no limit on therapeutic leave days. If an individual was hospitalized or needed to be in a rehabilitation facility agencies were able to bill a retainer day for those days when a resident was not in their group home. The thought behind both retainer and therapeutic leave days was to support agencies, encourage the resident’s familial and community bonds, and to ensure that a resident’s placement was not jeopardized. Mortgages, utilities and staffing costs remain the same for the agency, even when a resident is not there.

The change that begins today puts a cap of 96 therapeutic days per resident, per year, that an agency can get reimbursed for – but now at only 50% of our rate. After the 96 days have been utilized the agency will not receive any reimbursement for therapeutic days. There will be no reimbursement at all for any day that a resident is hospitalized or in a rehab facility. The proposed cuts will severely limit funding for individuals simply because they require hospitalization due to medical or psychiatric illness or choose to take a therapeutic leave to spend time with family members. The impact on this revised reimbursement method will be devastating to ACDS.

Please do not be concerned that ACDS will state that residents cannot go on home visits. We understand that time with their family members is vitally important for our residents to live a happy, well-rounded, fulfilling life. Instead we will be asking that you partner with us to ensure that your loved one enjoys time with family while also being aware that the financial health of ACDS will be severely impacted by these changes. One small compromise that we would like to promote regarding weekend visits: we strongly encourage picking up your loved one on Saturday morning and returning them on Sunday evening. For residential billing the standard is that the staff must work on a minimum of one of the individual’s valued outcomes and they must sleep in the group home for the agency to be able to bill for the day. Leaving Friday evening deprives the agency of a full day of billing, even though the individual has spent the day in our care. Leaving Saturday morning and returning Sunday evening means only Saturday is considered a therapeutic leave day. Taking your loved one for a day visit does not go towards the 96 day cap, and we strongly encourage families to enjoy day visits and activities with their loved one. We will be communicating with you on an ongoing basis and ask that you be mindful of the number of
therapeutic days your loved one has utilized. We greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation as we try to mitigate the impact of these devastating cuts.

As always the health of ACDS’ residents and staff are our top concern and we now must do all that we can to ensure that the high quality services you expect from ACDS remains intact. We must all be mindful of the fiscal implications of our activities and partner together during these challenging times. ACDS belongs to many provider associations who are actively advocating and lobbying for needed funding. It would be beneficial if parents could advocate as well. We use our email list to share updates and advocacy efforts. If you would like to be on that and you are not please let me know. In addition ACDS has a Facebook page where we share information as well as pictures of our residents, participants and students and updates across all of our services.

Some parent advocacy groups that you could join for additional information are listed below.

NYC FAIR: www.nycfamilyadvocacyinformationresource.org or info@nycfair.org to join their email list

Parent to Parent of NY: www.parenttoparentnys.org


NYADD another strong Facebook advocacy group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/NYADD

We thank you for sharing in our commitment to ensuring the health and safety of all ACDS residents and staff. Thank you for your continued support. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Be Well,

Erica

Erica Lepurage
Director of Community & Residential Services