



A letter from our President and CEO



Dear friends,

2020 is finally over. And not a moment too soon. It was so different from anything any of us has ever seen or lived through and the most challenging year in Richmond's history. It started regular enough, but by February, everything changed. We entered an environment that none of us knew anything about and one that we needed to be at our best to

protect our residents and staff. We acted swiftly and formed a COVID-19 response team that started working on a plan to protect staff and residents, continue running the agency while following all Department of Health (DOH) and OPWDD rules. Mid-March, DOH, and CDC came to visit 919 and told us that they were impressed with our preparedness and plan of action. What followed were long and exhausting months of work and worry for all Richmond residents, staff, and families. We closed day programs and then stopped visits to group homes. Everything was on lockdown for four months. We started with daily update videos that were posted on our website and social media. We developed training on COVID-19 and how to protect from it presenting it in several different ways, including electronic training platform (Relias), videos, in-person training, and written materials.

We were fortunate to have so many families and volunteers reach out to us and offer to make masks for our staff. We received hundreds of cloth masks from various groups. We also received hundreds of surgical masks from several elected officials (Mayor of Yonkers Mike Spano and Westchester County Legislator Ruth Walter). We are grateful to all and to the New England Joint Board UNITE Here (DSP union) for donating N95 masks to Richmond. With a lot of hard work and some luck, we were able to identify reliable vendors who delivered our PPEs on time and at a reasonable price. With pride, we say that our staff had all needed PPEs at all times. Like all other healthcare providers, we had to modify the wearing schedule for PPEs based on CDC and DOH recommendations.

But all of this would do no good to our residents if we did not have fantastic staff who carried the burden of working under extremely stressful conditions for months. DSPs, nurses, housekeeping, laundry, and maintenance staff carried the torch and worked tirelessly, more

than their fair share of shifts, to protect the residents and provide them with some sense of normalcy. They were all concerned for their own and families' health and safety. Despite that, they all showed up every day and provided care and support to our residents. Richmond professional staff changed their roles and did whatever we needed them to do: some became assistant managers while some changed their work hours, all to accommodate the agency's needs. Finance Department staff started working from home and continued to provide excellent service to employees and the agency. Workforce Development, with lightning speed, changed new hire orientation and shifted all training to virtual. HR adapted the hiring process to the new reality and continued to hire and process new employees while maintaining excellent customer service to all employees. The Quality Enhancement Department had to develop new ways of reporting new required data to OPWDD and DOH. IT department shifted to remote support of all technology needs. Richmond's Managers and Directors worked endless hours and never wavered in their dedication to Richmond and the people we support. Richmond's Board of Directors, with leadership by Chairman Nick Spano, helped Richmond management in navigating the new environment. They provided the agency and me with their expertise time and advice that were invaluable.

I am grateful to all staff for their contribution to resident care and protection during this pandemic. Without all your hard work, we would not do right by our residents and their families, our staff, and the field of developmental disabilities. In the DD field, Richmond is considered an agency that did a great job with the COVID-19 pandemic. I had the pleasure to share our strategy in fighting the pandemic with other agencies in various forums. As a relatively small agency, it is an excellent recognition by fellow agencies to be asked to share our way of doing things. That is our collective success; we did it together.

The vaccine is finally here, and now we have a way of stopping the virus. The more people get vaccinated, the greater chance we have to win this fight and go back to the life we love and miss. I am looking forward to 2021 to be a better, healthier, and happier year for all of us.

With gratitude,

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