

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | April 27, 2020

Life Skills and Transition Center and developmental disability service providers remain committed to serving vulnerable North Dakotans during COVID-19 pandemic

BISMARCK, N.D. - The Life Skills and Transition Center in Grafton, which is part of the North Dakota Department of Human Services, and other developmental disability service providers in the state continue providing valuable residential and support services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our team has been working diligently on our COVID-19 preparedness efforts to support the health and safety of the people who live here and our team members," said Susan Foerster, superintendent of the Life Skills and Transition Center.

Foerster said the center has identified an isolation area and a core team of medical professionals and direct support staff who can provide care should any person test positive for COVID-19. The center also has a supply of personal protective equipment on hand, and all employees are required to wear a mask and participate in a health screen before beginning their work shifts.

Along with following health and safety recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the North Dakota Department of Health, the Life Skills and Transition Center is also working to provide new routines and some sense of normalcy to the people who live there, whose routines, activities and social connections have been affected by the pandemic.

"We made some adjustments to our day program schedule to provide more opportunities for physical and occupational therapy, expanded use of the onsite pool and gymnasium for recreational activities, and added wellness activities like crafting, yoga, mindfulness meditation, healthy cooking classes and other activities," Foerster said.

A visitor restriction policy remains in effect. People who live at the center can continue to communicate with friends and family by phone, computers and other electronic devices. The center also provides regular written updates on COVID-19 preparedness efforts to family members and guardians of people who live on campus.

The department's Developmental Disabilities Division team is also working closely with developmental disability service providers in the state and individuals with disabilities and their families during this pandemic.

"Our developmental disability program managers, infant development specialists and service providers continue to provide support to individuals and their families, just in a different way," said

Tina Bay, director of the Developmental Disabilities Division. “We have ramped up the use of technology like Microsoft Teams to do virtual checks to ensure individuals are receiving the services and supports they need to maintain their health and well-being.”

To support service providers, the division holds regular conference calls with all providers to share policy guidance and recommendations on how to modify the way they deliver home and community-based services to meet individuals’ needs, while factoring in prevention recommendations from the CDC and state health department.

Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved an Appendix K to the state’s existing Medicaid 1915(c) waivers. This adds temporary flexibility in how Medicaid-funded services are delivered during the pandemic.

“We have a strong working relationship with our service providers, and we are doing what we can to help them to continue to serve vulnerable North Dakotans during this time,” Bay said. “I would also like to say thank you to our direct service professionals who are working hard and going above and beyond to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.”

For more information on the North Dakota Department of Human Services response to COVID-19, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid19/index.html. For COVID-19 health information, visit www.health.nd.gov/diseases-conditions/coronavirus. For details about the state’s COVID-19 response, visit www.ndresponse.gov.

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