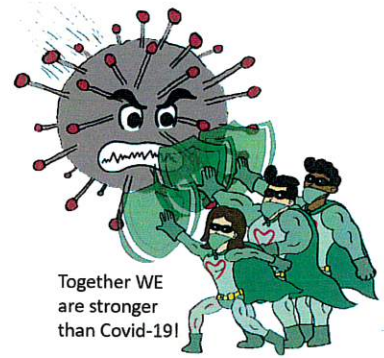




Meeting Life's Challenges

300 Washington Avenue Extension
Albany, NY 12203-7303
518/218-0000

June 18, 2020



Dear Residential Recipient or Family Member:

We understand your frustration with the closure of our homes to visitors and the restrictions placed on community outings. The OPWDD guidance that all providers are required to follow came out March 24, 2020, which was when the pandemic was rapidly accelerating. The statewide advocacy groups and agencies, including Living Resources, have been placing a great deal of pressure on OPWDD to update the guidance and provide meaningful revisions reflective of the NY Forward phased re-openings, which in the Capital Region includes restaurants, retail, hair salons, etc.

On Tuesday, June 16, 2020, Governor Cuomo announced that effective Friday, June 19, the visitation restriction which restricted family members from visiting their loved ones living in a certified residence will be lifted. Shortly after the announcement, OPWDD Commissioner Kastner issued a communication to all providers stating that OPWDD would be sending out specific guidelines and protocols required for family visits to certified residences. See bottom of letter for a copy of this communication. While the official guidance has not been sent out, we have notes from yesterday's provider association meeting with OPWDD outlining the guidance as follows:

- The visits may not be spontaneous and must be scheduled in advance
- A healthy symptoms check of the visitor must be performed (see form attached)
- Visitors must wear masks.
- Visitors may not leave the facility or have the resident accompany them in a car offsite
- Visits in an appropriate area such as a backyard, large common area, or if the person is in a single bedroom may be permitted
- Visits will not be allowed if the resident is in isolation, quarantine, or precautionary quarantine.

Unfortunately, the original OPWDD community outing restrictions still remain in effect. This is very disappointing and unreasonable! We will continue to advocate along with other providers across the state for OPWDD to develop more rational guidelines. Not only do the community outing restrictions remain unchanged, we have now been told that residents may not travel in vehicles with their families.

Using this guidance, we are willing to create safe community outing plans provided they follow specific safety & health practices consistent with the current New York State regulations. If you would like to discuss, or want to suggest a community outing for your family member, please contact your House Manager at least 72 hours in advance of the proposed outing. We will do everything we can to work with you within this timeline to help make this happen for you and your family. Please remember, we are all required to adhere to New York State and local health department policy.

Enclosed is a letter that you can, as family members, send to OPWDD asking them to review the current guidance for community outings and issue revised guidance in line with phased openings. It is important that we continue to work together to follow the guidance and keep everyone healthy.

As soon as we receive the official written guidance regarding home visitations, we will share it with you, so that together we can plan accordingly. We already have some families visiting, by sitting in the yard or on a deck while wearing masks and social distancing. **The safety and health of you, your family, and our staff is our highest priority. And, it is vital that Living Resources reopen intelligently to ensure the health and safety of all**

Thank you for being supportive and as always, feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns that arise. I'm available at ferlich@livingresources.org or 518-218-0000 x4317, as well as Steve Klein at sklein@livingresources.org x4312.

Best regards for your health and safety,



Fredrick W. Erlich
Chief Executive Officer

A Message from OPWDD Commissioner Kastner

June 16, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

OPWDD understands how challenging the temporary suspension of visitation has been for the people we support in community residences and their families during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

I am writing to inform you that visitation at OPWDD certified group homes and residential facilities may resume as early as this Friday, June 19, 2020.

Providers and visitors will be required to follow specific protocols and guidelines, which will be shared later this week.

The health and well-being of the people we mutually support is of utmost importance and OPWDD will continue to monitor the situation and provide additional updates as new information becomes available.

Sincerely,

Theodore Kastner, MD, MS
Commissioner

GUEST SCREENING FORM

***This screening process must be completed for every guest, and must take place outside of the residence. *
Staff members assisting in screening process need to wear PPE (including gloves and a mask)**

(A "guest" includes but is not limited to all outside vendors, families, state auditors, office staff, maintenance staff, nursing staff, and any other individual who is not a regular staff person at the residence.)

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ TIME: _____

REASON FOR VISIT: _____

1. Have you had close contact with any persons under investigation/diagnosed with COVID-19 **WITHOUT** wearing Personal Protective Gear in the past 14 days? **Y/N**

"Close contact" means within 6 feet of the person for at least 10 minutes.

2. Have you traveled outside of the country in the past 14 days? **Y/N**
3. Do you have any of the following symptoms (cough, sore throat, fever, loss of smell or taste, shortness of breath, headache, or diarrhea)? **Y/N**
4. Everyone entering this facility needs to take their temperature **immediately before entering the residence**. When you took your temperature today, was your temperature 100° or over? **Y/N**

Temp: _____ degrees.

5. Are you wearing a mask **Y/N**
 - ***You must wear a mask at ALL TIMES while in the residence.***

If you answered yes to questions 1,2,3,4 or are not wearing a mask, your entry is denied.

June 18, 2020

Shiela Brazie @ Sheila.Brazie@opwdd.ny.gov
Deputy Director, Capital Region DDRO
500 Balltown Road
Schenectady, NY 12304

RE: It is time to ease restrictions for individuals residing in a group home!

Dear Ms. Brazie:

As a family member of a loved one who resides in one of Living Resources residential homes, we are writing to request that OPWDD revise their guidance to allow individuals who reside in group homes to participate in community outings consistent with NY Forward's phased openings. The current guidance only provides limited discretion to the agencies to allow for low-risk restricted community outings such as sitting outside or taking a walk. It is imperative that we be provided the opportunity to take our loved ones in our vehicles and on outings to our homes, the market, for a haircut, visit the park, etc.

As New York Forward has moved past its PAUSE directives, it is time for OPWDD to issue guidance so that we, as families of individuals with developmental disabilities, be allowed to move forward as well. Individuals who do not reside in a group home setting are allowed to go to restaurants, get their hair/nails done, shop, and more.

Please tell OPWDD to release new guidance to allow us to spend time with our loved ones outside of a visit to the residence. As family members, we should be allowed to take our loved ones to enjoy the same simple pleasures that others have.

We appreciate your thoughtful review of our request and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,