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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CHRIS SPARKS

Up until a few months ago we thought we were in a challenging

set of circumstances. After all, we were working to managing a growing workforce crisis, stagnant/dwindling funding, complying with a myriad of state and federal regulation – all while responding to growing service demands. We thought things were challenging then. And then the global public health emergency, COVID-19, happened.

The priorities that had seemed so important in the months before suddenly became secondary to keeping people safe and healthy from the effects of this virus. We learned new language (PPE and Mitigation Strategies) and protocol (when to wear cloth masks, surgical masks, and N95 masks), and experienced significant service disruption as several of our services were shut down, or scaled back. As were the services of many of our community partners.

- Community Residential Services suddenly inherited expanded responsibility as day and employment programs temporarily closed.
- Child Care Resource and Referral staff sprang into action to help in home child care providers and child

care centers learn how to keep staff and children safe in the midst of a highly contagious and dangerous virus.

- We and many others had to determine which of our staff could work remotely and how to keep the staff that could not safe.
- Visitors were restricted and we had to explain to loved ones why it was best, at least in the short run, to limit contacts from outside the organization.

In the Biblical book of Philippians Paul the Apostle writes about the difficult task of changing direction in life. And he speaks poetically of letting go and moving forward. In his case he is trying to make a clear point that one's faith should not be placed in the things of this world, but rather the divine. He learned this after having accomplished much by human standards; he came from a very proud lineage, was a Jew, and became a Pharisee – educated and respected. But when he became a Christian he realized that the things he had thought were so important didn't amount to much. His worldview was changed. He sums this up in Philippians 3:7 by saying "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss..."

Without a doubt, the last few years in the field of community disability and child care services has been filled with disruptive and discontinuous change and challenges, and this continues quite separate from the effects of the pandemic. The changes are fundamental, alter our landscape, and push us to creatively respond with new service options, partnerships, and creative vision. The pace of change is unrelenting, not allowing us time to even catch our breath before the next one is upon us. This was our business environment until mid-March and then the pandemic hit.

The pandemic has presented specific challenges both human and financial. People we know and care about have gotten sick, including staff and people we serve. We have had three fatalities among people we serve, all precious people whose loss leaves a big hole in our organization – and our heart. The financial impact of the pandemic is significant due to the effects of reduced revenues in some programs and increased expenses in others.

Currently we are carefully tracking the data and we know that between mid-March and the end of June the financial impact was \$804,546. As we look ahead we project the ongoing financial impact to be around \$230,000 per month – yes per month.

That is a lot of sobering information. Sure, 2020 has been filled with unforeseeable and novel challenges. But there have been many bright spots. First, EPI staff have been incredible; stepping up and stepping forward. They have evidenced inspiring levels of commitment, selflessness, and courage. We are beyond grateful. Senator Grassley and Senator Ernst have worked on our behalf. Largely due to the efforts of Senator Grassley and staff we received federal monies from the Public Health and Social Service Emergency Fund. And Governor Reynolds and her staff, and DHS Director Garcia spearheaded an effort to allocate monies to Iowa Medicaid providers. This provides substantial help and we deeply appreciate their efforts.

As we look into the next year we see continued challenges; the pandemic and its danger, managing workforce challenges, financial restrictions, and continued service system transformation. We intend to face them as we always have, keeping our working relationships healthy, taking care of staff, collaborating with likeminded partners, and assuring we provide customers what they need and want.





