March 20, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

A member of the Melmark New England community has received positive test results today for Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The individual had recently received treatment for a different illness at the hospital. Several days after their return from the hospital, residential staff noted a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and contacted healthcare staff, which sent the individual out for further medical evaluation immediately. Melmark’s leadership team has identified all individuals, their families, and staff who had contact with the resident or shared areas of the home. Individuals who met the CDC criteria for contact were sent home to self-isolate for the next fourteen days at the time of contact. Every family member and staff who had direct exposure have been contacted. No other MNE residents met the criteria for direct exposure under the CDC guidelines. All surface areas within the house have been regularly sanitized, and daily health screenings for all residents and staff continue. The individual had not been in any day program area. We also cleaned the school over the weekend, as is consistent with our protocols. Our staff have taken appropriate steps, based on guidelines from the CDC and state health officials, to mitigate the risk of spread to others. This is the first case of COVID-19 within any of Melmark’s programs.

Melmark closed all day programs and restricted visitors to residential programs on March 16, following MA Governor Charlie Baker’s order that all public schools close, and that visitors not be allowed in long-term care facilities and nursing homes in the state. Families who are able to take their loved ones home for an extended period of time have been asked to prepare to do so. Others have been encouraged to schedule Facetime or Skype video calls in lieu of in-person visits.

Melmark’s senior leadership team continues to closely monitor evolving information coming from our state and national leaders, as well as from the CDC, as we evaluate when visitors will be allowed and when day programs will reopen. Staff continue to ensure social/physical distancing among individuals and employees as they work to maintain the health and safety of all the individuals served at Melmark, including children and adults with medical fragility.

The best source of information continues to be on our website and through our weekly newsletters. Individual phone calls are difficult to address while we are rapidly responding to new information daily.

We do ask that, if you have any access to personal protective equipment (N95 respirator masks, non-porous isolation gowns, goggles and face shields) to please obtain those items and notify us so we can coordinate delivery.

We will also need to start downsizing census due to exposures, which we have already started tonight. While this is something we do not want to do, we need to plan to create an isolation house, as well as protect our students who can’t go home or have no home to go to. Our community is doing our best to meet everyone’s needs, please understand we are doing out very best. We will be contacting you, should we be requiring you take your loved one home.
We will continue to update you and ask for your patience and cooperation as we navigate this evolving issue.

Thank you,

Rita M. Gardner
President and CEO
Melmark New England