



## Respite Program Case Study *Respite in the Time of COVID-19*

### Channel Islands Social Services – Regional Center Respite

#### Program Description

Channel Islands Social Services (CISS) is a family-operated organization founded in 2004 with funding provided through Tri-Counties Regional Center (TCRC) and North Los Angeles County Regional Center (NLACRC). CISS provides [in-home respite services](#)<sup>1</sup> for families caring for a child or adult relative with special needs (defined specifically as a developmental disability such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability or Cerebral Palsy.) The organization also operates a respite program for Resource Families (foster parents and kinship caregivers). Respite care is provided in the family's home or local community. Services are free for eligible families.

CISS has remained open throughout the pandemic as an essential service, but did close their physical office to visitors for the first six months. When the state enacted *shelter at home orders* there was an initial reduction in the number of families using services across all programs. Other adjustments were made for staff working reduced schedules with some accessing unemployment and disability benefits. [In-Home Respite Brochure](#)<sup>2</sup>

#### Planning and Guidance for Ongoing Respite Services

- **Management team planning process involved the CEO, Directors, and Human Resources Manager.** The Training and Development Specialist was later brought in to assist with contact tracing and documentation. This became the Risk Management Team that initially met daily, then weekly, and then transitioned to on-demand communication via Microsoft Teams meeting in person as needed.
- **Planning for respite services** involved reviewing state guidelines as well as recommendations from the primary funding agencies (TCRC; NLACRC). It took time for respite services to [officially be declared an essential service](#)<sup>3</sup> by California. Funding agencies have provided ongoing support for respite services, including reaching out to families and authorizing additional respite hours for families during the pandemic.

- **Researched COVID-19 information and resources** through the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center, California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Ventura County Public Health (VCPH), Tri-Counties Regional Center (TCRC), and Governors Orders/Guidance.
  - CDC was primary source for respite service guidance and staff/family communications on safe caregiving procedures.
  - Governor's and County's briefings guided decisions related to impact on families using services (e.g., schools starting online, changing family needs).
  - TCRC provided guidance for families, testing, and an opportunity for service providers to participate in focus groups for safely operating or reopening services.
- **Quickly accommodated need for flexibility for both staff and families.** Built in flexibility for staff who wanted or needed to continue to isolate. Provided flexibility for families who needed respite during the day due to assist with virtual school services.
- **Immediately customized database** so staff and family needs and services could be tracked, including usage, contacts, check ins, self-isolations, COVID status, testing, etc.

#### COVID-19 Training and Resource Dissemination

- **Staff training changes were made**, including pausing in-person monthly staff trainings. Found online solutions for the state required training for CPR and First Aid classes. Finding quality online training options that were easy to use for both English and Spanish speakers was challenging.
- **Addressed staff and family proficiency with using Zoom** for virtual meetings and check ins. Provided administrative training to improve staff proficiency with Zoom. Moving forward this provides an option for conducting Zoom home visits if needed.

- **Respite service protocols were developed and disseminated to staff and families** through social media, email, and direct mail. Handbook communicable diseases policy and procedures were updated, and all staff are now required to read the new two-page addendum and electronically sign that they are in agreement.
- **Developed COVID-19 section on website** featuring updates and guidance based on CDC, local and state public health recommendations. [COVID Webpage](#)<sup>4</sup>

### *Respite Service Procedures and Requirements*

- **Changes in service provision guidelines during the pandemic** has been an evolving process to reflect updated guidance from CDC, and state and local public health departments.
- **Communicated procedures and guidance to families and staff:**
  - [Caregiving Best Practices to Prevent Spreading Viruses](#)<sup>5</sup> 3.6.2020
  - [CISS Employee Guidance and FAQ's Due to COVID-19](#)<sup>6</sup> 3.17.2020
  - [Urgent COVID-19 Safety Reminders for Staff and Families](#)<sup>7</sup> 6.26.2020
- **Recommended that respite activities** be provided in the home and around the local neighborhood on foot, maintaining social distance whenever possible. CISS has restricted community activities until Ventura County attains a higher re-opening tier.
- **Provided guidance on social distancing** and recommended at least six feet distance be maintained during care whenever possible. When care is provided by non-family member living outside of the home, they must wear a face covering. Recommend that community outings be avoided or kept to a minimum, and that face coverings be worn by staff and individuals receiving care.
- **Made Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available.** Staff received \$5 stipend towards making/purchasing reusable cloth masks. Information was shared with staff and families on making face coverings. Purchased PPE as available (i.e., hand sanitizers, masks, surgical gloves). In June TCRC sourced large quantities of PPE from the state and provided to essential service agencies like CISS. CISS hosted monthly PPE drive-thru events to disseminate. Staff and families can also arrange to come by the office to pick up items during office hours and some were delivered to family homes when the need was urgent.

- **Implemented COVID-19 symptom checking and monitoring for staff and families.** Developed two internal forms to assess levels of potentially exposed staff or families and determine next steps for contact tracing, tracking, and HR follow-up. In-office staff have temperature checks twice a day, and staff who have traveled outside the country are quarantined and supported to work from home before having office access. Respite staff self-monitor and report if feeling sick or if the family has cancelled due to illness. COVID testing is done through community testing sites as needed.
- **Maintained ongoing communication with families and respite providers** through phone calls, emails, and electronic newsletters. Maintained [COVID resource webpage](#),<sup>8</sup> and used social media posts, regular mail, and texts. Primary communication with staff and families regarding urgent guidance done through existing MailChimp email option. Due to initial importance and urgency of some communication, and due to some emails going to junk folders, letters were also sent by U.S. Mail so everyone received the current guidance.

### *Challenges and Opportunities*

- **Initial barriers were related to understanding and operationalizing the multiple information streams** regarding the virus prevalence, as well as separating facts from fears and fiction. Once there was a clearer path to follow, it decreased stress for the administrative staff and decisions were streamlined.
- **Getting enough PPE at the beginning of the pandemic** to the staff and families so they were better protected during care provision. Concerns continue around whether families and staff are making safe choices in their daily lives to prevent catching the virus.
- **Finding willing and qualified staff to cover respite needs of families.** Seeing increase in families preferring someone they already know and trust. Other barriers included getting interested applicants to complete the hiring process and required training, as many changed their mind during the application or onboarding process.
- **Managing the significant increase in family stress and pressure during the pandemic** especially as it continued. Parents have taken on multiple roles of friend, mediator, and now teacher for their children resulting in increased referrals to crisis support services and counseling. Some children with intellectual disabilities and autism exhibited maladaptive and self-injurious behaviors at a higher intensity and frequency. Behavioral services have gone remote, schedules

are off, and circles of social support for parents as well as children have drastically changed.

- **Using Zoom for applicant interviews** that may continue after COVID, dependent upon the organization's needs. Given the very personal nature of providing respite care, in-person interviews are preferred.
- **Exploring whether respite could be provided over Zoom** as a creative way to have a respite provider engage with a child for 30-minute periods while the parent is still in the home. Hoping to implement a pilot program in near future pending state agency approval.
- **Expanding information technology infrastructure** by putting additional systems in place to support staff working from home resulted in unanticipated costs. Staff had to learn new software and ways of working digitally, while staying remotely connected to co-workers and doing additional outreach to families and respite staff.
- **Providing administrative services** with declining hours. Pandemic issues included increased unemployment benefit paperwork, unanticipated state sick pay costs, pausing the internship program cohort, and concerns over potential increases to insurance costs.
- **Addressing legal issues related to the pandemic.** Labor attorney advice was needed more frequently due to handbook changes, layoff notices, supplemental sick pay, what can and cannot be required of staff to do regarding testing and isolation, and other related issues.
- **Annual in-person events were cancelled** such as the summer picnic for families, monthly staff trainings and the holiday sensory-friendly family movie day. The organization is in the process of finding new ways to keep connected with families who look forward to these events by introducing new activities such as creating a holiday meet and greet drive-thru Santa event.

### Respite Service Continuation

- **CISS Risk Management group will continue to meet,** but broaden its scope beyond COVID-19 to address other program and risk management issues.
- **Continue implementation of electronic records** with pandemic hastening those efforts.
- **Maintain flexibility with staff and planning efforts** due to expected continuation of frequent changes during the pandemic.

- **Maintain and expand communication efforts** using various communication modes.
- **Administrative team will continue to use Microsoft Teams** to communicate information, conduct video calls, training, and staff check-ins, give appreciation when someone has gone above and beyond, and share uplifting messages.
- **Continue quarterly administrative team meetings** to discuss effects of COVID on families, staff, and operations. Due to high stress levels during the pandemic, **self-care has become an even greater, integral component of our work.** Staff at all levels need increased support as they recruit and hire more Respite Caregivers who work with families they already know and listen to each family's experience. Ongoing staff check ins, providing resources, and staying connected provides continuity and positive work environment that in turn helps families and staff trust our ability to support them.

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### Respite Contact, Email and Phone Number

Sharon Francis, MBA, Co-Founder and CEO

805-384-0983 x850

Edith Wysinger, M.S., Program Director

805-384-0983 x852

<https://www.islandsocialservices.org>

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### Website Link URLs

1. <https://www.islandsocialservices.org/regional-center-families/>
2. <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.47/xpc.eaa.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CISS-Both-Respite-Tri-Fold-Flier-2018.pdf>
3. <https://xpc.eaa.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-Essential-Services-Guidance-from-CISS-3-20-2020.pdf>
4. <https://www.islandsocialservices.org/covid-19/>
5. <https://mailchi.mp/islandsocialservices.org/coronavirus>
6. <https://xpc.eaa.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-Guidance-from-CISS-3-17-2020.pdf>
7. <https://mailchi.mp/islandsocialservices.org/coronavirus-06262020>
8. <https://www.islandsocialservices.org/covid-19>