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Serving Children and Adults with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities for over 70 Years

July 24, 2020

PAUL H. TORRES
Executive Director

Dear AHRC Suffolk Individuals, Families and Staff:

To say we were excited to welcome back students and adults in our day program this week would be an understatement. These buildings were built for excitement, learning, working and socializing and they have been far too quiet these last four months. We are thrilled that the buzz is back, and we can sense big smiles from individuals and staff, even under face masks, as they return to classrooms and workspaces that were left dark for so long.

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Wednesday marked the first day that nearly 100 individuals began returning to Adult Day Programs, with our Bohemia, Knickerbocker and Westhampton Beach locations welcoming back individuals, including those from our Lakeland and Annex buildings. Program set-ups may look and feel a bit different than when individuals left them back in March, but familiar faces greeted each person as they entered the buildings. Safety and protection remains a top priority, as lessons and instruction were provided to reinforce proper PPE wearing and proper cleaning procedures. Individualized supplies and work areas were waiting for those individuals who returned to our Employment and Vocational Services programs. As individuals adjusted back to a daily routine, they shared stories of what kept them busy during the last few months, including chats about healthy habits they participated in at home, which lead into a fun exercise activity in one of the Day Hab programs. Additionally, virtual or in-home Day Hab services continue to be provided to individuals who have not yet returned to program.

Today concludes the first full week of in-person learning at our Educare Center, with approximately 50 students who have returned for the remainder of the summer session. Students are receiving therapy services and engaging in other fun and important classroom activities. Students and staff have adjusted remarkably to new safety procedures and have quickly adapted to being back in the swing of school. So much effort and work has been put forth by students, families and staff to make the transition as seamless as possible, and it shows. Just like in our adult programs, remote learning services continue to be provided to students who are not currently attending school.

I know I risk sounding like a broken record, but we have come so far. The renewed energy in our buildings, the happy faces we are seeing returning to programs they have missed for so long, it all reinforces that what we and our neighbors have been doing has been working. Taking proper precautions, keeping groups small, being outside as much as possible, wearing masks and other PPE when necessary, engaging in proper hygiene practices, it all continues to work and continues to be of utmost importance. We cannot let our guard down and we cannot go backwards. We are so thankful for the great lengths our individuals and our staff are going to each and every day to keep themselves, and each other, safe. *#InItTogether*

This Sunday marks the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and with it transformational reforms that changed and improved the lives of so many of the individuals we serve. Thirty years does not seem so long ago for some starkly needed advances in the rights and treatment of individuals living with differences and yet we are far from where we need to be in equality and access that should be entitled to all. AHRC Suffolk and our staff proudly stand in solidarity with our individuals and families as staunch advocates for not only those we provide supports for but for all children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who need our strength and determination to continue to lead the way towards equality.

Stay well, stay safe and thank you for all you do.

Paul H. Torres
Executive Director

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Your gift to our **COVID-19 Relief Fund** helps us purchase personal protective equipment, provide expanded medical and mental health services, increase our technology, and so much more. To donate, visit www.ahrcsuffolk.org/covidrelief (donations, marked **COVID-19 Relief Fund**, can also be mailed to the address at the top of this page)