

September 2, 2020

COVID-19 September Update for Persons Served, Families and Caregivers

Hello everyone,

I hope this update finds you well and refreshed from having some summer fun with family and friends. We recognize that the month of September is going to feel very different this year, and that there is uncertainty and some anxiety surrounding heading back to school, especially for children with additional support needs; and for adults, returning to Community Inclusion and/or in-person Outreach Services. Given the recent climb in COVID-19 cases, we have all been advised by Public Health to scale back our social activities as we head into September, which is also the beginning of cold and flu season. You may be wondering what does this mean to the services we offer at *posAbilities*?

In today's update we will cover:

- what to expect when returning to in-person Community Inclusion or outreach supports;
- providing care during a COVID-19 virus outbreak; and
- Fall learning – where to go online to learn about all things disability related.

Although this is a different autumn, we are confident that we can move forward with support, and learn how to live with the virus for the foreseeable future.

Also, we'd like to be sure that you have what you need to participate in online communication and learning opportunities. If you need a hand sourcing equipment or affordable internet, please contact us.

What to Expect When Returning to In-Person Services

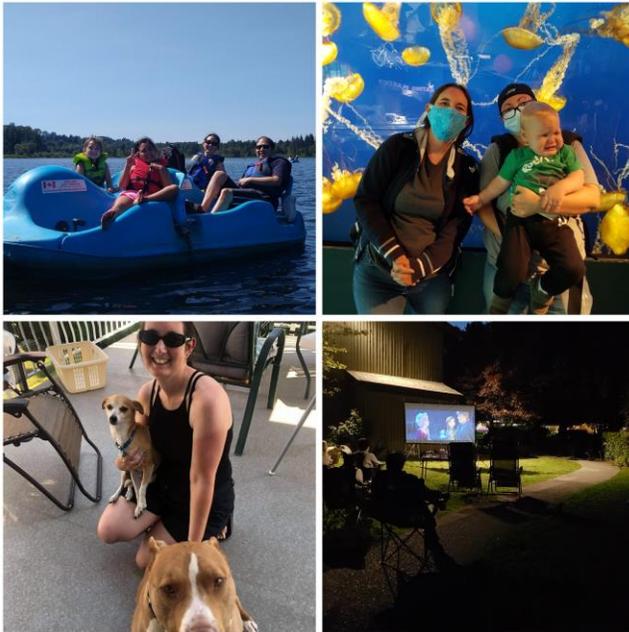
Know that we respect your decision about when/how to resume services. At this time, you will not 'lose your spot' due to not participating in a site-based program, or declining in-person visits.

Other ways we maintain physical distance at our work/program sites, is by running community inclusion services on different schedules. This allows us to use our spaces more flexibly. For example, we may host you later in the afternoons, in the evenings or on the weekend. Your Team Leader can update you on the options you have.

Your Team Leader will also provide you with current information on your program's re-start plan, which includes the health and safety measures that we put in place, and which have been approved by our funder and WorkSafe BC.

Thank you for your flexibility to date, as it has been greatly appreciated. Don't hesitate to reach out and let us know if your support needs change.

In response to last month's contest to send us photos of fun activities that comply with Dr. Henry's rules for public safety, we received this entry from one of our Team Leaders, Amanda Kim:



Providing Care During a COVID-19 Virus Outbreak

On Saturday, August the 8th at 5:33pm, our On-Call Team received a call they won't soon forget. An employee promptly reported that COVID-19 had been transmitted to a person served. This individual lives in one of our residential homes with three roommates, and participates in a community inclusion day program that had just started to welcome back participants.

Soon after, we learned that the virus had also been transmitted to some of our team members who work in the home. Within hours, everyone who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus at the home or day service was contacted, and the process of self-isolating and arranging for testing began.

An entire staff team went into isolation, and our Emergency Response team stepped in to provide care in the home. As a precaution, we temporarily closed the Community Inclusion program site to prevent any potential cross contamination.

At this time, we don't know where the transmission occurred. Possibilities include a family visit, a community outing, or an employee working in one of the two programs. On that note, we have limited the number of programs employees can work in to two, in order to help prevent the spread of the virus should we have an outbreak.

In total, three of the four roommates contracted the virus, and a handful of team members did as well. One person who lived on the lower level of the home, did not contract the virus, and none of the other persons who attended the day program did either. Their activities were physically distanced and mostly outdoors. This shows us how important physical distancing and fresh air is when it comes to preventing further spread of the virus. Fortunately, everyone impacted by this outbreak experienced only mild symptoms like fatigue, and some coughing. The outbreak was declared over within 14 days.

There was a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes connecting with various government health authorities (Fraser Health COVID-19 Team, the Health Authority, Public Health Nurses, Licensing, WorkSafe BC), our employees' union, the BCGEU and our funder, CLBC during the outbreak. Each of these entities provided the necessary support and direction we needed to implement our Pandemic Response Plan.

What did we learn?

- First, we learned how essential it is to follow Dr. Henry's rules: physical distancing, good hand hygiene/cough etiquette, deep cleaning, and staying home when ill.
- Second, stay informed of changes to public health orders and best practices to prevent transmission. We have been stocking up on personal protective equipment for months, and are phasing in a mandatory workplace mask wearing policy. Masks/face coverings have been proven to reduce the risk of transmission by capturing a person's droplets at the source. Note, masks do not prevent one from contracting the novel Coronavirus.
- Lastly, communicate, communicate, communicate! We were in constant communication with the employees, individuals, families and caregivers impacted, and the above mentioned government authorities.

We are happy to answer any questions that you may have about how to safely access our services. We are in this together!

Fall learning – where to go online to learn about all things disability related!

In the next issue of our quarterly issue of Imagine (released September 9 [here](#)), you will find a Fall training insert with loads of information on all topics disability related: where to go for advocacy support, inclusive education, transition planning, personal and financial planning, friendship and social skills, sexual health training, employment services and much, much more! Until then, we would like to highlight a few resources for you:

www.CoMakeDo.ca - fun online learning and entertainment

www.posAbilities.ca/COVID-19 - information on health, wellness, programs and services

www.LaurelBC.ca – educational materials and videos (e.g, care kits, tutorial on mask wearing)

Advocacy, Inclusive Education & Navigating Transitions

Back to school is an exciting time, and this year also brings extra challenges for the inclusion of children, youth and families with complex care/support needs. Look to **Inclusion BC** for tips on how to successfully get your learner on track ([see advice here](#)), and if needed, you can access their [advocacy program](#).

Check out **BC ED Access** for their annual inclusive education conference, (online, September 17 and 23, [details here](#).) This year's theme is *Equity During a Pandemic – the Intersections of Race and Disability*.

For all families, we recommend visiting the **Family Support Institute** [website](#). Discover regularly scheduled hangouts, a wide variety of webinars “learning explorations,” and several microsites to support various needs like finding support workers, community groups/services and more. If you are in the process of planning the transition from high school to adulthood, start by perusing their [Transition Checklist](#) – a step-by-step guide to assist you in navigating life (the checklist begins at age 0!)

You can also connect to experienced parents for guidance and support. One example is the [Wayfinders](#) service. Parent consultants will help you flesh out your vision, make a PATH plan, and move forward.

Another resource is the [Vancouver Parents Transition Group](#). Coordinators plan to resume physically distanced meetings in October. Sign-up to receive meeting notices and periodic emails filled with relevant information: transitionparents@gmail.com Everyone is welcome.

Last but not least, be sure to sign up for **Community Living BC's** [family updates](#). In this week's issue you will find information about the next phone call about how to stay safe this Fall with Dr. Behn Smith, resources for families and self-advocates and information about government funding and services.

In closing, September is also recognized as **Disability Employment Awareness month**. If you are wondering about how to get a foot on the career ladder during these pandemic times, please contact **posAbilities Employment Service** – www.PESworks.ca or call 604-299-4001 ext. 342. We have a youth employment initiative called IMPACT, government and privately funded service options for adults with diverse abilities, and other great information to share. We are open for business!

Thank you for your continued trust in *posAbilities*, your participation in our services, and in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Sincerely,



Fernando Coelho, CEO