



Stevens County Developmental Achievement Center

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Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Fall is in the air and winter is soon ready to kiss us on our pumpkins, but COVID-19 is still our holiday theme. For now, we have reopened, and we are divided into eight “pods”.

Each Pod can include 10 people, including staff, and people cannot move from pod to pod. They must spend their day with the same friends for the entire shift. If you visit, you will see plastic temporary walls to keep people and pods separate from cross contamination. On the floors you will find taped “hallways” for staff to use to move from one end of the building to another without contaminating pods along the way. Lunch is back, too, and there again, everyone is serviced in their own pods. No one is allowed to visit with other pods during lunch breaks. Buses are making many trips to allow for social distancing and less people per trip.

All of this is to keep us safe during the pandemic. These mandated emergency precautions allow us to provide DAC services following being closed for four months. It is working, too. So far, we have no confirmed cases at the DAC. But it has been hard to adapt and we have bought an awful lot of gloves, masks, face shields, disinfectants, hand sanitizer, and thermometers. It has been challenging. But most people have been happy to be back at the DAC with at least some of their friends.

Unfortunately, not everyone is comfortable leaving their homes yet. We went into the lockdown with 60 clients at 6 hours per day. Or make that forty people with 16 fifteen-minute units as the MN DHS likes to call them nowadays. So we are only billing about one-third of normal earnings compared to before the pandemic.

During those 4 months, we lost \$300K in unearned fees from the Department of Human Services. Currently we are losing about \$50K per month. Fortunately, we had healthy reserves and we have wonderful friends that have been donating to keep us open. Two DACs have closed their doors so far, one as near as Willmar, and it served 100 clients for 50 years. Now they are broke and out of business.

We have been successfully applying for help through a whole new alphabet soup of programs. CARES, PPP, Fed Provider Retention Grants, MN Provider Assistance, etc. have brought in \$220K and anonymous donors have brought in another \$30K. We are surviving and looking forward to a future without COVID-19. I am getting ready to hand my keys over to someone younger for the next few years.

I will be retiring this Christmas, although it won't be very Christmassy. No holiday open house this year. No, Halloween party & no Chanhassen Dinner Theater either. Just pandemic DAC services for the foreseeable future. The DAC board has begun interviewing and soon they will announce the new Executive Director decision. This program is in good shape, and we have terrific staff, too. It has been my pleasure working with this group and this board of directors. Thanks for letting me play in your sand box. It has been fun.

Charlie Oakes

SCDAC Executive Director