



New England Homes for the Deaf

Senior Living for the Deaf Since 1901

In March of 2020, what started out as a quiet whisper soon became a freight train barreling toward all of us. When news struck of the seriousness of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2), New England Homes for the Deaf went into immediate emergency mode. We listened; we learned; and we strategized to prepare ourselves and our residents for the complete change of life that awaited. We are enormously grateful to our staff for their dedication to excellent care, reflected by the highest grades in several government infection control surveys and zero positive cases since May.

**Prioritizing Connections, Safely**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has impacted all of our lives, but none more than the elderly population – especially those in health care facilities living under strict state and federal government protocols. Residents have been isolated, have lost contact with family and friends, and have had their sense of normalcy and communal living disrupted.

Socializing with friends at mealtimes or in our community rooms had to come to a screeching halt in the spring. Residents could not gather for church services or beloved Bingo. Most spent nearly 24 hours a day in their rooms. We have a unique mission at NEHD. Our Deaf and Deafblind residents already experience being cut off from the world in unique and overwhelmingly difficult ways. And now, lip-reading, facial gestures or gently touching a Deaf person to get their attention, commonly used communication methods, have become taboo in the current climate. Even masks with clear viewing of the mouth still hide those gestures that are so very much a part of Deaf interaction. Our residents feel these losses deeply, for they make up the essence of how they communicate. And the ability to communicate represents the antidote to the loneliness that so many of them feel right now.

Even as NEHD adopted these necessary and difficult measures to protect our residents' physical health, we prioritized creative alternatives to safely bring activities to residents.

**Together, We Can Do So Much**

Helen Keller said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." It is in that spirit that the residents and staff at NEHD have tackled the new normal under which we are all living.

NEHD purchased laptops and tablets and increased the availability of technology to close the social isolation gap. In order to link families and friends closer together, staff helped residents navigate Videophone calls, Facetime, Wavello and tactile interpretation. Yes, visits and hugs from families were absent. At a point in their lives when family time is precious, and precarious, our residents have had to champion on. And champions they all are, indeed!

The NEHD community is doing what we all need to do to weather a difficult pandemic, and our residents have done so with grace and strength. We all have new appreciation for simple freedoms, and we are looking with hope to 2021.

**Deep Appreciation for Your Continued Support**

I hope as you enjoy the holiday season and prepare to put 2020 in the rearview mirror that you will consider giving to NEHD, so we can continue providing an accessible, barrier-free, and culturally-sensitive environment for our residents. For the residents at NEHD, this place is far more than a skilled nursing, rehabilitation and assisted-living facility. It is their *home*. Please help us maintain the camaraderie, warmth, and caring that are the hallmarks of NEHD.

Thank you and Happy Holidays.

Shelley Silverman  
NEHD Executive Director

New England Homes for the Deaf, 154 Water Street, Danvers, MA 01923 Voice: (978) 774-0445 • VP: (978) 767-8784 • TTY: (978) 739-4010 • Fax: (978) 774-0271  
Thompson House, 160 Water Street, Danvers, MA 01923 VP: (978) 767-8750 •  
Voice/Fax: (978) 777-8957 • Email: Thompsnhse@verizon.net www.nehd.org

