

CHS AND COVID-19

HOW THE PANDEMIC AFFECT CHS AND OUR WORK



Every child deserves a home.

As we all adjust our lives, both personal and professional, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our team at CHS continues its work—albeit in new and creative ways. The uncertainty of our new reality creates additional challenges for the vulnerable and already traumatized children, families and adults with whom we work every day. In the following four segments, we will explore how the COVID-19 outbreak affects our clients and how we deliver our services..

*In the first segment, we hear from our **Foster Care Adoption team** who is working hard to match children and teens in foster care with forever families.*



How COVID-19 impacts the Foster Care Adoption Program at CHS

As with many jobs, CHS social workers are accustomed to meeting with our clients in person to conduct trainings, complete home study interviews, discuss questions, and make adoption plans. We also value our ability to spend quality face-to-face time with the young people in foster care who are waiting to be adopted, as it allows us to build rapport, establish trust, and help them make their voices heard in the process. Due to COVID-19 and the desire to ensure everyone's health and safety, **our team has made a shift such that the vast majority of our communications with our clients are on virtual platforms and video calls.** Although this is not ideal, it allows us to continue our crucial work to train families, approve homes, and place children for adoption.

One challenge we are experiencing is that in-person "get to know you" visits between the identified adoptive family and their child-to-be are not able to happen at this time. Although they can have virtual visits, this will ultimately slow down the process of transitioning children into their adoptive homes. We need to be patient and creative so that we maintain momentum and create strong, permanent families.

Another challenge to our work is that **the court system is currently limiting hearings to emergency matters.** We depend on the court system to help us complete adoption petitions and sign final orders. Since much of this is a mailing and paperwork process, we feel hopeful that this will not delay too many finalized adoptions.

Lastly, due to schools being closed, we anticipate that there may be a spike in re-placement needs among Virginia's foster families. This means our partners at Social Services will be engaged in handling those placement crises, which detracts their focus from adoption cases. **CHS is stepping in to fill the gaps during this time.** We continue to keep tabs on adoption cases and provide support services to those front-line case workers so that the adoption process can continue to move forward. Without our assistance and support, it is very likely that the adoption process would grind to a halt.

Although many things have changed as we practice social distancing and plan for the safety of our team and clients, we remain committed to our mission of finding adoptive homes for children in the foster system, and **we are using our best creative resources to ensure that the process continues to move forward.** We thank you for your support!

*In the second segment, we hear from our **Post Adoption team** who is working hard to provide services and support to adoptive families.*



How COVID-19 impacts the Post Adoption Program at CHS

We created our Post Adoption Program nearly ten years ago with the hope to provide specialized support to adoptive families. We know children who have been adopted come from pasts of disrupted relationships, exposure to trauma, and very little control over anything in their lives.

We work with families to provide what these children and teenagers need most; safety, consistency in care, and healthy relationships. Amid current COVID-19 pandemic, our staff are continuing Parent Coaching services using virtual and phone meetings to continue those supportive relationships using virtual and phone meetings. For adoptive youth we are now providing fun and skill-building activities through twice weekly Facebook Live events. Also via video, we continue our programming for Parental Workshops. In these ways, CHS has been able to provide that breadth of support we have for the past decade to post adoptive families.

The challenges for us still remain. We are missing the in-person interactions that allow us to better understand each parent and child and thus guide them. We know a Facebook live event does not provide the same level of engagement as a full day of programming; nor are parents receiving the benefit of a full day where qualified staff are caring for their children.

Our staff consistently encourage self-care for our parents and time to tend to one's own needs to manage the stress of parenting a child of trauma, however finding that time and space has been made more difficult in the current environment. Parents are struggling to create structure and predictability in an ever-changing situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenges are great and impactful, however, the Post-Adoption program was designed to help others overcome their own challenges. Cornerstones of our program include adapting to the client's needs and being creative in service delivery. Our families are used to sudden changes in behavior and emotions and we have become practiced in coaching them through tough times. The effects of this pandemic are novel and scary, but **our Post Adoption team has been helping families manage the novel and scary for nearly 10 years;** we feel confident we can continue to be that uniquely adoption-competent and trauma-informed service provider for them now and moving forward. Our partners and supporters make it possible for us to continue to provide; thanks for your support.

In the third segment, we will hear from **The Possibilities Project team** who is working hard to provide services and support to young adults who have aged out of the foster care system.



How COVID-19 Impacts The Possibilities Project Program at CHS

The Possibilities Project (TPP) team continues to meet the needs of the youth on a daily basis. While all services are now being rendered via phone calls, video calls and emails, all participants of TPP are receiving full case management services and life skills coaching services from a distance. Transportation for the youth continues through Uber and Lyft, while staff are adhering to current CHS Policies regarding service delivery during COVID-19. TPP youth continue to receive weekly therapy services through their regular providers, through tele-therapy. TPP staff continue to be responsive to issues that may prohibit continued services, including responding to internet outages and any financial issues that would prohibit a youth from keeping their phone service active. We are also dedicated to providing regular updates and safety precautions from the CDC to each youth, and are checking in with each of them regularly, about their fears and stressors related to COVID-19.

TPP staff are here to support our youth, while they process their fears and confusion during this unique and challenging time. They have shared fears and anxieties about losing their jobs, not knowing when things will "go back to normal," feeling isolated and having to put their classes or job trainings on hold. TPP team members are sharing financial and employment resources with youth who have had their hours or positions cut from their jobs. Staff ensure that youth have weekly access to their local grocery store and are practicing CDC guidelines accordingly when out in public. Through the generous donations that comprise our TPP pantry, we were able to ensure that all youth who needed paper products, household items and personal care products did not go without, despite empty shelves in most stores. Keeping these items in stock for our youth is crucial and challenging, however, staff is making every effort possible to ensure our youth's basic needs are met despite trying circumstances. TPP will continue communicating with partner agencies in the community, including colleges and vocational programs, to help youth stay hopeful about their future and the educational goals they set when they came into our program.

The clients of TPP have limited supports and resources, and often do not have the luxury of relying on their parents, or other adult supports. They do not have natural supports who will make sure they have safety nets in the event they lose their job, their savings, have an empty fridge, or scarcities in their cabinets.

We are their safety net and they need us more than ever. That is why we have opted to use video calls when possible, instead of just being a voice on the other end of a phone. We maintain connectedness and continue to ensure our youth that we are still there for them in all of the same capacities, and that we will get through this together.

Although many things have changed as we practice social distancing and plan for the safety of our team and clients, The Possibilities Project team remains committed to our mission of serving youth who have aged out of the foster system, and we are using our best creative resources to ensure that the process continues to move forward. We thank you for your support!

In our fourth segment, our **Chief Advancement Officer, Bruin Richardson**, writes about how the crisis affects CHS--and **what you can do to help**.



Friends and Supporters:

Over the past several days we have chronicled the amazing work that CHS continues to do as we all learn to adjust to a new normal. Our **Foster Care Adoption** team comforts children and teens living in foster care and find them the permanent homes they so desperately want and need. Our **Post Adoption** team counsels and supports families who face uncertain futures while parenting children whose lives have been touched by trauma and loss, but also love and hope. Our **Possibilities Project** team works hard to reassure youth -- let down by a system that promised to make their lives better -- that someone is there to support and nurture them, even in these ever changing times.

As I write to you from my dining room, I feel privileged to be a part of this amazing CHS family of professionals, youth, teens, children and parents who have given their lives to something more than themselves. Those who believe in the **Power of Family** as a healing force. Like many others, my own family has been touched by these events. My wife, a travel professional, just filed her first ever unemployment claim. My son, about to graduate from college, wonders every day about his future and whether four years of hard work will result in a job. But we are here together, and we have each other to support and love one another, and that helps us to know that we will ultimately get through this together. But not everyone has those supports.

CHS's mission is to build the strong and permanent families and connections that will help some of our most vulnerable children and youth thrive in the years to come.

But we can't fulfill that mission without you. As the Commonwealth faces a looming budget shortfall, the funding for our Foster Care Adoption and Post Adoption programs is in peril. Our major fund-raising event, celebrating our 120 years of service to the children, youth and families of Virginia has been postponed. Major funders have understandably repurposed some of their support to basic needs that are so crucial right now. But those whom we serve need us now more than ever.

So I ask that if you have the means to help advance our mission, you thoughtfully consider doing so now.

Please help us help those who need the love and support that my family and your family has -- support that will help them get through these trying times. The new CARES Act provides a charitable tax deduction for everyone of \$300, whether they itemize deductions or use the standard deduction. This benefit makes it a little easier for everyone to give to those charitable causes that are most dear to their hearts. The Act also provides direct payments of \$1,200 to many citizens. Some of the loyal CHS family--who have the ability to do so--have already elected to redirect that amount to further our work. At CHS we are incredibly grateful for that support, and we ask that if you have the ability to join their generosity you do so. The work that we do is crucial every day. So is your support.

Thank you for all you have done for the CHS family in the past. And thank you for all you will do to sustain us today and in the future. Because of you, our mission continues.

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Children's Home Society of Virginia

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