

OP-ED

Residential foster care agency *adjusts to COVID-19 pandemic*

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We are all struggling to adjust to the COVID-19 world. Many are working from home, parents are learning to home school children, businesses are trying to survive, and too many New Yorkers have already lost work.

But for those of us in the human services nonprofit sector, the reality is different. We have to come to work and work harder than ever. We can't and won't shutter our doors because some of

the most vulnerable and at-risk children and families rely on us – now more than ever.

We at The Children's Village operate shelters and residential homes in the NYC area. Our residential campus in Dobbs Ferry is a temporary home for approximately 300 children. While we are not family, we do our best to care for children as a family would.

One hundred and twelve staff members live on campus, helping operate 33 cottages, food services, health and behavioral services, and

a plethora of other programs, including a job training program, full recreation center, greenhouse, and more.

Our main priority is keeping the young people in our care healthy and safe. We are following government guidelines to ensure that we are taking every necessary precaution, including performing daily sanitation of all our facilities, no small task given our size. But we need to do much more than that.

All children need love, stability and reassurance. This need is especially acute for the kids in our care, who

have often experienced extreme stress and trauma of rejection and separation from those they love. We are making great efforts to ensure their emotional and mental well-being during these stressful times.

With the on-campus public school closed, we have opened our recreation center all day to provide a carefully regimented schedule. We are finding activities that conform to social distancing guidance, including basketball, bike riding, and taking walks to explore our vast campus, among other things.

We are also working hard to ensure that the mental health of the young people in our care is addressed. Our staff of psychiatrists and social workers are working around the clock to help our children weather this storm.

We will all have to get through this time together, but it's the dedicated nonprofit workers that will ensure the success of the most vulnerable among us. If you know one, please thank them.

Dr. Jeremy Kohomban is president and chief executive of The Children's Village.