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**March 15, 2020**

**Statement from Beginnings Executive Director:**

As the COVID-19 situation continues to develop both in our community and around the world, the health and wellbeing of our staff and client families is our top priority. Beginnings Family Services is following closely the recommendations from the Public Health Departments as well as the Government of Ontario. As a result, we have come to some decisions that will impact our ability to deliver services, particularly at our Care Centres in Guelph and Woodstock.

**Hamilton Office**

**Adoption Services and Birth Parent Counselling:**

Adoption planning will continue as usual. Telephone and email will be monitored at all times and messages returned promptly. Individuals in need of counselling will be referred to a counsellor. Other service providers please continue to refer to Beginnings as we will continue to respond to clients in need. Staff may be working remotely therefore please call the office before coming in.

**Embryo Donation Program:**

Embryo Donation Program remains open as usual. Please contact the office for more information.

**Guelph and Woodstock Care Centres**

To further protect the wellbeing of our clients and families that we serve and slow the potential spread of COVID-19 in our community, the Care Centres in Guelph and Woodstock will be closed to the public and for all programming from March 16 through April 5, 2020. We will reassess prior to that date and update our plans accordingly.

This was a difficult decision to make, knowing the significant impact that these cancellations will have on the clients and families who rely on our programming, and on the staff who work hard to deliver these important services.

Clients in need of baby essentials, (i.e. diapers, formula, wipes, toiletries) can call ahead and make an appointment time to pick up these items. They should identify what items they need to pick up so staff can have it ready. All clients, including walk in clients, will be screened appropriately. We will only attend one client / family at a time.

Our staff will still be on-site and available to provide client support via phone or email. If in-person crisis counselling / pregnancy tests is required, please call and set an appointment. We will only attend one client at a time.

The following guidelines will be set in place for clients or visitors accessing the Care Centre:

- 1.) Hand sanitizing upon arrival and departure at the Centre
- 2.) Staff and volunteers have the authority to send home any clients who attend the office with a cold or who are ill
- 3.) Practice social distancing with any people

We ask all clients and visitors to our Care Centre to self-screen prior to entering our facilities. If you have experienced any of the following, we encourage you to stay home to avoid the possibility of exposing others:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath / difficulty breathing
- Known coronavirus (COVID-19) exposure
- Traveled out of the country within last 14 days

All group programming will be postponed until Public Health guidelines deem that it is safe to gather in larger groups again.

Material and clothing donations will not be accepted at this time. We ask our supporters and friends to please consider making a monetary donation instead to help keep our Care Cupboards stocked for the families who will be needing essential baby supplies during this time.

These are challenging times. We appreciate that the pace at which decisions are being made and changes are occurring is disruptive and disconcerting. Please know that we are doing everything we can to address this situation with the most careful thought and consideration for the safety and wellbeing of our staff, volunteers, and clients.