

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 19
August 13, 2020



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Thursday, August 13, 2020. Welcome to our weekly video. I'm here again with Edward Brubaker, Living Branches President/CEO. Welcome back!

Ed Brubaker: Thank you, Alex. Good to be back.

AM: First, let me summarize – everyone likes this part of the video where I say we have no COVID cases anywhere right now from anyone at Living Branches. Whether it be residents or staff – we are COVID-free at this moment. So we're very grateful for that.

EB: And COVID-free has a caveat. It's been a few weeks since we did testing of everyone. Certainly we test for symptoms and that kind of thing. And there's been some recent ones this week, too, that we needed to do that with again. So that's always going to be happening and we are exploring possibilities that are hopefully within the realm of what we can do for more regular testing, but we haven't figured that out yet. As far as we know, we are. And it feels very good to be at that place. It feels much different today than it did in April, May, and June certainly.

AM: Absolutely. Last week I talked a lot about the pandemic guidelines that were released. And especially for Personal Care, Memory Care, and Health Care, talking about the fact there are now different steps that we can be at and that can change depending on what COVID status is. So right now everyone in Personal Care, Memory Care, and Health Care is in Step 2 which means we've been able to implement some of our reopening planning. We're coming back to communal dining, we're back to some more group activities, and perhaps more importantly, for everybody, we have more ability to have visitation. Have you been on campus? Have you heard stories about how people are responding to this?

EB: Yes. I was just on campus at Dock Woods yesterday and just a reflection, too, about how we can go back to previous phases and that is true. Obviously we want to focus on the opportunity and the good news of where we're at now, but I'm aware of a sister facility not in this area that had one person test positive – it may have been a staff person, I can't exactly remember – and so they had to go back to the beginning. So that's always the risk that we have and we need to be aware of that because those are always distinct possibilities. Having said that, it does feel good to be where we're at and we want to focus on that, too. I am at the Dock Woods campus and I can't say I heard a lot of stories about visitation in Personal Care and Health Care but certainly observed the Bistro being open. It was interesting though – my observation to Nancy [Donnelly, executive director at Dock Woods] was that it didn't seem like

there were a lot of residents there. There was a fair number of staff there having their lunch, but we've been banging that drum for so long of: keep distance, don't come to the dining room – and so I think people got the message. Turning that around is not going to happen on a dime. On the other hand, it's not like it went back to February either. You're wearing a mask, you need to be socially distant. And the reality is when you're eating you have your mask off, so there is more change of transmission. So it's just an interesting thing – people are very happy with the changes and want to engage in new and different ways, but you do that a bit of a cloud over it, too. To say how does this all work? How is it going to feel? So it will take some time for that. Certainly, it's not gone yet so until we have a methodology, whether it's through a vaccine or testing or otherwise, to make people feel safer – it's going to be a long time until it feels like it did in February or January. But it definitely is good to be here. And I know the stories are that people are very pleased to be able to leave their rooms and to come out to dine again, appropriately distances, but certainly being able to see a different perspective – see a different part of the facility, which is a big deal. So we're very pleased with that.

AM: I was talking to someone in life enrichment in Personal Care at Souderton and she was sharing that a gentleman who lives there who was being taken down for a visit with his girlfriend. They were telling him that things are different now and you won't have to be separated. You can give her a hug! And evidently he was so excited that he burst into song. He was singing and whooping it up as they were walking through the halls.

EB: It would be interesting to know what song he burst out into!

AM: That would be a very good detail! I have been hearing from a lot of families, too, that since visitation is longer our times slots are all booked up. So we're working right now – in fact I have a meeting after this with life enrichment at Souderton – we're working to see if there are ways that we can restructure how we are scheduling visits so that we'll be able to get more people through. We had talked about the fact that per the guidance from the state, we're now able to have volunteers from Residential Living who may be able to assist with visitation. So we are exploring those options to see if we can get more time slots so that people will be able to get in more quickly. Stay tuned and keep watching the website as we make those changes! I know people will be very excited about that.

EB: I guess you could always do night owl visits – the 2:00 a.m.- I can't sleep, is mom awake? Maybe I'll go see mom for the 2:00 a.m. visit. But the reality is there are certain hours of the day that visits will take place, so there is a capacity issue. And we certainly want to work at making it as accessible as possible because it is just very important. People need this. People need it.

AM: Absolutely. I can't believe I'm saying this – it seems like just yesterday – but it's time for the annual Chicken BBQ at Souderton Mennonite Homes. Of course this year we're not having 2,000 people on campus and doing the things that we would normally do, but next week is going

to be a week of fun. At Dock Woods there is a singer coming and an ice cream truck coming. At Souderton they're doing a couple of retrospectives on the BBQ, and then on Saturday we're still having a concert and residents will be getting their BBQ chicken. It's nice to be planning those types of activities again.

EB: Obviously it's a virtual event this year and a lot of things will be done over video or socially distanced appropriately. We obviously can't have 2,000 people roaming around our campus, but that's what is happening at a lot of places. There is an event this evening for a local senior center that is a virtual event. There's an event in September for another not-for-profit that's virtual. So essentially that's what people are doing this year and that's the reality. But it's still nice to be able to have some kinds of events going on that we need to be looking at. So it will be different – no question – but it will be a fun time together. It was decided to do an online auction this year as a way to do what had been the silent auction. So we'll see how that goes to see if it's something we want to continue in the future or not. But it was another way to stay connected, so certainly people can go on our website and look at the things that are there. I don't think those are real pictures of the sticky buns, but they look amazing, frankly. People can go in a bid and bid often – early and often – but it's a way to try to create some newness and change in our lives to create some excitement, if you will, even in this time. We can't gather in the same way, so there are a lot of things going on and people are trying to be creative and working at these things to have some sense of normalcy but also recognizing that it can't be like it was last year.

AM: I guess we could say for folks who are watching this that the auction is live through Sunday at livingbranches.org/auction – a very creative name we came up with there. But yes, if you want to bid by all means, go ahead and do that!

EB: It's very easy to bid.

AM: Yes it is. And it will even remind you if someone has topped your bid, if you put your phone number in.

EB: That's right. It will send you a text message. It is very easy to use.

AM: We're having an interesting time in marketing trying to figure out, how do we take a virtual – how do we take the tours that we used to do with people on our campuses and convert them to some type of a virtual experience that still has meaning for people. Especially because for so long, what people have really said is the reason they come to a Living Branches campus is the feeling. It's the community. It's the way that they feel welcomed. So trying to change that now to a virtual experience is very interesting. We're not the only ones trying to figure it out.

EB: That's right.

AM: Well I think that's it for this week, unless you have anything in particular that you would like to mention.

EB: I would just encourage people to pay attention to the website. That's where we give updates. In looking at the guidelines and things that are changing, there's some slight changes as we move into Phase 3, but some of the changes aren't as significant, but things with visitation, dining, and other things like that – that's where you can get the latest information and where we try to communicate and give the details of what's going on. It really does feel good to be at this place. It feels like, it seems like in Pennsylvania we're still somewhat stabilized. We need to keep our discipline. We need to keep wearing our masks when we're in public and appropriate situation. We need to keep doing those things to keep us safe so we can keep that temped down. But it certainly feels good to be at this place and we want to continue to make those changes within reason. The big deal is the opportunity for people to visit with their loved ones. I mean that's huge. That is so important and we're so happy to be at that place to do that.

AM: Absolutely. Thank you all. If you have questions, feel free to email them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org and we'll see you next week.