Dear Friend of Children,

One short month ago, our offices were vibrant, the parking lots outside were full and life was normal. We were headed into the final month of the 1st quarter of 2020 and finalizing the preparations for our annual Friends of Children Banquet.

And yet, here we are today. Only 30 short days beyond that point, but it feels so different. The unknowns we, and I’m sure you as well, are navigating appear to be rapidly changing and ever-evolving from one day to the next.

Scripture says to mourn with those who mourn and we do so for those who’ve lost loved ones. Our prayers go out to those who are sick and to those in our medical community who are on the frontlines of serving.

In mid-March, out of concern for our supporters and our staff, we postponed our Friends of Children Banquet and we’ve shifted to doing things differently over the past two weeks.

With the intent of taking care of our team, we transitioned 76% of our staff to working from home. For those that are still office- or campus-based, we’ve limited the number of staff allowed in an office at the same time to 3 or less, implemented CDC guidelines, and have instituted a “no visitor” policy at our offices and campuses.

We’ve transitioned our monthly all staff Zoom video chats to weekly, so that we can overcommunicate, connect and check in on one another. We’ve transitioned our face-to-face contact and visits with clients to video and telephonic communication. We’ve started an employee Facebook group to connect more often and share resources with one another.

We are leaning in and allowing our new core values of Faith, Accountability, Integrity, Fun, People, and Innovation to guide our responses, actions, and decisions.

We’ve reminded our team and we remind you that for 103 years our mission of “providing Christian help, healing, and hope to children and families in crisis” has withstood both trials and joys. And, so here we are, staring into the unknowns of when will this end, how many people will be hurt or affected by COVID-19, how many children will need a home in this season, and how many alumni of foster care will need a place to stay because their college dorm has closed?

We don’t have all the answers, but we know this. We are mission and core value focused and we are committed to saying “Yes!” to help, healing and hope. Do we have challenges? Yes. Our endowment that funds 18% of our budget has taken an approximate 12% market hit, reducing our accessible budgeted funds for 2020 by $76,000. Postponing our banquet eliminates an expected cash flow increase in April by about $50,000. These are both in light of an already potential drop in our United Methodist Church support in 2020.
We could shrink back, but that is not our DNA. Our beginning, our heritage, and our very roots are to be those who do something in the midst of challenge, brokenness, and crisis. **So, we are doing what we know how to do, respond.** We have reached out to the Department of Human Services and said, “We have room on our campuses, if you need space for young adults or others in crisis.” We’ve reached out to our foster families to encourage them and ask if they’d be willing to reconsider their age range, open one more bed, or come off hold to take a child. They responded and we now have 47 more spots available for children in need of a temporary foster home. **In addition, we hit an all-time single day high in March of serving 213 kids in our foster homes.** I’m certain that number will hit another high in April.

Our PAL staff and Pearl’s Hope staff have responded by checking in more frequently with our young adults and moms. Checking on their mental health, their need for resources, and continuing to be available for any emergencies. Over the past two weeks of remote work, our foster care team has continued to approve new foster homes by opening 5 new families across Oklahoma. In addition, we are using technology to launch an online support group for all foster families in Oklahoma, not just Circle of Care families.

**We believe we should ask the question, “How can we help?”, and then answer it.** We will continue to do that in the days, weeks, and months ahead. History shows that crisis leads to transformation and new ideas. We are committed to being out in front of serving Oklahoma’s most vulnerable populations in any way we can.

**You might be asking, “How can I help?”**. It’s simple, **join us in this season with your giving and prayers.** Why are we able to lean in, instead of shrink back in the face of challenges? Part of the answer is you and everyone who has chosen to invest financially in our mission of help, healing, and hope over the past 103 years. We have an endowment because individuals chose to leave legacy gifts. We can withstand unexpected monthly fluctuations in our budgets, because our monthly supporters keep giving. We occasionally have cash reserves because individuals choose to give unexpected one-time gifts and memorials.

You allow us to lean in and say “Yes!” and in this season, **we need you.** My team and I are fully committed to doing what we can, but we cannot do that without your giving and prayers.

I’m keenly aware that I stand on the shoulders of the leaders and donors who have gone before me. In this season of unknowns, I’m committed to leading Circle of Care to “**do more for more**” in new and innovative ways as we show up and provide help, healing, and hope across Oklahoma.

Let’s keep praying for one another, as well as, for those who are sick and for those who will serve the sick in the days and weeks ahead. **We will always be better together.**

Thank you for your support and concern. As always if you have any questions, would like to hear more about the work we’re doing or have a prayer request of your own, please call me on my cell phone at 1-918-453-3558. I look forward to hearing from you!

For the Children,

Keith Howard, President and CEO

P.S. To receive monthly updates, please subscribe to our email list at www.circleofcare.org/contact/. May God bless you and keep you!