

Thank You, Watertown

To Our Friends and Neighbors:

Recently, we shared the sad news that we would be closing our group homes, employment services and day programs in Watertown and across Wisconsin. This decision was painful and deeply personal. We knew that in the community we have called home for 116 years the grief would be shared, and indeed it has been.

We have long been candid about our financial struggles. The sorry truth is our state simply does not pay what it takes to sustain quality residential care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have accepted losses for years. Many of you have joined us in the fight for more funding, only to join in our frustration when the state said no, year after year.

COVID-19 caused huge, immediate cost increases and made certain that we would receive even less funding in the future. *We lost nearly \$2 million in Wisconsin in our most recent fiscal year.* This forced our hand: Change now and have a chance to serve people where our programs are sustainable, or change nothing and soon serve no one at all. We made the only choice we could – a heartbreaking one.

While the numbers and trends were clear, this is really about people. It always has been. As we have done since 1904, we are putting people first. We shared our decision the best way we could, and we respect the disappointment, sadness and anger that some feel toward us. We hear you.

We are working nonstop to ensure that those we can no longer support find new programs and transition smoothly and safely. Everyone will have a home – you have our word on it. For our valued colleagues leaving us through no fault of their own, we are offering a variety of resources to help them thrive in new career opportunities.

Please know that we will continue to be a part of this community and this state. We remain a major local employer with our corporate office, and our Watertown thrift store and Bethesda College at Concordia University Wisconsin will continue to provide opportunities and resources for people with disabilities. New and innovative services are possible down the road.

To those of you who have been part of the Bethesda Family, some for generations, **thank you.** Whether you have been a person we support, worked or volunteered here, shopped at our thrift store or made a donation, you made a difference. Thank you for making people's lives better.

Mike

Mike Thirtle, Ph.D.,
President and CEO

