



Roca Statement on COVID-19

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

On March 9, Roca started initial conversations around COVID-19 and preparations to ensure our infrastructure was sophisticated and strong enough to withstand worst-case scenarios. We began testing our Information Technology capacity to work with young people and each other remotely if needed, increased daily sanitizing of the building and reviewed potential remote programming work models. On Friday, March 13, Roca closed two sites and went to remote work in response to a potential exposure to COVID-19 that fortunately turned out to be negative. On Monday, March 16, Roca prepared for an organizational closure of all sites for programming, stopping work crews, and began remote work with social distance outreach starting March 17. Since then, we have mobilized the organization, changed our work, and started to prepare for the future, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve.

At Roca, we are privileged to serve and walk with a special group of very vulnerable young people every day. Unfortunately, our young people and their families now face far more risks of poverty, trauma, and isolation from services than they did before the outbreak of the virus. We are continuously working on designing and implementing the best and safest ways to support them and everyone else we work with and know – our team, our partners, our families, and our friends – in these challenging and uncertain times.

Like each of you, we at Roca are heartbroken when faced with the tragic reality of the virus and the necessary changes in all our lives. The safety and health of everyone is paramount.

All of Roca's work is grounded in developing and nurturing positive and intensive relationships with young people, community partners, police, probation and the court system. Due to the recent events of COVID-19, the fluidity of the ever-changing communication we are getting locally and nationally from our government officials, and the impact of closures and social distancing, Roca has been forced to make some difficult, temporary, business decisions.

Because we have contracts that have been suspended, and resultant reduced funding, we quickly explored many options to improve efficiency and reduce costs, while also ensuring that we could continue to deliver essential services to our communities' highest-risk young people. While these measures have succeeded to some extent, it became clear that we needed reduce our workforce to ensure the stability of the organization. We have also changed the way we work to serve the remarkable young people we know, support staff, and work with community partners.

This document outlines those changes and next steps.

Reduction in Workforce and Wages

- As of March 25, 2020, Roca has directly communicated a temporary furlough to 36 employees in Massachusetts (27) and Baltimore (9). The impacted employees are being provided supportive services to guide them through the application process for unemployment. Roca has also made the commitment to pay 100% of medical, dental and vision through COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act) to ensure that affected employees retain their full benefits through May 2020; our ability to continue this important practice will be evaluated monthly.

We have communicated to impacted staff that a furlough is a leave of absence while remaining employed by Roca. This means that employees will not be paid by Roca but can receive state unemployment benefits instead of losing their jobs during this transition period, if they so choose. We are grateful that the federal government has increased payments and length of time for unemployment. We hope to bring people back to work as soon as changes to this situation and opportunity allow.

- Secondly, the entire Executive Team has agreed to reduced wages as of March 23, 2020 through June 30, 2020.

Roca's Commitment to Mission & Current Strategic Approach

Roca's mission is to be a relentless force in disrupting incarceration and poverty by engaging the young adults, police and systems at the center of urban violence in relationships to address trauma, find hope, and drive change.

Committed to our mission, Roca's business approach is in alignment with the following comments from an editorial by John MacIntosh, managing partner for SeaChange Capital Partners, published by CNN on Friday, March 20, 2020. MacIntosh outlines both the immediate challenge to nonprofits and the bold but necessary approach we believe in:

"COVID-19 is poised to become an extinction-level event for America's non-profits . . . Fundraising events have been canceled. Many essential front-line social serves – e.g., operating homeless shelters – cannot be delivered remotely and pose particular risks of infection, increasing costs of keeping staff safe . . .

. . . While the nonprofit sector is often taken for granted, it provides much of what is valuable in social service, arts and culture, recreation and education. For example, the countless nonprofits delivering human services represent a \$200 billion industry that touches the lives of more than 1 in 5 Americans, including housing more than 200,000 elderly Americans, providing homes to 670,000 foster children and serving food to 46 million people through food banks . . .

. . . **Non-profit leaders and boards: Be tough-minded.** Non-profits must go into cash conservation mode. It is hard . . . But a tough restructuring allowing for survival and the continuation of the mission (which is the non-profit's sole reason for being) is far better than hitting the wall and closing up shop all together . . ."

We are clear that, sadly, the world is changing rapidly, great harm and losses are impacting and will continue to impact people, and the economy is in trouble. We understand that times are uncertain and at present, it is impossible to know when things will change. To go forward, building off Roca's historical business approach, ongoing lessons from others, and love for young people, Roca is embracing the following principles:

- Be compassionate, transformational and grateful.
- Stabilize the organization, cut costs, and do the best we can to incur no debt.
- Be transparent and communicate.
- Quickly, carefully, and safely adjust how we serve young people, our partners and communities.

- Use this time for: strengthening infrastructure, training, and innovation.
- Be forward-thinking and adjust management and strategies for the next two years.
- Seek wisdom, support and help.

We are hopeful that Roca will be stronger and fully prepared to hit the ground running once this pandemic has subsided. We understand that these are difficult decisions that have a dramatic impact on each person and their families. We are being as strategic as possible to ensure the organization can meet its mission and remain viable to continue the amazing work that we do to serve young people, our partners and communities.

Changing The Way We Work

Since July 1, 2019, Roca Baltimore has lost 13 young people to homicide and an additional 26 were victims of non-fatal shootings. Over the past two weeks in Greater Boston, one young person was stabbed and hospitalized, and another left his substance abuse program and is at risk for an overdose and violating probation. Seventeen young mothers in Greater Boston (4) and Western MA (13) are currently separated from their children. These incidents were some among many others.

Each day in Massachusetts and Baltimore programs, we have the privilege of walking with young people who are dealing with domestic violence, child separation, court dates, street and gang violence, and poverty in addition to the ongoing impact of years or decades of trauma and racism. At the same time, they demonstrate remarkable courage to learn and grow.

We cannot and won't stop our work. We are essential workers under the federal and state guidelines regarding health, health education, behavioral health, emergency support, and public safety.

Our relationships help create safety and stability for our young people. Those relationships and support are now needed more than ever. We need to be just as relentless in our remote/social distancing efforts as we continue to support our young people through these challenging times. To ensure we are able to do this, we have drafted adapted operational protocols for outreach as well as expectations for contact and programming standards throughout this period of Remote Work & Social Distancing.

While we clearly can't do all of our work the same way, we can do much of it, and adjust other aspects of the work towards the same goals.

The work will include:

1. **Creating Safety and Stability:** While each site normally serves as a safe place for many young people, these times do not allow for that. However, our relentless outreach and transformational relationships can continue and improve. Every young person has an identified youth worker and support from 1 - 2 other staff for education, CBT, and crisis support.
 - a. Youth Workers will seek to have a minimum of 3 actual contacts with the young person each week (social distance outreach and/or actual, deliberate conversations and skills development by text, social media or phone – not including programming).
 - b. Youth Workers will receive weekly supervision, identify and follow-up on young people most in crisis, and participate in training and team meetings virtually.

- c. To address basic needs, we will: provide food/hygiene/diapers every 2-2 ½ weeks to young people and their families; set up an emergency fund for rent and utilities; continue to sign young people for SNAP benefits; assist participants who have lost their jobs with taxes and unemployment paperwork; and connect young people to other available services as needed.
2. **Teaching Life-Saving Skills:** CBT – in the form of Roca’s 7-skill curriculum – will continue to be intentionally delivered by youth workers, but will now be offered in on-line individual and/or small group classes. **We believe that this is the most important work that we can do and share with young people.**
3. **Practicing Skills, Relapse and Repeat:** We will provide individual and small group opportunities for employment, education and life skills programming. While different, due to the lack of access to sites, use of the site, having no work crews, and even the inability to sit in a living room or door step to work individually with a young person, these times will provide us with the opportunity to review, improve and innovate our curriculum, methodology, and use of IT.
4. **Engaging Institutions and Systems:** We will continue to work with police, probation, House of Corrections, Corrections, juvenile services, children and family services, and all other partners during this period. This includes: near-daily check-ins with police; regular meetings with Probation; working with the Department of Children and Families regarding family issues and safety; as well as others.

Infrastructure, Capacity Building and Strategy Moving Forward

All infrastructure operations – finance, administration, performance-based management and development – have been moved off site and are set-up to run virtually. In addition to continued business operations, Roca will use this unusual period to strengthen infrastructure, build capacity, innovate, and adjust our recently completed strategic plan to these times.

Roca had recently completed a detailed 4-year strategic plan. However, the circumstance of today necessitates a quick pivot with the understanding that the next two years will be different due to the impact of COVID-19 on people and families, what will inevitably be changes in government and funding, and a worldwide economy that will be different than anything we have ever known. For Roca, this will be a period of fiscal conservatism, improvement, innovation and entrepreneurship.

We will continue to keep our friends and partners updated during this extraordinarily challenging time. Roca is deeply grateful for our supporters’ faith in and commitment to Roca’s young people during this uncertain period. We wish safety, security, and good health to you and your families.

Sincerely,



Molly Baldwin, CEO