When LIFE St. Francis’ center in Bordentown was forced to close under Executive order for everything except essential services due to COVID-19 restrictions, Executive Director Lisa Zavorski and her team were faced with the challenge of remotely serving their 353 participants.

“We typically had about 130 participants who came to the center on any given day, but in order to comply with the Executive order, only our clinic and rehabilitation departments could remain open for urgent medical and rehab needs,” explains Zavorski. “This created the need for a revised approach to managing our participants in their homes. To accomplish this, our focus shifted to inhome interventions and assessments and the implementation of telehealth technology.”

According to Medical Director Rachel Liebman, DO, LIFE St. Francis’ primary care providers quickly transitioned to telehealth calls so they could see participants face-to-face in both the home and nursing home settings to minimize the need to bring participants into the clinic for more routine evaluations.

“We’re making phone calls every day to evaluate the physical and emotional needs of our participants, but telehealth actually lets us see how they are doing so we can assess them,” she says. “Our medical clinic and rehabilitation departments are still open for urgent issues that require an inpatient visit, but we are having great success using remote management.”

“Our nurses are also using a lot of telehealth to reduce exposure where we can,” adds Tammi Devlin, Director of Nursing for LIFE St. Francis. “We still have nurses out in the community drawing labs and performing in-home visits when necessary. We’re also utilizing our medical assistants and home health aides for in-home needs.”

LIFE St. Francis has also gotten creative with its transportation vans. While the center is still providing transportation for urgent care needs, it has also become a delivery service of sorts, providing participants with goods such as food, medications, supplies and other items essential to managing them successfully in their homes. Dietitians are also reaching out to participants and preparing food items and boxed lunches that can be delivered to participants as needed. All other departments and LIFE St. Francis colleagues are also making supportive calls and going the extra mile during this time.

“We are a 24/7 program,” says Zavorski. “The number of concerned calls we’re receiving between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m. has increased significantly. We’re also supporting families who are now working from home and have become full-time caregivers. We’re providing education and emotional support across the board. Our chaplain and social workers have also been very active addressing the spiritual, emotional and social needs of our participants.”

Because recreation is such an important part of a participant’s overall health and well-being, LIFE St. Francis has also launched a phone conference line to maintain recreational activities and social engagement. Participants can dial in to the phone line to listen to a daily morning greeting, play games like bingo and trivia, meditate, and lend their voices in sing-a-longs. They can also interact with one another.

“Our participants are really feeling the love,” says Zavorski. “We are showing them that we are a family and their depth of appreciation is overwhelming. I always knew my staff had huge hearts, but these circumstances have really driven that point home. They’ve stepped up to the plate in so many ways…I’ve been so inspired. They truly are heroes at work.”