

□ Diversion program helping mothers makes adjustments amid COVID-19 crisis



Updated: 11:16 PM CDT Mar 25, 2020



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OKLAHOMA CITY — Nonprofit organizations and the vulnerable populations they serve have been hit hard by the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis.

One of those groups is Rmerge, a diversion program for mothers. In place of prison time, the organization offers program time. Terri Woodland, executive director of Rmerge, said the lack of in-person interaction as leaders try to curb the spread of the virus has been a difficult change.

"I think the thing that's most difficult for us is the lack of being able to see them face-to-face and contact them and support," Woodland said.

The coronavirus has shut down Rermerge's standard operating procedures, which is all about in-person support via classes, counseling and even visits from the Department of Human Services. That's now a no-go.

"We would have visits here face-to-face so moms could connect," Woodland said.

Rermerge allows the women in the program to be at its facility instead of jail. It's serious business, and the pandemic puts them at risk, as social distancing can feel like disconnecting.

"The stress, but also dealing with addiction, struggling with mental health, it's risky for our moms," Woodland said.

But so far so good, as the team and mothers are adjusting through daily check-ins over the phone and video. Rermerge also makes sure the mothers have the necessary items at home to get by.

"Just trying to do the best we can with the situation given our moms are in the community, in their homes," Woodland said.

The organization works to keep the goal of graduation at the forefront. If the women complete the program, not only will they successfully avoid jail time but their charges will be dropped.