



COJAC - Maintaining support to families during lockdown

COJAC (Caring Operations Joint Action Council) is a voluntary managed charity with its own premises in the Castlemilk area of Glasgow.

The centre provides children services, afterschool activities during term-time and during holidays, adult services three evenings per week, and a one-day service for young adults. All service users have additional support needs including distressed behaviour.

COJAC has continued to provide day services to children aged 5-18 years during the COVID-19 lockdown. They are providing a week-day service between 9am and 3pm, with on average 6-8 children and young people attending per day.

Initially this was to support children of key workers, but over time this was extended to include families that had previously accessed the service. Many families using COJAC are vulnerable, and it became evident that some were now struggling to manage without a break. School provision was very limited and often difficult to access.

The centre manager has worked closely with staff and families to ensure there is a safe environment for both the children and the staff, and to allow people to discuss any concerns. This was crucial in building confidence. As a change of service hours was required (to provide support throughout the day instead of only after school), the Care Inspectorate was notified and this was approved quickly. Their HSCP commissioning officer was also informed and a positive response was received.

A successful application was made to Firstport for resilience funding and this extra funding has helped to offset the additional costs, which have included:

- Paying staff extra hours for cleaning and sanitising
- Additional time needed for staff to put on and dispose of PPE
- Additional time required to collect PPE, queue and collect snacks etc from supermarkets
- Purchase of extra cleaning products, signage, etc.

Guidance on infection prevention and control was collected from various sources (Health Protection Scotland, HSE, Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate) and used by the centre manager to prepare local policies and procedures. One difficulty has been the overwhelming volume of guidance that has been produced, and deciding which is most relevant.

The information of most importance related to:

- Accessing and using PPE

- Advice on social/physical distancing
- Advice on accessing testing for staff
- HR advice on safe working practices for staff

Sector specific guidance was also sought from official sources in England, as it was felt they were further ahead in their planning for resuming certain public services. For example, practical advice in relation to adapting the school environment was found to be relevant to the COJAC setting.

Taking account of the guidance available, COJAC has taken the following steps:

- Children are dropped off at a designated place where distancing can be maintained and contact between families is minimised. COJAC staff then collect children and bring them into the centre
- Hand sanitiser points are provided and children are helped with their hand hygiene, particularly on entering and leaving the building
- Staff involved in providing personal care are given appropriate PPE and training
- All spaces are regularly cleaned and sanitised
- Parents/carers are kept fully informed about the infection control measures and invited to speak to staff if they have any questions or concerns.

Physical distancing

Many of the children require 1:1 support and so physical distancing has been easier to manage. Also, there are small numbers of children and young people attending each day – 6 to 8 on average. However, inevitably children do mix during play and COJAC feel it is not in the child's interests to try and implement strict distancing measures. This places greater importance on the other infection prevention measures.

Access to testing and PPE

Access to testing has been very important to ensure service continuity. If a member of staff has to self-isolate for precautionary reasons, they would be unavailable for 14 days resulting in a major impact on service capacity. Now staff can be referred to the local testing centre and results are available within 48hrs. The local health board infection control service has been a useful source of advice for the centre manager, helping them with any questions about testing and infection control measures. PPE is provided by the local hub (their usual supplier had run out) and this has been working very well.

Next steps

COJAC is now exploring resuming their evening service for young adults. Previously this has involved collecting clients from their homes with a minibus, which would make distancing difficult. They are also making plans for their holiday provision and outdoor visits, but this will depend on overcoming similar transport challenges, and also how quickly lockdown restrictions are relaxed. However, they are determined to find solutions and be ready as they anticipate more families will begin to struggle without access to their normal supports.

COJAC has the following advice for organisations planning to resume their services:

- Keep staff and families fully involved and informed. Listen to their concerns and ideas for resuming services safely

- Ensure you and your staff are familiar with the latest available guidance on infection prevention and control. Use this as the basis to create your own operational policies, procedures and risk assessments. Provide training and regularly meet with staff to review and identify improvements
- Carefully plan how people will enter and exit your building and have clear guidance visible on COVID-19 prevention
- Keep staff to the minimum required
- Ensure sufficient supplies of PPE and hand cleaning facilities
- *“It can be done! If we follow the guidance we should feel confident we can keep people safe.” “Speak to families to help them understand what safeguards are in place, but ultimately they will decide when they’re ready to come back.”*

See more of what COJAC have been up to on twitter: @cojactweets

Website: <https://cojaccentre.co.uk>