

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE- UPDATE JULY 2020

None of the services have reported any incidence of COVID 19 and have been operating since March 2020- they have been providing critical childcare for families, many of which are frontline healthcare professionals. The biggest issue services reported was around the issue of cohorts.

Some of the services' stories also feature on our Stories from the Frontline page, which also include videos. <https://soscn.org/stories-from-the-front-line/>

JOSS (Currently closed during the summer holidays)

We opened for key workers from 23 March until 25 June and during that spell we looked after 31 children, which included 10 pairs of siblings. The classes were as follows: 6xp1s, 5xp2s, 8xp3s, 4xp4s, 4xp5s and 4xp6s. During this spell the school amalgamated different classes on different days, e.g., p1 and 2, P4,5,6 etc.

On meeting the children at the school we asked them to line up with 2 metre spacing but the siblings tended to walk together arguing that they were allowed to. Then peers said they had been in class together so they could walk together. As a result, we continued to ask that they social distance on the walk to JOSS but we did not continually enforce it.

At JOSS we again lined up in a socially distanced manner for hand washing and for snack but then we relaxed while they played. We were restricted to having 2 rooms open and children were free to move between each room as normal. I don't think it is necessary nor beneficial to keep the children in cohorts. It is totally impractical as siblings will drift to each other and friends in separate year groups will do too.

During the time we were open we had a couple of parents who had COVID but no children or staff with symptoms which strengthens the argument that socially distancing primary aged children is not necessary. The other argument is that had we been under cohort rules we would not have been able to stay open because we would have required more staff members to maintain the cohorts. It is not practical.

Throughout the time we were open we continued as normal with craft and physical activities and had great fun in large mixed groups doing big scale projects. We introduced new games such as Time Bomb which was enjoyed by all age groups. The joy of after school is the ability for all classes to be together and for children to make friends across ages. Cohort childcare goes against everything that out of school care stands for. It is a home from home - a place to unwind and have fun with everyone who attends. We should be keeping things as normal as possible for all children just now.

SCAMPS

Whilst we have been open for the duration of lockdown, we have provided a high level of care by putting more robust hygiene measures in place, hand washing being the main priority. The children have become used to the new routine. We have not strategically separated the children, although we do talk to them daily about trying to maintain some form of physical distancing. Staff are told they MUST maintain 2 metres between each other and as best they can between them and the children. This is not always possible. Outdoor play is encouraged as much as possible.

Potential issues when escorting the children to and from school have been ascertained and we will now walk the children up in smaller groups of 8-10 to alleviate any over-crowding on pavements etc. This also allows us to get the children into the building and hand washing in smaller groups which should help to stop the boredom factor kicking in as they have to wait.

Snacks will also change in so much as that we will serve the children in smaller groups at the table rather than them queuing up and then cleaning the tables and chairs between use.

COJAC

Staff should be mindful of social distancing with other staff and parents/carers where possible, but we have since the beginning allowed the children to play together. Although, we work with high staff: child ratios, we have never separated the children into 'cohorts.'

We have implemented increased hand washing, installed a hand sanitiser at the entrance, increased cleaning schedules and now thankfully can go out and about.

KLAS

The children choose their cohorts as they naturally drift into groups, which during play scheme is perhaps easier. I use the phrase: "minimise the risk as much as physically possible indoors and maximise the use of outdoor areas, this is always balanced with article 31 the right to play". I allocate a staff member to each cohort area and they adopt the children in that area.

So instead of dividing the children I have divided the facility and then the children get associated with that area and a member of staff.

LINCLUDEN

In reference to cohorts and being open over the past 16 weeks we have found it ok. However it might be easier for us as we run with ratios of 1:1, 1:2 and 1:8. The children are informed who has them on that day and the staff member allocated is responsible for that child/ren. The 1:8 ratio kids (those without ASN) eat lunch and play together. They can at times seek out another staff member but they are gently reminded who "has" them and redirected back to them. The 1:1 and 1:2 ratios are fairly the same. They eat lunch with the staff member and if they want to be included in any of the games activities that the 1:8 kids are taking part in then their allocated staff member ensures they are socially distancing as much as they can, which can be tricky for children with ASN. We have to remind them at times about personal space but some of these children do not understand.

We are lucky that our space allows us to have different cohorts in different areas to spread them out. We have had overlaps but we ensure the children remain apart. The use of the outdoors helps greatly and to allow the freedom to be outside as and when they want to.

My suggestion would be to allocate areas if they can for each cohort. Look at removing equipment to make space and altering their floor space if they can.

What our enhanced cleaning looks like in statistics for the first 80 days of being open:
Our service has cleaned

Coat Hangers - 3184 times
Door Handles - 5508 times
Light Switches - 1944 times
Chairs - 3888 times
Chair legs - 15552
Tables - 5832 times
Table legs - 23328
Toilets - 1296 times
Game Controllers - 8072 times

this doesn't include sinks, taps, kitchen units, fridge, microwave, kettle, oven etc or sterilising of toys and is only during our scheduled cleans and not all the other in between times

we have also used over the 16 weeks

green hand towels - 28,800
bottles soap - 32
bottles hand sanitiser - 25
single use cloths - 400
bottles anti bac/anti virus cleaner - approx 120,000ml
carpet disinfectant sprays - 54
Milton sterilising tablets - 640
tissues - 600 tissues
aprons - approx 1380
gloves - approx 1580 pairs
dishwashing tablets - 162
toilet bowl cleaner - 24 bottles

and not to mention the amount of times hands have been washed and the amount of hours going into cleaning on top of watching and looking after the children 😊

MACS

Cohorts have not been the easiest to work with. It is better if OSC settings colour code their children by age group. We broke the smaller projects in 2 cohorts and once coloured coded it was easier to track them through the days they are in. A staff member is assigned to that colour group only. This also means if you need cover staff they must be assigned to that colour only.

It is better to have separate areas for snack which are timetabled. If one cohort needs the bathroom, the whole 6/8 children also go. Children are assigned the same sink and toilet to use while they are in. Don't use every toilet or basin. A gap in between each. Cleaning in between use. Outside is easier but again if you have large cohorts you needed to keep them in their colour assigned groups too.

All resources are better to be hard plastic if possible for cleaning. Our children also have wipe down

boards and a marker which are kept in their own resource bag, they also have their own skipping rope.

Everything needs to be cleaned and stored in the colour assigned groups. Mark absences on an overview rather than daily register. We use Kindles and Laptops. No parent is allowed on the premises, you may need to stagger arrivals and departures depending on your numbers. If you need to speak to a parent do it by phone or phone ahead to advise and you can meet outside where necessary.

BOSCA

Have been delivering an OSC service since March. As the school was an educational critical childcare hub operating on school hours, BOSCA provided after school care for 10-14 children on a daily basis, and are currently providing a 30-place holiday service. BOSCA took the decision to remain open as many of their parents are critical childcare workers. They worked closely with the school, and aligned as much as possible with the school's risk assessments. The relationship with the school has strengthened through this partnership working.

Keeping children in cohorts has been challenging as different children are in on a daily basis. However, the staff let the children (as much as possible) decide who will be in their group- all the children are brought into the hall and then staff watch to see who gravitates towards who. Also, there are some children who do not wish to be part of a group so it's a balancing act of respecting children's rights and wishes as well as what is practicable- you need to know your children.

Play opportunities indoors have had to be more structured- cohorts have been allocated spaces and times in certain areas, as much as possible. Once the time is up, these areas can be cleaned. Toys are limited and only to those which are easily cleaned.

As much as possible the children are outdoors; even if there are children who don't like being outdoors, the indoors activities can be taken out. Have also purchased more outdoor equipment such as scooters.

Social distancing has been difficult, nearly impossible. Tend to keep siblings together but again, some don't want to be together so need to work around that. Have had to be inventive with play e.g. "shadow tig" and "beat the goalie" instead of football matches etc.

BOSCA looked at everything as infection prevention control so focused on enhanced hand washing (more often and better practice) and enhanced cleaning of areas, surfaces and equipment.

A lot of the measures especially cohorts and social-distancing are challenging to operate- it's not fair or right to constantly tell children to keep apart and stay in a particular area. Children's rights and emotional/mental wellbeing need to be considered in all of this as well.

It has been difficult financially and has eaten into financial reserves but BOSCA felt that they had to provide the service for their families.