

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland was successfully launched as a SCIO in 2019 after One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), Scotland's national single parent organisation found that parents they were supporting were unable to engage in training, education or employment due to the lack of flexible childcare provision.

We deliver flexible childcare in Dundee, Aberdeenshire and Highland.

“STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE” CRITICAL CHILDCARE DELIVERY DURING COVID-19 CRISIS – APRIL 2020

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland - Dundee

- **What service are you currently providing?**
We are currently providing our day care service for children aged birth to 16 years, Monday to Friday 7.00am to 6.00pm.
- **On average how many children do you have on a daily basis?**
At the moment we are averaging on 10 children a day.
- **Are you part of a co-ordinated partnership with your local authority or does demand from key worker parents allow you to stay open independently?**
The childcare at the moment is being funded by Dundee City Council.
- **How is it working under COVID-19 guidance/restrictions?**
We have adapted really well to the guidelines, and families have been really accommodating. The one guideline that we are finding challenging is the social distancing for children.
- **What difficulties are you facing?**
Staying sustainable.
- **What are the positives?**
The situation has really made us look at our infection control procedures and policies. Getting caught up with work that has been at the bottom of the pile. Looking at other ways of keeping in touch with the staff. We have been undertaking remote supervision and appraisals and the staff have really liked this.
- **How is staff morale?**
The staff have been coping really well. It was a wee bit fretful at the beginning when guidance etc was not coming out from the authorities, but this was no surprise as we had not been in this situation before. Think staff were overthinking children's symptoms, but I think that was just fear of the unknown. Now that there is guidance and some more knowledge and the understanding of infection control and what we can do this has really helped staff.

We have a whatsapp group that we are in daily contact with the staff and they put together a “we’re all in this together” video and got them all working as a team again. They have really taken training on board and have been doing on-line training and getting themselves totally up to date with everything. Many of them have said that they are missing the children and just want everything to go back to normal – but what is that? The staff have really listened to the guidelines and information and taken it all on board in a mature and professional way.

- **How is the children's morale?**

The children have not really noticed any difference due to us having continuity for them – this was one of our main aims was to try and not make huge changes for them.

- **Any feedback from parents?**

We have had parents tell us that they love the fact that we are getting the children ready with shoes, bags etc and they are being taken to the main door instead of them having to access the building. They are saying that they can get the children home a lot quicker.

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland – Highland

- **What service are you currently providing?**

We’re providing 1:1 home based care for vulnerable children. This service means that vulnerable children receive care from fully trained and experienced staff from the familiar surroundings of the family home giving them a sense of security and continuity. We are also taking the children outside for some fresh air and exercise whilst following national guidance.

- **On average how many children do you have on a daily basis?**

Due to the level of hands on, in depth support we care for an average of six children each day just now, normally its many more but many of our regular families are self-isolating just now.

- **Are you part of a co-ordinated partnership with your local authority or does demand from key worker parents allow you to stay open independently?**

The main source of referrals come from our partners in Social Work but we are hoping to expand our service to allow more Key Parents to return to work.

- **How is it working under COVID-19 guidance/restrictions?**

Initially, due to the uncertainties around the coronavirus, working conditions were tricky. However, now that we are fully aware of the national guidance our Home-Based care service is running well.

- **What difficulties are you facing?** Social distancing is not really possible when working with children. Most of the children we care for have additional support needs and don’t always understand the guidance.

- **What are the positives?**
It's great to see the staff pulling together and ensuring the children in our care can maintain their normal routines as much as possible.
- **How is staff morale?**
Our team have embraced the changes brought upon them by the coronavirus and their morale is good.
- **How is the children's morale?**
Due to the nature of the Home-Based Care we deliver the children we support haven't been adversely affected and on the whole they are very happy.
- **Any feedback from parents?**
Allowing parents time to shop or even go for a walk on their own have been the main benefits to the parents.
- **Can you share some activities undertaken with the children.**
The purpose of our service is to try to maintain the normal family routines, so we have been taking the children to the park, for a walk, playing in the garden, making snacks etc.

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland – Aberdeenshire

- **What service are you currently providing?**
We are only operating two services currently. Day Care for frontline staff in Peterhead, and Home Care in different parts of Aberdeenshire. Our Home Care service provides childcare from the family home and is aimed at children with additional support needs. This respite care service gives parents and carers time away from their caring role allowing them to spend time with the rest of the family or have a break due to the current situation with Covid19.
- **On average how many children do you have on a daily basis?**
The Peterhead setting has an average of 14 children per day ranging from children aged 18 months to 7 years old.
- **Are you part of a co-ordinated partnership with your local authority or does demand from key worker parents allow you to stay open independently?**
This setting is working in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council Education Dept who are paying for the service. We have regular Skype calls along with Council Management, their development team and ourselves.
- **How is it working under COVID-19 guidance/restrictions?**
We cannot operate our usual groups for children with Additional Support Needs so if families require support we are offering Home Care instead with Infection Control measures in place.

- **What difficulties are you facing?**
Face to face contact with staff. So contact is by Skype and telephone, but we are adapting to these changes and on the whole, they are working.
- **What are the positives?**
The good communication between Aberdeenshire Council and ourselves. We have a very good relationship with both Education and Social Work. By working closely together we are supporting not only frontline staff but other families who require support to get through this difficult period.
- **How is staff morale?**
Staff morale is quite good, and we are all trying to support each other where we can.
- **How is the children's morale?**
Children appear happy and settled in the Peterhead setting. Home care allows the children to do something different with someone else and provides something different.
- **Any feedback from parents?**
Parents have been very positive about the care being provided and very grateful for allowing them to continue working in their frontline roles.
- **Can you share some activities undertaken with the children.**
The children enjoy using the space for physical activities which they really enjoy as there is the space to provide this in the setting. Arts and crafts is also an activity that the children enjoy.
- **Anything else you want to tell us.**
We have to acknowledge our staff team's hard work in providing care in a very difficult time.

Parents have been really grateful for us staying open and say that they would not have been able to carry on working if it had not been for us. As there are community hubs in Dundee, they were worried that their children may have had to attend one of them, but were so happy when they knew that the children could still attend somewhere that they knew. We have also called round the families that have not been using us just to let them know that we are here and so many said to us that they were really grateful for that point to contact.

