

Learning example – short breaks

Provider name	KIDS
Area/Service	<i>London - Camden</i>

Summary of Short break provision

KIDS provide a large domiciliary care service, an overnight respite service, 12 short break provisions, 4 London adventure playgrounds and Early Years settings. They also provide a range of other services including advice and guidance. Normally, the short break services are very busy with a mixture of one to one, setting and community based services, as well as summer play schemes. KIDS work with children and young people 0 - 25 years.

During the lockdown, the charity's principle and practice was to continue providing services where it was safe to do so. Subsequently, the essential domiciliary care service and overnight respite continued to run, as well as nursery settings, which provided childcare for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Overall, the provider experienced a 54% drop in hours for short breaks during the lockdown.

What needed to change?

(Please note these examples are based on Government guidelines in place at the time. All providers continue to monitor and update their practice based on current advice)

There were a number of challenges as the team at KIDS started to consider how to change their approach at the start of lockdown, including:

- How to deliver a community based short break service when all children's recreational services are closed.
- Access to adequate open spaces, in order to maintain social distancing
- Public awareness/understanding regarding child/young person's behaviours – specifically that they may not fully understand what social distancing means.
- Parental and staff concerns - for example, short break workers using public transport and the families' concerns surrounding this.

One of the key steps in overcoming some of these has been clear communication and transparency from the beginning to help to develop individualised services based on the needs of each child or young person. One example is that KIDS shared a communication from the commissioner of the service early in the lockdown:

"This service is provided pursuant to a range of legislation including the Children's Act 1989 (clarified by the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011), the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Carers Act 2014.

The support may include accompanying the young person to appointments or supporting them while they take exercise/walk in the local community."

Some of the short break provisions stopped delivering services due to parental choice. However, the services continued to stay in touch with all families through video links, such as Facetime and regular telephone calls.

In places where face to face contact could not occur, provision included:

- Virtual coffee mornings with families;
- Youth clubs for older children via Zoom, which were very successful;
- Carried out virtual direct work with children and young people;
- Delivered activity packs where parents did not want, or were unable, to attend short breaks services;
- Delivered food parcels to families working in partnership with other organisations.

The team took a flexible approach to 1:1 support at home and in the community, for instance one hour of exercise for families became their short break hour; breaking down the allocated short break time over a series of exercise sessions. Furthermore, to decrease the health risk to families and workers, they matched workers that lived in close proximity to families, which reduced the time spent on transport.

Further changes included:

- Recruitment for seasonal staff has been carried out virtually.
- Covid-19 training for staff, including an online e-learning module that had to be completed before any face to face sessions could take place. This helped to build staff confidence, understanding and awareness and most of all to enable them to deliver sessions in the safest way possible.
- All staff carrying out a face-to-face service had to complete a COVID-19 return to work suitability form as well as implementing a checklist and risk assessment for each child.
- Public transport could no longer be used in London provisions as a means for staff and children to go out into community based activities. Similarly, in rural areas staff could not use or share their cars as a mode of transport.
- Children were supported on their own rather than in groups.
- KIDS worked closely with local special schools and, where necessary, the short break staff supported children and young people in school to support staffing challenges as a result of the pandemic.
- They also proactively worked with new children and families who were unable to access their normal support services.

As a consequence of the changes made to reduce the health risk and to continue providing essential services, the team effectively managed the risk. Staff members that showed any symptoms of coronavirus immediately went into self-isolation and as a result they have had no COVID-19 outbreaks.

What enabled the changes to happen?

The KIDS team viewed their provision as an essential service and took action to sustain it within guidance and with the support of local authorities.

- ✓ KIDS provided all staff delivering face-to-face sessions with PPE, to travel to and from their sessions and to use during their short break if necessary.
- ✓ Where 1:1 sessions were taking place staff were advised to access local parks and open spaces, and go on walks with the child/young person and to maintain social distancing measures from other people.
- ✓ In the absence of specific guidance for short break providers the team used the Early Years and other relevant guidance that was available to produce KIDS guidance to ensure they could continue to safely operate and support families that wanted to continue to accessing the services.
- ✓ Via internal networking site (Yammer) KIDS was able to share guidance and update staff in a timely manner
- ✓ Risk assessment and management was used as a tool to enable services to continue safely.
- ✓ Putting children and families at the heart of the service.
- ✓ Staff members acquired new virtual skills.
- ✓ New systems in place for staff returning back to work.

What next – scaling up and sustainability

(Please note these plans have been developed in response to the new and expected guidance on the wider opening of services)

KIDS are keen to maintain good and trusted relationships with the families receiving their service and provide home visits, when safe to do so, adjusting to their individual needs and concerns going forward post lock-down. The team is talking to families this month (July) about summer plans and activities.

They are working out plans on bubbles; staff and children in the same bubbles with much smaller numbers. For instance, they are looking at 30 children rather than the usual 100 children in their playgrounds. Consequently, the provider is having to make decisions based on children who are the most vulnerable and most in need, by working with local authorities.

During the lockdown, access to public toilets and toilets within services are no longer available during the short breaks. As such they have had to change the length of the sessions they are delivering and spread them throughout the week, as it is not practicable to deliver 3, 4 or 5-hour session without these facilities. As different child friendly organisations open up, KIDS will offer all families the option to increase the length of their session.

KIDS' key priorities in supporting families in the coming months are:

- Understanding the impact the pandemic has had on the children and families and supporting them back to some sort of normality.
- Increasing the length of sessions and opportunities within the community at a pace parents are happy with and adapting to meet government guidelines as they are announced.
- Continuing to provide up to date training and implementing government guidelines as the pandemic unfolds.
- Maintaining high standards for prevention, safety and wellbeing of all staff and children and their families post-lock down, including through information sharing.
- Maintaining staff levels and supporting staff wellbeing.
- Acknowledging the continuing concern regarding a second wave of coronavirus. KIDS has reassured all families they will be ready to adapt and implement Government guidelines, if a second wave should occur (nationally or locally). They have conveyed the message that they will work with them and address their concerns as they arise and adapt the delivery of the service to suit them and their family as a whole.

KIDS has several examples of other short breaks provision (face-to-face and on-line) from elsewhere in England during lockdown. We are actively exploring ideas and models to build up vital face to face provision of short breaks for families during the recovery (and to offer complementary on-line support).