

Short Break learning examples

Overview of learning

In our role as Strategic Reform Partner to the DfE, the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) have been identifying examples of creative practice in continuing to provide short break support to families during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Our call for examples resulted in 14 responses which have been analysed and key themes of learning drawn out. In addition, 5 of the submissions were identified for a further interview with the provider, leading to more detailed learning examples which explore the approaches they have taken, the changes to practice and the sustainable learning beyond the pandemic.

We have heard from a number of providers and local authorities that the key to providing effective short break provision during the lockdown has been to quickly work together to:

- Identify the most vulnerable children, young people and families;
- Make decisions and, where appropriate, delegate responsibility for decision making to different levels of the system to enable responsive support;
- Speak to families regularly to understand how their needs may have changed and may have continued to change over the course of lockdown;
- Be flexible in supporting families where children and young people are shielding
- Ensure short break staff are trained, supported and provided with appropriate equipment in order to provide flexible and responsive care in line with government guidance including:
 - PPE
 - Social distancing
 - Enhanced Hygiene
 - Risk assessment and management

The changing restrictions of the lockdown have led to a wide range of changes in demand, where some families may be shielding or may choose to keep their children at home where possible, as well as changing need for specific support from short break services. In line with the government guidelines around physical contact and social distancing rules, the normal face-to-face options of short break providers have been limited. As such, providers have demonstrated flexibility by maintaining frequent contact with families using a range of technology, from daily telephone calls to WhatsApp video calling in place of in person support. This approach helped to ease tension and anxiety for families who no longer had a sense of routine due to the reduction of face to face support. For example;

Lancashire Break Time Service (Barnardo's Include Me 2): **"We identified a young person who was really struggling with anxiety. Parents told us that every day, the young person consistently asks about Barnardo's and if he will be allowed to come back once all the bad germs have gone. In an effort to help ease the young person's anxiety, it was agreed that a staff member would speak to him by phone each week on the day he**

would normally be in the Lancashire Break Time group, giving him the regular contact and consistency with Barnardo's that he obviously needs."

Together Trust – Meridian: **"Support from the Family support team at Together Trust where we have been able to offer parents telephone / Zoom consultations with OT's, Speech and Language, sleep clinic and behavior support tailored to their specific need to support the families who are not currently able to attend the service."**

The Junction Foundation: **"We consulted with families around how young people would cope with online sessions and took their feedback on board when planning and establishing a model for delivery."**

Other examples included, KIDS and Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT), who recognised the arising basic needs of many of the families supported by their service, particularly those shielding, has been centred on the importance of weekly shopping for groceries and medication from the pharmacy, which is then delivered to families' door step. This has enabled families to continue to have their basic needs met and avoid unnecessary risks to their health.

KIDS: **"Arranging for workers to drop off shopping to families having difficulties getting out"**

CACT: **"We did various shopping and pharmacy deliveries to families, they would send in their shopping list in the morning and later that day we would have it to them."**

Group activity sessions for children and young people that would have usually taken place face to face before lockdown have been more challenging however, some providers have adapted their sessions through virtual applications, such as Zoom. This has enabled parents who have taken on more caring responsibilities during the lockdown to have some of their own personal time, whilst knowing that their child is engaging in an activity. As well as this, some children have been able to develop skills to use technology independently. The examples below illustrate the significant impact and use of virtual platforms by short break providers.

Bath Area Play Project: **"Once Lockdown happened, term time providers moved to using the Zoom platform for their online weekly groups. As some young people are non-verbal, this had to include many visual and interactive games and challenges/teasers, shared cooking and food/drink making."**

The Junction Foundation: **"Male aged 11 with Autism was accessing our face to face groups just before lockdown. When we started our online groups, he was a bit apprehensive to join as he was unsure of how this would work. Since then he has attended all sessions and as the sessions have progressed he has developed more independence and asks his Mum to leave him alone while he is on a session as he wants to do it himself. Mum has reported that he gets excited before each session."**

A key message from all providers was that risk assessments should be used as an enabler to providing support rather than a barrier. A good risk assessment which supports effective risk management and creative thinking led to different approaches to face-to-face support rather than

support being withdrawn particularly for children, young people and families who were particularly vulnerable or at high risk of going into crisis during the pandemic.

There are examples of Short Break Providers supporting children and families in critical situations during the lockdown. Services effort to support families enabled positive change to occur in situations that would have deteriorated without it. For instance, Barnardo's Brighton and Hove Link Plus and KIDS highlight the ways in which workers help to reduce risk and escalation of family crisis through their support in the midst of the health concerns associated with the pandemic.

Barnardo's Brighton and Hove Link Plus: **"As regards to Contract Care, apart from the very early stages of lockdown when the carer herself was in self-isolation, she has continued to provide short breaks to 5 children and young people whose families would be considered critical without ongoing short break provision. This is undertaken on a rolling programme with robust hygiene practices in place."**

KIDS: **"The worker was now in place to provide a 'vital pair of eyes' on a weekly basis, provide respite for a single parent and a well needed fun and safe session for the child outdoors, enabling them to have fresh air and exercise. Updates are provided every two weeks to the social worker, and with the key worker also supporting the family it seems to have had a positive effect."**

Where necessary short break providers have adapted their group services to effectively respond to the changing needs of children and their families including smaller numbers and support 'bubbles' for both children and staff. This enabled children and families to continue to maintain routine and have necessary breaks from caring that would have normally taken place through education. For example;

Barnardo's Include Me 2: **"Instead of having 4 evening sessions which run 3pm to 7pm we have changed to have 2 days where we are running sessions 1pm to 7pm and 2 days where we are running 10am to 4pm in addition to the regular 10am -4pm weekend days. This has enabled us to provide places for the families who have still wanted their child to attend whether they are also attending school in some way or not."**

Sense: **"We decided to place more resource into delivering our sibling support groups instead, providing them with a break and activities to do and a chance to connect with peers who are living in similar situations. This provides them with respite from sometimes very challenging family lives and allows parents to get on with other jobs or spend some time with the other child."**

Key learning themes across the examples included:

- **Communication and ongoing consultation with parents/families**
- **Understanding the changing needs for support during the pandemic lockdown**
- **Creative use of technology**
- **Remodelling provision of support and responsive decision making**