

Preparation for Reopening

We decided to reopen Banteer Community Childcare from Monday the 29th of June 2020 after being closed for over three months.

Lots of work took place in the 2 weeks prior to reopening. It was all hands on deck. All staff members returned to help with deep cleaning the whole centre, setting up pods, sorting toys, equipment and rotation systems. Board members, parents and local contractors assisted with developments. New Covid 19 policies and response plans were drawn up, all new cleaning and sterilising schedules were devised as well as risk assessments, fire evacuation procedures, settling in procedure and arrival and collection procedures. New ways of doing the everyday things were formulated following which all members of staff were trained ensuring we all felt confident in reopening and welcoming children back into the service.

Creating pods:

Each room or pod is viewed as a separate entity, and therefore needed to be self-sufficient to comply with Covid 19 requirements. Some measures that we have implemented include: separate entrances to each pod, division of outdoor area for each pod, the purchase of pedal bins for all areas including nappy changing bins, a thermometer for each pod, hand wash stations, signage and floor markings, steam cleaners and fog machine for cleaning/disinfecting, extra toys and equipment and storage containers to facilitate storage and rotation, a dishwasher for the staff room, lots of additional PPE (disposable aprons, gloves, masks) as well as a designated isolation room. Each room has their own laundry baskets and a timetable for using the laundry room. We have trolleys outside each pod door for breakfast/dinner/evening tea, cutlery and crockery and any other bits and pieces so that kitchen/cleaning staff are not entering any of the pods, minimising the number of contacts for all.

Children and families:

Once all the above was underway we turned our focus to the families and children returning to us. Firstly, we consulted with parents to ascertain who and how many families required childcare. Priority would be given to frontline and essential workers, followed by all others requiring childcare. Once we had an idea of numbers, we were able to work out pod sizes. Five pods were prepared, one for babies in the nursery room, one for wobblers, toddlers, preschool age and school age. We were apprehensive about how children would react on their first day back to us as it had been so long since they were here and they had become accustomed to being at home particularly the younger children. As some children would now be in a new room with new staff we decided to make videos to send to the children in advance of reopening. The educators assigned to each pod made a video of themselves in their pod introducing themselves to the children and welcoming them, so children would know in advance who they would meet on their first day and each day after that and they would see the space they would occupy.

Many resources were available to Early Years Services for sharing with parents and children to ease the transition back to creche and so we shared these with all returning families, these included:

- Coming back to school in a bubble (booklet)
- Supporting your child (Barnardos)

- FAQ for Parents (DCYA)
- Lets get ready (DCYA – video)
- Short Story Book about returning to childcare in play pods (NCN)

We shared our Covid 19 Policy and Response Plan and the Parent and Child Documentation that needed to be completed and returned prior to the child recommencing in the centre. Parents found these resources and videos very useful in preparing their children for coming back. We created videos of the new entry and exit routes and shared these with families. Rather than explaining it all on an email, we felt a virtual tour would be more effective.

Settling in new children:

We also had new babies joining us for the first time. Normally parents would be invited for a tour of the centre and the outdoor area, we would have an induction meeting and go through the parents information and enrolment pack, discuss the relevant policies and paperwork required. As this was now not possible, we held an induction meeting via Zoom with the new families. This worked well, it was an opportunity to introduce ourselves, explain the new procedures and answer any questions. We were able to explain about our new settling in area. Usually the parent would arrive with the baby on the first day and spend time in the nursery room chatting to the educators about the baby, his/her routine, likes/dislikes, etc. The baby could explore the new environment (sights, sounds, smells) and get to meet their new carers while still having the comfort of their parents presence. As parents are now not allowed to be in the care rooms we decided to set up a separate settling in area, where the parent can arrive with the baby and meet the key worker in a safe and comfortable place, maintaining 2 metres social distancing. As this is indoors it is recommended that the parent and the key worker wear a mask or face shield once this does not distress the child. 30 minutes max is assigned to this encounter where the parent can go through the things like the babies routine etc. Then the key worker will take the baby into the nursery room for another 30 minutes once to baby is happy to do this. We have a tablet set up in the settling in area where the parent can view their baby in the nursery room to observe how she/he is getting on.

Since reopening we have asked parents for feedback on the Covid 19 measures in place and how they are finding the changes and we have sought their comments and suggestions.