

Knowsley Early Years Service Newsletter

Covid-19 update

Our response to the pandemic

Covid-19 has affected the whole country and for almost everyone, life has had to fundamentally change. Knowsley Early Years Service, like all services across Knowsley Council, had to adapt rapidly in March 2020 when the national lockdown began.

The service has continued to be fully operational throughout the pandemic supporting providers and families in Knowsley, especially the 10,000 children aged 0-5 years and the families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the borough.

Since March we have been available for the most vulnerable families by opening, when possible, our eight Children Centres for targeted activities. Where we have been unable to bring families to us, Children and Family Practitioners have produced online activities via Zoom, Facebook and YouTube aimed at parents and carers with children under five.

The service has also supported a range of Early Years providers across the borough, including 41 Nurseries, 69 Childminders and 29 Schools with Early Years provision.

Many of our staff have been working from home, where possible since March. The lockdown has brought many challenges which has meant the work of the team has been far from 'business as usual'. We are all doing things completely differently than we were at the start of the year before the pandemic began.

The team has risen to the challenge and supported Knowsley childcare providers to navigate through all the government guidance published in response to Covid-19 and have kept providers fully informed of national and local updates via daily emails. We have remained available to all our providers via telephone or email throughout the year.

The service has continued remotely, initially offering brokerage to key workers to find childcare when schools and nurseries closed and Practitioners have supported vulnerable families via telephone and WhatsApp calls to continue the support they were previously receiving. Practitioners also developed a virtual/online timetable and where possible have run targeted activities in the centres.

The service was heavily involved in the free school meals provision put in place by Knowsley Council, making sure Knowsley school children didn't go hungry after delays with the launch of a national free school meal scheme. We provided local locations for families to call into and collect packed lunches from our staff and where families were isolating we took packed lunches to their homes.



Thank you so much for the YouTube videos. We miss coming into the centres and I have been struggling so much with ideas and activities and these have helped greatly!

Parent (Online activities)



How we have continued to support providers and families throughout the pandemic

Support for families

I just wanted to thank you for your help today. You were so polite and friendly. We've had a particularly bad few months and I really appreciate your help.

Parent (Childcare and Family Information Service)

Childcare and Family Information

- Gathered information on the childcare providers intending to remain open for key workers and vulnerable children displaced from their usual childcare provider when providers closed during this period.
- We supported keyworker parents/carers and vulnerable families through our Childcare Brokerage system to find suitable provision.

Think we are very lucky to have such a supportive early years team who are always there should we need support. Thank you so much for everything that you do.

Provider (The Quality Assurance Team)

- Worked with schools and early years providers, ensuring childcare was available for

keyworker children over the Easter period.

- 2 Year Offer enquiries were registered manually until new system was implemented in August, resulting in 150 children successfully placed in September.

Thank you for all your support over the last few months it's definitely got me through things and you have helped with everything you can it's amazing thank you. xx

Parent (SEND Support Team)

- Worked with Knowsley SEN team and Knowsley Parent Carers Voice to supply information, advice and guidance about the Local Offer and support available to children and families with SEN.
- Used our social media to keep families updated on information about Covid-19 from Knowsley Council and also government announcements.
- Informed families what provisions had been put in place to protect children attending Early Years Providers and to encourage more to return in September.

Early Years Activities

- A virtual timetable was delivered by the Early Years Children and Family Practitioners beginning with Baby Massage in June, following the success of this, further activities were added including Baby Explorers, Little Explorers, Big Explorers and Storytime. These activities took place using Zoom and YouTube with some posted to Facebook and Twitter. We have continued producing online activities as they have been very well received by the families.



- During the initial lockdown we used social media to share activities and online museum and zoo virtual visits to keep children and families entertained.



You are a star! - Parent rang the number and got through straight away and got her code, she is delighted, she said to say thank you.

*Childminder
(Feedback for the Funding Team)*



Early Years SEND Support

- Children and Family Practitioners shared play activities, language packs, Peep Learning Together Programme (PEEP) activity sheets and emailed sleep advice when needed.
- Portage Team supported remotely at home providing support, advice and guidance to families and carried out some socially distanced visits outside in gardens when appropriate to support assessments.

We have loved joining in with Story Time, we don't have many books at home so it has been amazing joining in and listening to these stories.

Parent (Online activities)

- Portage Team provided resources and suggested activities for families to work on with their children at home, they regularly checked in on the wellbeing of the families and liaised with other agencies to ensure the needs of the children were being met.
- Parents were given information regarding PlayPods from a charitable organisation, New Life, which lends sensory toys to children with complex needs.



- A Flexible Support Assistant continued to model quality first inclusive practice every day in a nursery that remained open during the Covid-19 situation. This provided additional support for the staff in the setting to meet the needs of the vulnerable children who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and were attending nursery during this time.

- The Child Development Team also met each month virtually from April 2020 to discuss service requests enabling referrals to continue to be accepted by appropriate services.

Early Years Volunteering and Training

- We have continued to support our volunteers in completing their NVQ Level 2 Early Years Practitioner qualification through virtual training sessions in partnership with Salford College. Some of our volunteers have continued to maintain our community allotment at Jubilee Children's Centre in preparation for the spring.

We are also busy in assessing the quality and improving our volunteer programme by re-applying for the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) Kitemark Standard. The IiV Kitemark is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management. We were last awarded the standard in 2017, hopefully we are on our way to achieving re-accreditation and benchmarking Knowsley Early Years Volunteer Programme in line with the UK standard.

I didn't think there would be anything on with the drop-in sessions being cancelled and was worried about missing out with my second baby during Covid-19 but we've enjoyed joining in with the online sessions.

Parent (Online activities)

Thank you for all your help, sometimes it becomes very overwhelming. Your kind words, support and understanding was much appreciated.

Parent (Childcare and Family Information)

Big thanks to the QA officers for being a great support at the moment and always being at the end of the phone if we need them.

Provider (The Quality Assurance Team)

Support for Early Years Providers

Childcare and Family Information

- Since March 2020 we have had weekly contact with our providers to collect information required by the government.

Supported all of our childcare providers either to remain open or for those providers that closed support was given to enable them to reopen by the beginning of September 2020.

Quality Assurance Team

Our Quality Assurance Officers have supported childcare providers:

- Following government announcements to re-open childcare provision more widely from 1 June, providers were given a range of advice to prepare for re-opening.
- Reviewing and mitigating against associated risks and providing recommendations.
- Continuing Safeguarding and Paediatric First Aid training to ensure settings meet their statutory requirements.
- Running virtual networks to enable providers to keep up to date with information and continue peer contact.
- Carrying out virtual calls for targeted support for

settings, such as observation, assessment and planning plus, training workshops.

- Carried out a small number of face-to-face support visits with providers in line with Covid-19 safety guidelines.

Early Years Providers Funding

A variety of grants were offered to support providers to enable them to remain open and sustainable, for example:

- Covid-19 Emergency Recovery Fund awarded 36 grants to PVI's and childminders.
- Covid-19 Open Initiative Funding provided 20 Grants to PVI's and childminders who remained open from 23 March 2020.
- Providers were paid for the Autumn 2020 term based on Autumn 2019 figures in line with DfE guidance.
- Business support training was identified and delivered supporting providers with managing their business.
- The council changed over to a new finance system during this period and the Early Years Service also transitioned over to the new Early Years EYES system. While challenging all

staff and providers received training and support during this time.

- Continued to provide mandatory training to our workforce including skilling up our Practitioners e.g. First Aid training.

Early Years SEND Support

The Early Years SEND Team have:

- Offered remote support, advice and guidance from Quality Assurance SEND Officers to PVI Settings and Childminders who were supporting children with SEND via email or telephone.

Quality Activities:

- The EYSEND Inclusion Panel continued to meet monthly and agreed additional funding or resources for children under assessment for an EHCP.
- Assisted Childcare and Disability Access Fund was also considered if needed to enable better outcomes for Early Years children with SEND.

I just wanted to thank you so, so much for your support to our setting today. All the girls really valued everything you did today and the advice you gave.

Parent (SEND Support Team)

If you would like to speak to anyone in Early Years please call 0151 443 5633.