



Childcare on the front-line:

A collection of **Early Years Wales**
members experiences during
the Covid-19 lockdown (**unedited**)

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At the end of April 2020 Early Years Wales did a social media 'shout out' asking our members, those that were open and caring for the children of key workers during the Covid-19 lockdown, if they were willing to share their experiences with other members for the summer issue of *smalltalk* magazine.

We had no idea what level of response we'd get, if any. We should have known better...we could have filled the issue.

Please find contained in this document the raw, unedited case studies, testimonials and photographs that were received.

Please visit:

<https://earlyyears.wales/en/product/smalltalk-summer-2020>

or

<https://earlyyears.wales/en/product/smalltalk-summer-2020-0>

to purchase or download the published issue

- 1) Abacus Day Nursery, Swansea
- 2) Coed Derw Day Nursery, Carmarthenshire
- 3) Marford Playgroup Little Explorers, Wrexham
- 4) Osborne Children's Nursery, Newport
- 5) Rachael's Playhouse, Rhondda Cynon Taff
- 6) Rainbow Reef Daycare, Pembrokeshire

Best wishes

Charlotte Davies

Editor

smalltalk

Email: smalltalk@earlyyears.wales / charlotted@earlyyears.wales

Abacus Day Nursery, Swansea
Manager: Beth Hughes



<https://www.abacus-day-nurseries.co.uk/>

I saw the Facebook post and I thought I'd share our experience:

We've done a lot more physical exercise and outside play as the children have limited opportunity for exercise. We've been outside as much as we can. Lots of free play and play using nature.

They've had more free play and child led activities as it's been easier to do with small groups.

Lots more focus on children's emotions as we've seen changes in some of the children e.g. regression

We've used technology to take part in activities e.g. Joe Wickes session

They've had more free play and child led activities as it's been easier to do with small groups.

We've had to look at new ways of doing things e.g. we can't visit our friends at the care home so we've been video calling them.

We've done lots of hand washing/germ activities and incorporated washing toys into the children's play e.g. play with the dollies then give them a bath

We didn't want to be continually washing toys/equipment so the staff have adapted the way they do activities e.g. instead of using the wooden railway track for the vehicles they drew a track in chalk.

We've given the children more responsibilities e.g. they now make tea every day whereas previously it would have been occasionally. They've made cards for their friends who are unable to attend, packed seeds for them and written the names on the envelopes

More engagement with the community e.g. making cards for the ambulance station, care home etc.



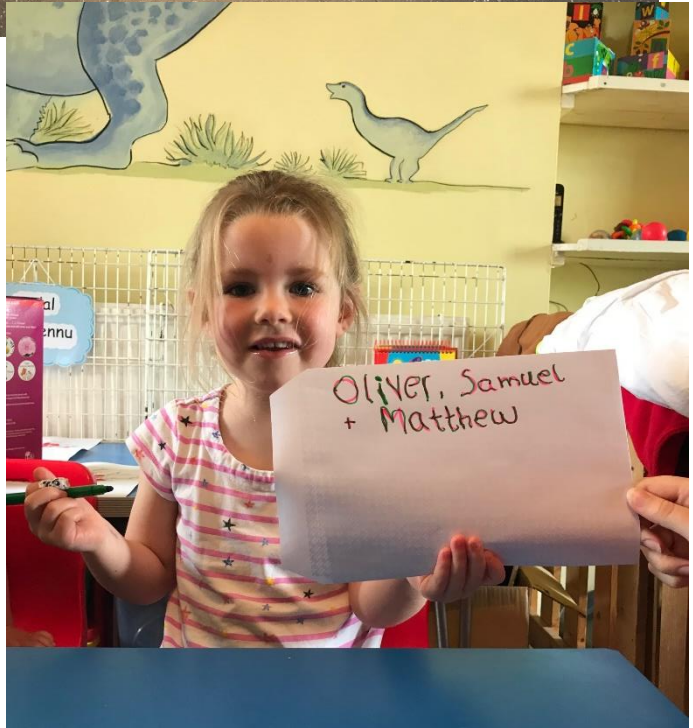






MEITHRINFFA A CYN-YSGOL 
Abacus
 DAY NURSERY AND PRE-SCHOOL





On the Friday 20th March 2020, we in Wales entered an unprecedented era. The national Government placed the whole of the United Kingdom into state of lockdown due to the increased threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Gradually, over the following week, we in the childcare sector were advised to restrict access to our provision. Children's parents were contacted and asked to keep their children home wherever possible, and later, to only bring their children to nursery if their own profession fell under the category of "essential" to the targeted response to the pandemic. The outlook appeared bleak with numbers dropping significantly and many nurseries began closing their doors for the foreseeable future.

In Coed Derw Day Nursery, discussions were had regarding the long term future of the provision. We were desperate to remain open to provide vital support for key workers, but were finding it increasingly difficult to balance that with having a provision after the crisis subsided. Ultimately, our moral obligation won out and we decided to struggle on, hoping to make use of some of the financial support on offer from the national and Welsh Government.



During this very difficult time, the wonderful team at Coed Derw Day Nursery refused to allow the ethos of the nursery to be diminished in any way... certainly not in any way which would impact the children. We felt it was our duty to remain playful, whilst social distancing to the best ability that one can when providing personal care to the under 4s. Our ethos of natural, outdoor, child-centred, child led, playful childcare seemed even more important in the current climate of increasing strangeness. All the new rules, increased don'ts and can'ts, were bound to be unsettling, and the team wanted to provide a safe haven for the children who remained.



Celebrating the positives hasn't been the priority for most during this difficult time, but seems increasingly important the longer the lockdown is imposed. In an attempt to showcase the best of our attempts, we have taken photographs, written case studies and talked to both children and parents to get a rounded picture of "life in lockdown" at Coed Derw.



Case Study – The Great Outdoors

It is a common misconception that children "catch a cold" from being cold, and so from being outdoors. This is of course not the case. Germs thrive and spread in an indoor environment. The spell of milder weather which appeared to coincide with the enforced lockdown, therefore, made Coed Derw an ideal location for keeping children safe from the spread of the virus. The provision has a large grassed outdoor area which is utilized daily in all weathers, but the improved conditions meant staying out for the majority of the day was an increased possibility.

Children love to be in an outdoor environment, and thrive when faced with challenges to their physical capabilities. The theory of "loose parts" play, which has always been the basis for Coed Derw's outdoor approach, has meant that children have had the opportunity to find ways to test their physical development, but also test their risk taking abilities, and their social abilities when requiring the support of their peers .





Some of our parents have remarked that their older children had been suffering from a reduced confidence, or had even become withdrawn since the closure of school provision. Allowing them to discover their own abilities, supported by sensitive adults who provide encouragement and guidance throughout, has enabled a number of these children to find their confidence again.

Undirected, children decided to use loose parts to create an obstacle course. Children were allowed to construct their own challenges and were supported to navigate them. The team would then suggest alterations to make the existing challenge more difficult. Children were delighted and climbed higher, jumped further, and laughed harder as a result.

Some children opted to simply watch for a period before joining in. This gave them the opportunity to assess for themselves their comfort levels with what was being undertaken. By the end of the afternoon, most children had engaged with the obstacle course in one way or another.

Staff noted a significant increase in self-esteem, and also saw an increased desire in older children to support their younger peers. This was particularly noticeable in siblings, who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to engage in such a provision if schools were still open.



Case Study – “What do you miss most?”

During the COVID-19 crisis, many of the things we took for granted have been impossible to access. Things children were familiar with doing have been restricted or closed altogether. In conversation with one of the team, some of the children began discussing what they missed most about living in a locked down society. This conversation gradually blossomed into an important planning exercise for the team.

The majority of children expressed the fact that they missed their grandparents, their friends, their extended families, but they also discussed the fact that they missed the lovely things they used to do with them. While the team knew they wouldn't be able to bring their loved ones to them, they could possibly recreate some of the things the children were missing.

One child missed going to a café with her aunt. This was something they would usually do every weekend but they weren't able to due to the closure of the café and rules around social distancing. The team supported her to create an outdoor café for her friends.



The children made menus, money, and had a picnic in the garden. They were waited on by their peer who had taken their orders at the counter, and they all had a wonderful day imagining that they were at a real café.

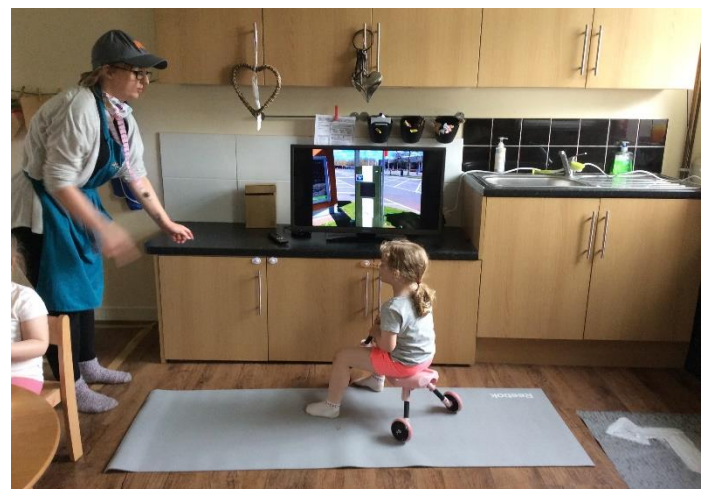


Some of the children missed having the opportunity to go to the cinema with their friends from school. Screen time is not something that is usually offered at Coed Derw, however, so this presented a challenge for the team.



They managed however to create a cinema for the children, complete with film of the children's choosing, popcorn and hot dogs. The children were absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to do something that was usually seen as off limits, and decided to make it a regular feature of lockdown. They now have a film day once a fortnight.

Some of the children missed going to McDonalds with their grandparents. The team decided to recreate the Drive Thru experience for some of the older children. They were able to use a vehicle to "drive" to the monitor, "order" and "pay" for



their food, take a seat and have a member of staff “deliver” their McDonalds to them.

They were delighted with the results.



Marford Playgroup Little Explorers, Wrexham

Manager: Tracy Nevitt

<https://www.facebook.com/marford.playgroup/timeline?lst=10001%3A100002424991013%3A1593107929>



Week commencing 23rd March 2020

What a strange week!

Numbers drastically decreasing - Covid 19 awareness is everywhere.

Children are asking questions and some are a little anxious. After researching a bit of science I came across a fab experiment to trial with the children to explain the virus with a visual experiment.

18 children present and a mix of 2-4 year olds. I used a bowl of milk, cracked pepper and hand soap.

First we saw how when a dirty finger was submerged in the bowl of the mix there appeared to be no change. We explained that the pepper was the virus and how it stays around dirt but when we placed soap on the finger and submerged again the pepper simply moved to the side of the bowl.

This prompted lots of questions and trials. It also helped with personal care tasks. Children understood that clean hands kept the virus away. Boom!

Week commencing 30th April 2020

We should be looking forward to one week off at Easter however I don't think that will happen. We are needed to assist the key worker children.

We are down to 5/6 children this week.

3 staff members are self isolating. One due to her mum displaying symptoms, one was to be a new apprentice and my Supervisor of 10 years is struggling with anxiety. I totally understand as 3 years ago she became seriously ill with Kidney cancer.

My part time staff have offered to cover all hours to ensure we remain open to meet the needs of the community.

As owners Vicky and I discussed remaining open until we couldn't.

Week commencing 6th April 2020

We are still open and adapting well. Planning is out of the window, paperwork for key worker parents funding is starting to come through and we are assisting parents as and when needed.

We feel we can pay staff with the funding in place and economically survive another month although it has proved frustrating that some nurseries are closing and pulling the 30 hour funding for children who are now in our care. One mum has struggled claiming hours as she lives in Flintshire and shared her hours between us and another provider. The other provider which is closed pulled the funding leaving her to reapply. She as a nurse struggled working then coming home to look after her child and deal with extra paperwork whilst her fiance was

stuck out in Afgan.

We are still awaiting confirmation due to being a wrexham provider. Paperwork can be very complicated at times as most of the council are working from home and when you call them you find yourself explaining the issue over and over again.

Bonus! The weather is fabulous! Outdoor play has been full on. Lots of Easter craft and rainbow making. Banners, posters, in chalk and paint. We even painted the tree in our garden.

Week commencing 13th April 2020

As a community we have been supporting one of our ex families as their little girl aged 9 has been diagnosed with a rare brain tumour. £250,000 is needed and to date the total raised is £200,000. Our children have been involved in an Easter Egg competition.

Parents and children would pass over their pictures at a safe distance whilst on their daily walk which boosted all our spirits but also made us sad.

We did manage to raise £600.00 though which makes us very proud.

Routine has totally gone out of the window and planning is totally child led as we are taking children at the drop of a hat now. Key workers are being asked to cover extra shifts and why should a parent be penalised for wanting to help? We have always accepted ad hoc requests and charged for used hours only as we understand that that financially childcare can be crippling. This I feel is important.

One staff member back from self isolation. Whoop!

Week commencing 20th April

The mood of the children is mainly happy, positive and they are full of life. Due to the weather being so nice we have been outdoors. Together we have moved outdoor areas and provisions, which looks amazing. As we run from a community centre we find it difficult at times to keep areas out but currently we are the only users. Bonus! No packing away on a daily basis. What a difference this makes to our mood.

We have grown beans, potatoes and herbs which a child brought from home. Daddy is away so he thought we could do this together.

We have made bee houses, a new bug house and adapted the reading area outdoors. The children are enjoying using the forest phones and lots of water play too.

Thursday 23rd April was my 50th Birthday and I was told to stay home yesterday (Wed 22nd) as the children had a surprise for me. I turned up on my birthday to be greeted with flowers, a fantastic cake that they and staff had made and balloons. Who could ask for more? Parents inundated me with gifts at my front door and umpteen messages. I felt very humbled.

Week commencing 27th April 2020

Sadly my supervisor has resigned. 10 years of working together. This has actually impacted on me hard. I felt very sad for many reasons but perhaps today was a realisation that Covid is real. When you are out there working with children you tend to live in a bubble. Come home, take off clothes at the door, wash them, shower, pj's on but then I also realised that perhaps I haven't cuddled my husband and youngest son enough as I don't want to expose them to anything I could bring home but today I did. I miss my eldest who passes out as a policeman in 2 weeks and my youngest should be going for RAF selection on the 4th May. After a good cry, a glass of wine and putting my positive pants back on I carry on as normal. This was much needed.

We also helped a new little girl celebrate her 3rd Birthday as mum is a police officer and had to work. This was tough for mum as her nursery closed at short notice which meant a lot of mums time was taken up looking for childcare. Anyway, she had the best day ever and Peppa Pig came to visit. (one of my staff). These little treats matter, not only to the child but to mum too.

Marford Little Explorers are a very community minded group. We get involved in anything and everything locally from planting trees in the quarry to me playing an elf on santa's sleigh at Christmas. We visit the park, go on local walks, take bus trips and visit the local nursing home and garden centres.
WE MISS THIS!

Week commencing 4th May 2020

2 new children with ALN. Both nurseries closed due to Covid 19. All paperwork received and extra hands funding applied for. One to one support in place to meet the needs of both children and what a great pair they are. Fabulous communication from the parents and I've spoken to outside practitioners to ensure all next steps are followed.

The views of my staff:-

Georgie Cain - 25 years old, full time staff member.

I am so happy to be working as I believe I would struggle at home. Keeping an extrovert down is hard and I am too wearing my positive pants. As for planning, I am enjoying the children's ideas, staff and children are bouncing off each other but I do miss getting out and about and our usual fizzy Friday staff meeting in the local pub.

I really do want to praise the younger members of staff. They have excelled and I'm proud to be part of such an amazing group!

Lauren Addison - 20 years old

I feel positive and that is due to working. I really don't think i'd like to be at home for this length of time without it affecting my mental health. I have enjoyed the child led activities and the new siblings as they are older. Observing the group with their peers is special. I have also really enjoyed the one to one with O. I have also really enjoyed finishing my course work for the NVQ 3 which is due at the end of May.

Darcy Goodwin -18 years old

I feel really positive. I see the little ones enjoying playing with their peers. We don't use welsh as much but planning is being adapted to meet the needs of the children. They are taking the lead and we follow. Still Staying Strong!! Still staying positive.

Tracey Nevitt -50 years old. Owner/Manager

Wow! After writing this and reading it back I have become quite emotional. We are all existing surrounded by big green Covid bouncy things bobbing about, ducking and diving. (thats how i see it) I have enjoyed reflecting on our practise and I know that you have to adapt and at times at the drop of a hat. We have mastered that!

I am sad to lose my staff member due to anxiety however we have spoken and she is now scared of the second wave but we will look at reinstating her early next year if she feels ready.

I am extremely proud of all of my girls and they will be rewarded for all their hard work and dedication as soon as we can arrange something.

I am proud of the children and next week we will make a time capsule to plant in the garden to be opened in the future full of pictures and thoughts.

I missed my Birthday party but the children and my family made it special.

We have made a video which I have sent over and I will seperately send you 3 parents accounts of their time during Covid 19. One is a new mum who gave birth on 14/4/20, one is a single mum of 3. Her daughter has speech and language issues and the last one i'm waiting for was due to be married last week. A NHS nurse.

Parent testimonials

09:56



Cerrin >

become anxious . My youngest Alice is behind with her speech and before lockdown she was having extra help in nursery with tracy and her team, within weeks you could see a big improvement. As the weeks continued with her out of nursery I could see her going backwards she had gone back to saying the beginning and end of a sentence with the middle mixed up. Being able to send my three children all together to Marford little explorers has made a massive difference financially and mentally , I am now not as worried about sending them out and I feel safe leaving them with tracy and her team so I can return to work and I no Alices speech will start to improve again . Everyone and marford explorers have been fantastic throughout this crisis. My hours have changed in work as we are extremely busy and they have been so flexible , it means a lot to me that I have found somewhere I feel safe to leave them and you can tell that it is more than just a job for all the girls they are a little family lovingly looking after all the children in there care.



iMessage



09:56



Cerrin >

I have taken six weeks off work due to covid 19.

When we were put into lockdown I decided to take the time off to look after my children.

As a single parent of three children I did not want to send two children to school and one to nursery as this would of increased are risk of catching covid 19 and I was worried if I became to sick to look after them were would they go. The six weeks as not been a holiday as I have tried not very successfully to home school two while caring for Alice my youngest who is three, while also trying to make this time fun for them so they did not become anxious . My youngest Alice is behind with her speech and before lockdown she was having extra help in nursery with tracy and her team, within weeks you could see a big improvement. As the weeks continued with her out of nursery I could see her going backwards she had gone back to saying the beginning and end of a sentence with the middle mixed up. Being able to send my three children all together to Marford little explorers has made a massive



iMessage





At the beginning of the lockdown i was very anxious. i had a new baby due at any moment and suddenly had both other children at home with me constantly. my husband is a key worker and so he still went to work as normal and i was left at home heavily overnsnt with two children 4 and under. Oscar really struggled initially, he was settling well into school and loved coming to 'traceys playgroup.' He isnt quite old enough to understand why he cant go to school and playgroup and go to places like the zoo and grandads house. He keeos asking me when the germs will go away. He asks why he isnt going to school and asks if auntie tracey is at home having a rest. Henry is that bit younfer and so it all goes over his head, he is happy at home with us. I am anxious about the return to school and playgroup for both boys as being at home so much has become the new norm. To go back to thst way of life will take an adjustment again. Strangely, I have never been hugely anxious aboutbthe virus itself and catching it, I have been more anxious about the lack of social support I will have. Maybe thats because I don't have much confidence in my ability to look after the children on my own. As time has gone on, we are getting used to this new routine. We do a bit of learning





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Osborne Childrens Nursery, Newport
Manager: Karen Smith

<http://www.osbornechildrensnursery.co.uk/en/home>



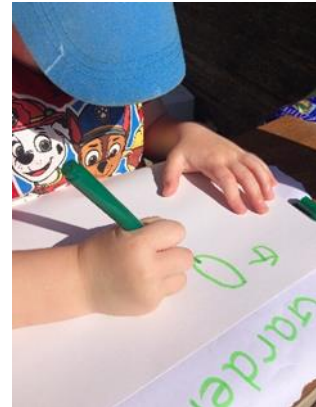
Nursery delivers care and continuity in uncertain times.

Throughout all this uncertainty and difficult time, we at Osborne Childrens Nursery took the decision to remain open for children of Keyworkers. We understand that without childcare many families would be unable to support us, whether it be in the hospitals, delivering our food or suppling our utilities. We understand that this is not a time for making a profit, it is a time for helping our community.

Our dedicated staff ensure that children's all-round development is catered for especially focusing on their well-being. All staff are enthusiastic and caring and have the empathy that all children are needing during COVID-19. We have made a few changes to ensure the safety of all. The children leave their shoes outside the main door and a local small business lady donated enough pyjamas for the children to change into when arriving at nursery. Our children really are amazing, and we ensure that they are having fun whilst learning. However, we really do miss the children who are at home.

We have embraced the lovely weather and are continuing to develop our outside areas which includes growing and nurturing produce. Children have set up a "Garden Centre" and are learning about social distancing through this. Our current topic of "Minibeasts" is perfect as our three gardens are blooming with plants, grass and of course minibeasts.





The children took inspiration from Prince Louis, by completing "Rainbow print butterflies".



We managed to celebrate Easter with talking about the Easter story and having lots of egg hunts. We even saw Easter Bunnies' ears over the fence, and he left us a gift of chocolate.



The children completed 100 laps around the nursery's summer garden in support of Colonel Tom, and we even celebrated his birthday by having a party. We hope he liked his card that we sent to him.



The children have been busy with preparations for VE Day making bunting, hats and musical instruments and to celebrate this we hosted another party!





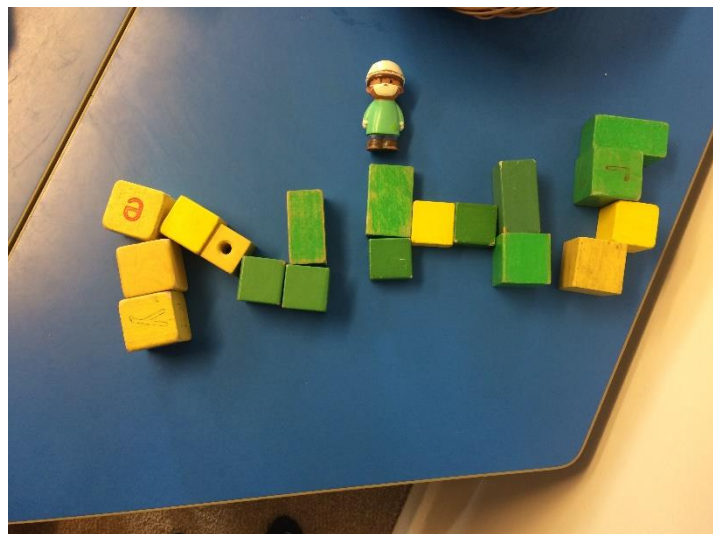
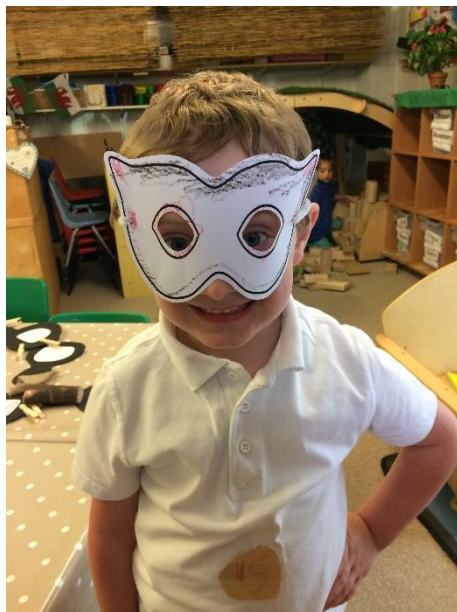
The children love designing weekly cards to post to our local Nursing Home in the hope that it lifts their spirits.



The council said a lovely "Thankyou" for our beautiful colouring that we placed on our bin.



We celebrated National Heroes Day, this year we did it for our local Heroes.



Families have positively commented on our weekly story that is told on our Twitter and Facebook pages. Families are keen to engage in our topic work at home that is sent via e-mail and we have had excellent feedback and photos from families.

We think this a good way of staying in contact with our families and a way of offering any support that we can give should they need it.

Thank you again to all our wonderfully dedicated staff and to **all** Keyworkers.

What a party we will have when we are all together again.

Many thanks to our very supportive Families.

Take Care and Stay Safe Everyone



Osborne Childrens Nursery – Family Testimonials

Hello

Thank you for your email, it's lovely to hear from you.

We're non key workers and are being asked to work from home and home school etc. I am finding it difficult to know which platform you are using to give us information eg. Twitter/Facebook; I am finding things on each. Some clarity around which platform you use predominately would be great. I found the call we had with Mrs Smith a few weeks back very encouraging and it was good to talk things through and also the newsletter that you sent via email was helpful, although maybe some weekly/daily ideas of what we can do at home to support Rosie's development would be brilliant. We are finding things to do with her, although some guidance from nursery would be helpful to ensure we're doing activities at the right level for her.

Rosie is missing everyone at nursery and is missing her friends very much - she is looking forward to seeing you all again!

Thank you

As always I have nothing but positive praise for osbournes childrens nursery especially in this uncertain difficult period. As a key worker and in the position to still need childcare I am more than happy and confident she is superbly looked after and kept safe and all necessary precautions are taken and met. I think it's great they have to leave shoes outside and have stuff to wear when they get in and I have no question that hygiene is always at the highest standards.

As freya is still young I can only pick up snippets of what she has been doing but keep up to date with the news letters showing activities which all look and sound amazing, she often now asks me to look for spiders in the garden which must of been the influence of bug week :-).

I'm glad she is able to attend the nursery at this time her safety and well being is paramount to myself and her dad and we feel she is in the safest hands. Also the fact that she loves going so much, she can't wait to get out of the car in the mornings which is always reassuring. I see so much in her development every week which I believe the nursery play a big part in and her Heath needs are met from every aspect. We both wouldn't want her to be anywhere else thank you for all your hard work.

Hope this is ok
Kind regards
Vicky Griffiths
Owen Kilby

Morning all,

Following your recent email, I would like to say that during this time I feel that you have taken all precautions necessary to keep our children safe and well and I feel that you have carried out some lovely activities with the children in your care and my daughter has brought home some lovely art work etc.

You are all working so hard to keep our children safe, well and happy by not letting any parents into the nursery and making all children take their shoes off at the door and leaving them outside. I see regular use of hand sanitizer and cleaning, PPE etc.

During this unprecedented time I feel you are all doing a wonderful job putting yourselves at risk to keep our children safe so would like to thank you greatly

Dear all at Osborne's,

Thank you for your email.

Isabella currently isn't in nursery as I'm working from home at the moment, and Peter is at home shielding due to being high risk.

We have found that having the Facebook page and Twitter pages to be such a great way for us, especially Isabella, to keep in touch with what you have all been up to. Especially seeing all your lovely faces. She has absolutely loved story time and the video yesterday from everyone at Osborne's saying hello was so thoughtful. We all sat and watched it together..and I think Isabella must have watched it another 3 or 4 times! All these things have made us, especially Isabella, feel like we are still a part of the nursery. I especially feel that being able to still see your faces, and keep some familiarity at her age is really important for her, and I thank you for working so hard to do this.

The newsletters have been especially helpful and informative for mum and dad, keeping us updated with everything that's going on. It's great to know what topics you are covering so we can do them at home with Isabella at the same time. Last week we found lots of lovely bugs! (I've attached some pics)

For us.. myself Peter and Isabella feel like you are all doing an amazing job at such a difficult time. You are all going above and beyond and we are so grateful to you all, thank you so much. Isabella is missing you all and her time in nursery so much. We are looking forward to when the time comes and we can get back into our normal little routine.

Again thank you for all the hard work you are doing during these tough times. We think you are all amazing!! 😊

Take care all

Best Wishes
Sarah, Peter & Isabella x

Hi there,

No negative feedback from me! I think the stories are great too! I show them to Jasper every other night so he doesn't get bored of my stories haha.

Cheers
Josh

Morning all,

Following your recent email, I would like to say that during this time I feel that you have taken all precautions necessary to keep our children safe and well and I feel that you have carried out some lovely activities with the children in your care and my daughter has brought home some lovely art work etc.

You are all working so hard to keep our children safe, well and happy by not letting any parents into the nursery and making all children take their shoes off at the door and leaving them outside. I see regular use of hand sanitizer and cleaning, PPE etc.

During this unprecedented time I feel you are all doing a wonderful job putting yourselves at risk to keep our children safe so would like to thank you greatly

Hi There,

Families attending during COVID-19

During the start of the lock down we were informed that we were not eligible to have the childcare as only I am a key worker.

Naturally having my husband trying to juggle a full time workload whilst also managing the children was extremely difficult.

We received a message from yourselves confirming that you were open and also that the Government had quietly changed the rules allowing our children to have Child Care even though one of us is a key worker. To say we were grateful for this information and for placement availability for both of our children is an understatement!

Overall the care appears to be working well. Our children do struggle very much with the new rules that are in place due to COVID, not being able to play directly with the other children is especially hard for them.

Katherine really enjoys the opportunity to exercise via the dance videos and she would like this to be a daily fixture as it is a fun way to exercise and have fun with the other children.

The outdoor space appears to be the best bit for both children, as long as it is not raining they would prefer to be outside than inside.

The creative activities are popular, especially when they get to make musical instruments or to make something to play with.

Finally they both enjoy the breakfast options, especially the fruit, but sometimes struggle with the lunch options.

Warm Regards,

Vicky

Hi

I am very happy with the level of contact we are receiving. I am aware of my options in relation to accessing the nursery being a key worker.

I love the Facebook account as it's nice to see what the children are getting up to :)

Thanks

Jenna

Happy with seeing things on Facebook. I'm not on twitter so I feel like I miss some important information. If any info is shared on twitter could you also email me or put it on Facebook.

Thank you

As my husband is a key worker and I work for the NHS it essential that we both have to work through this pandemic. It's wonderful how all the staff in the nursery has made us feel that they are taking every precaution to keep all the children and there staff safe we really don't know what we would of done if the nursery was to close.You are all doing an amazing job and we would just like to say thank you for everything.

Many thanks

Mr and Mrs lloyd-jones

Thanks to you and Mrs Cole for taking such good care of Catrin. She seems to be really enjoying at Osborne Nursery and we're relieved she's settled in so well. I picked up Catrin today and your nursery is really lovely. The focus on nature and animals is great. Now that we're reassured that Catrin has settled in we were wondering if you might have capacity to offer us an extra morning. This would enable me to work my normal hours in the NHS. Monday AM would be ideal but we're flexible on this.

Rachael's Playhouse, Rhondda Cynon Taff

Managers: Ceri Ward and Rachael Barnett

<https://www.rachaelsplayhouse.com/>



Rachael's Playhouse is a relatively small nursery catering for up to 90 children across two sites in the RCT area. The nursery is managed by a passionate group of Early Years professionals who started as friends with a common goal of offering the best childcare that we can to the children that need us. Through hard work and determination, we continue to exceed our goals and face all challenges with no fear. We pride ourselves on building firm relationships with parents / carers understanding that a holistic approach to childcare can often be the key to success.

At the end of February 2020 the management team watched in horror as Coronavirus / Covid-19 unfolded in Italy and it was at that point that we understood that life as we knew it was about to be altered - but we had no idea to what extent.

Initially we began by refreshing all staff and parents on our sickness and illness policy ensuring it was fully understood by all. We also followed Government guidance as it was released and changed almost daily. Several letters were issued only to be altered the following day as our Government and scientists began to fully understand the complexities of the virus and knew more of what was required to safeguard us all.

One of the hardest decisions for us was mid-March when we chose to prevent all visitors, parents or carers from entering onto our sites opting for a drop off at the outside gate as opposed to welcoming visitors into our nursery. The decision was respected and understood by all parents as we were doing everything to safeguard their children and my staff team. We knew this would be a huge change for the children and to prevent this transition from affecting the children we made this a fun drop off where the children could run from practitioner to practitioner offering a high five from us all on the way.

As the virus unfolded and our families followed the Government advice to stay home (lockdown) the numbers of children attending the nursery reduced and we met as a staff team to discuss the possible changes ahead. Wellbeing for our staff team has always been key and we knew we had to be transparent to

reduce anxieties and maintain staff well-being. We discussed the possibilities of enforced Government closure, being deployed to help across the district and working as a hub.

With the impact of the lockdown continuing we remained open as a small hub offering care to keyworkers and vulnerable children. This has not always gone smoothly as staff fears for their own families, and the anxiety of new families we were meeting sometimes overtook and often we struggled to see the wood for the trees but as a supportive team when one was down the others naturally lifted. We are a team because we love, trust, support and care for each other not because we are colleagues.

We currently care for 5 existing children and have welcomed a handful of new children into our settings. The initial settling in and building a relationship with the new children was vital as well as building trust with the new parents which was also imperative. The fears and anxiety of all parents, whether old or new, was real as we tread the uncertain times together. By continuing to offer high quality childcare by a team of staff that love and respect the children we could take a small pressure away as they worked hard to keep our nation running during a global pandemic.

For our new parents we offered packs with a welcome booklet detailing who we are and what we care about so they could begin to understand us and our mission and begin to see that we are more than a group of colleagues (as they haven't had the opportunity to get to know us like our other parents have). As there was no opportunity of a transition period for both children and parents photographs and videos taken of their children happy in play helped ease the situation and a general "are you ok?" where we genuinely care about the reply at the end of their shift has helped to build relationships.

We have completed a number of activities and as we remained in smaller groups, we have been able to concentrate on activities such as

- Snipping grass with scissors (1:1 activity)
- Making seed heads (1:2 activity)
- Planting (small group activity)
- Yoga & Mindfulness (small group activity)
- Dancing (small group activity)
- A VE Day Tea Party (small group activity)

- Lots of crafts to include painting the walls outside, painting with water, painting shadows, creating big shadows, tracing around our own shadows, playing in Café Cwtch - our outside mud kitchen, making potions with small pots and pulling petals from flowers to explore, making musical instruments, completing fun sports activities, making beautiful rainbows and threading with natural resources
- Bug hunts
- Fixing our bikes and trikes (we love to get the tools out!)
- building big obstacle courses
- building big tracks for our cars
- putting big cushions on the floor and laying watching the clouds move – getting excited as we see a helicopter and quickly deciding we will make 1 from junk modelling!

All of these opportunities offer a number of skills to be developed such as

- gross motor
- fine motor
- balance
- independence
- turn taking
- language building
- following instructions
- hand & eye co-ordination
- problem solving
- imaginative play... the list is truly endless!

Our children are explorers by nature, they are sociable and are using all their senses to learn about the world around them navigating these strange days! We are taking these slower paced days to just be us and support in all the ways we can!

The steps that have changed for us as practitioners are that we wash our hands and our children's hands a lot! We supervise each visit to the toilet and clean and sanitise the areas immediately after use (the toilets and the sinks), we clean and sanitise every surface regularly (even if we haven't been there!) and we deep clean all of the used toys each day. Each week we deep clean all toys (even the unused ones).

Following each Government announcement, we wait with bated breath for the next entry of children - whether old, returning, or new as families are beginning to think about returning to work. In preparation for this we have re-designed our nursery to offer clearly divided spaces to allow us to work with small “bubbles” of children. A maximum of 5 / 6 children will be in a bubble with the same practitioner. We are planning a structure of rotating around the nursery, allowing all children to spend time in each area as they remain in their “bubble” with their keyperson. We will continue to trial this over the coming weeks to ensure we are all confident in our roles and our ability to allow the children to flow through the setting and each area with the sanitation of toys between all children moving between sections. This will be our new normal that we are ready to embrace. The safety of our children, our families and our staff team give us the strength to continue to succeed.

We haven't only supported our new children we have continued to support our families that we no longer see by sending flower packs through the mail, sharing videos on our Facebook page to ensure we remain recognisable to our children that we dearly love and miss – these have been stories, songs, yoga tutorials, how to make dough, bubble snakes, dough disco and our wonderful children have filled our page with rainbows and smiles! We have also held a virtual graduation for the children that are transitioning to school as we are unable to host our usual celebration providing individual videos that families can treasure forever.

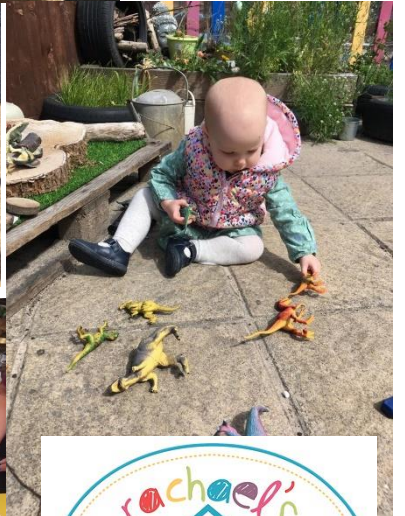
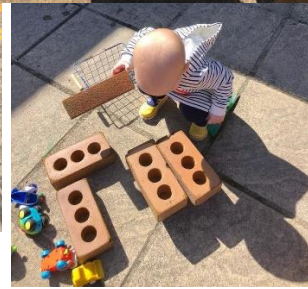
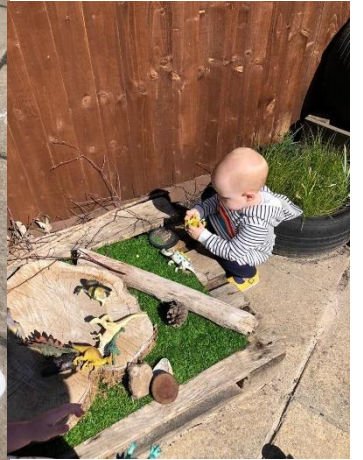
I know this is going to be long road that will never lead us back to what we once knew. This is our new “norm” as the world adapts to living with Covid-19 but I couldn't face this with anyone other than my fantastic team.

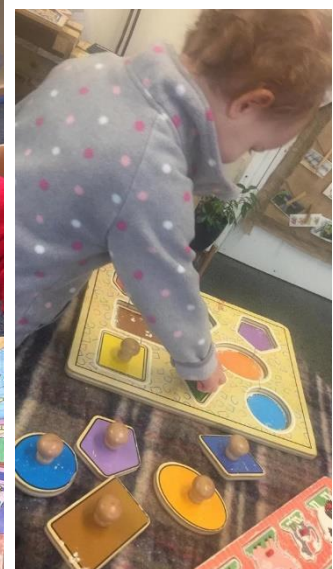
Ceri Ward

Leader of Rachael's Playhouse Hirwaun













A day in the life of Rainbow Reef Daycare, Pembrokeshire during COVID-19

Manager: Bronwen Parrott

<https://www.facebook.com/RainbowReefDaycare/>

Child Led Days

At Rainbow Reef, as we are only able to care for children of Critical Workers where both parents have to fall under this category, our numbers have dropped dramatically from over 100 on the registers to 12, sometimes we can have as low as 3 children in a day. As unfortunate as this pandemic is, as Manager, I feel that the children have really enjoyed the nursery being quieter and having that time to spend with the staff without them having to rush off on School Runs etc. The staff have encouraged the children to choose what they would like to do whereas before, they may not have always got the option to do this, this includes what they would like to eat too ensuring it is still healthy, nutritious and varying throughout the week.



Childs Interests

We ensure that at Rainbow Reef we take the children's interests seriously and ensure that they are a priority to our daily life here however with them having more scope to plan their day themselves, it has been lovely to see what they have shown interest in whilst expressing their thoughts.



← From this ...



... to that! →

Why can't we go out on walks?

We are based in a village which has a lovely community feel to it, we often go on the bus, on the train, for a walk down the cycle path and also go to the nursing home based in the village, initially we had a lot of questions asking why we can't go out to these places anymore so careful discussions regarding the restrictions were held with the children to help them understand. They have been really understanding and are looking forward to when we can go out again! We are extremely lucky that before the restrictions were put in place, our garden was transformed so the children spent lots of time having fun outdoors in our safe garden.

The Critical Worker Team at the Reef

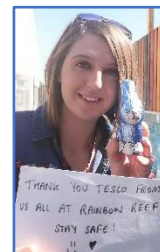
Unfortunately, due to the low numbers and no school runs, we have had to furlough 7 members of staff however we do still have 4 Critical Workers who are based at the nursery and they have all said how they feel that from now on, the way learning is taught should change and there should be a lot more learning through play opportunities. The ages of the children vary for example one day we had a 1 year old, a 3 year old and a 6 year old and it was amazing to watch them play together and enjoy being in each other's company. On busier days where we have 10 children in, there is more structure and routine needed where the children are in groups according to their development and age however most of the children have varying days and they all enjoy the quieter days where they are more child led.



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Catch it

Bin it



Kill it

Everybody is applauding our Critical Workers, and rightly so, but what about the children?

Every single child has gone through such a huge change in routine and when this happened, we could see how it affected their emotions. The children do not understand why they can't go to school, why they can't play with their friends and why all of a sudden, their mummy's and daddy's have become their teachers. It is so confusing for them all and especially the children who are at that age where they understand half of what is going on because then it is even more confusing for them. They use the word Coronavirus; they know people are dying and are scared but don't know much more than that. I am lucky that one of my Critical Workers has been on ELSA training so they have been carefully helping the children deal with their fears and worries and providing information to the other staff too. We are finding that now the children are in a routine of this different lifestyle, they are happier and content.

What next?

As a Nursery Owner, these restrictions have already given us 7 weeks of uncertainty and worry. Being a nursery who can cater for 51 children a day and do wrap around care to 5 different schools, our overheads reflect this so whereas our income has dropped, our overheads have not. Every nursery is in the same position as us and it has been extremely difficult however we are trying our best to remain open as we provide care for 12 Critical Worker Families who need us. We have been keeping in contact with our families who remain in lockdown at home by sending them weekly planning and activities at home and have also sent out a parent survey to find out what they would like to see in place when the restrictions lift and they answered things such as checking all temperatures before anyone enters the nursery, staying off for a whole week if the children are unwell, deep cleaning the nursery before restrictions lift, wearing masks, hand sanitiser available, regular handwashing, keeping numbers lower and spending more time outdoors however the majority of parents said that we are the most safe place they know and they are happy with everything we already have in place. Unfortunately, we are fully aware that life will take a long, long time to go back to normal, if it ever will again and things such as parents not coming in further than the porch into the nursery, may be a permanent thing. We will follow government guidance and make sure that our hygiene standard continues to remain high for the safety of the children and the staff here at Rainbow Reef.

A BIG THANK YOU

We would like to say a big thank you to all of our parents who are Critical Workers and are NHS staff, emergency service staff, shop staff and many more, you are all doing a great job and keep up the fantastic work! We would also like to say a huge thank you to Tesco who kindly donated lots of Easter treats to our staff and children and helped to put a smile on their faces during this difficult time!

