

# Covid-19 and RCC

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# Who am I?

- Former Nurse
- Former R&I, CSCI, NCSC inspector
- Former NHS Manager
- Former Director Pathfinders Childcare
- Previous ICHA Chair
- DCEO since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020

# ICHA and Covid

- Lots of meetings-Government, DfE, DOH, Ofsted, ADCS, LA consortiums etc, etc.....
- Regional member meetings
- Information gathering and sharing
  - Daily updates (just reduced to twice a week)
  - Weekly ring-around report
  - Survey monkeys
  - Member's enquiries
  - Ofsted and Gov alerts
  - Covid tv/media updates
  - DFE, Ofsted, CYP, LGAs etc receive the ring around and survey monkey reports, and appear to take note.

# Ring Arouns

- Started 1<sup>st</sup> April
- Includes 30 providers-over 400 homes
- Covers general and specific issues
- Small and large providers, local and national companies
- Join us!
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# Survey and ring-around findings

## Staff

### **Sickness**

- Initial isolation numbers were fairly high and corresponding agency usage was also high.
- However, many remaining staff picked up (and still pick up) shifts
- Some staff picked up extra log shifts-going into isolation with their young people (2 days to 2 weeks)
- Small numbers of staff were shielded and remain so. Homes are preparing to bring them back-some eager, some scared, some happy to stay away.

- Sickness dramatically reduced around week 3 of the lockdown. Those who had self-isolated returned. A number currently report below average sickness across the board.
- ‘Normal’ sickness is beginning to return.
- Levels of confirmed illness have been low-due to lateness in testing and apparently low numbers of symptomatic staff and children.
- Homes have reported positive diagnoses. However, these are **incredibly** low.
- Most companies have many staff who think they have had Covid-19 but testing wasn’t available at the time they displayed symptoms.

- **Other staff issues:**

- Recruitment for some was/is very good-lots of people coming into the sector who may not have previously considered it.
- Many staff had/still have anxieties. Initially, 'we can't care for children without PPE' to 'how will we cope when the children start going out again' to: 'what happens when the next wave hits'
- Some staff are now sole breadwinners, are cut off from their usual supports, are anxious but wanting to be seen as coping etc....
- Holidays have built up in some homes-companies are looking at how to avoid shortages at year end
- Staff are starting to go abroad-will this have an effect when they return?

# Children

- People have largely been surprised at how well our young people have been coping.
- Some children have continued to go out and a few have continued to go missing *but*, they are the minority.
- Violence and challenging behaviour has not increased as many feared. Although some behaviours are creeping back, they still remain at lower levels than pre-lockdown
- Many report that children are enjoying the lock down, engaging better with staff, being more in control of their contact with family and social services through social media and experiencing a general reduction of social pressures.



- Children have been engaging in home based education-many reportedly doing better than in formal education settings.
- Some schools have been refusing to allow LAC to attend stating that they are unable to manage their need for proximity-some using their powers to decide that they will be 'safer' elsewhere
- Whilst some children long for a return to face to face family time, many seem to benefit from being 'given permission' not to continue to see them during lockdown.
- The level of infection appears to be extremely low. We have had no reports of a confirmed diagnosis of Covid-19 amongst our children. There have been children displaying symptoms although these largely appear to be mild.
- One RSS had 12 children with symptoms at one time, prior to any form of testing. No medical or hospital treatment was required.

# Support

- Providers have been frustrated by the lack of sector specific guidance.
- Lots of contradictory guidance
- Formal recognition of the sector's efforts have been minimal
- LA support has been patchy. Some have been maintaining regular contact, but not all.
- PPE and testing was and in some areas is, still patchy-but providers report that they have stocks
- Ofsted have relaxed some systems eg for more rapid registrations. However, the support they have generally offered, has been felt to be inadequate.
- Some concerns about low IRO presence?

# General observations/questions

- Extra costs seem to be balancing out with savings for most if not all providers.
- Referrals have been difficult due to:
  - matching
  - fears about introducing a new child to a settled closed environment
  - Lack of knowledge about the Covid status of referrals
  - Type of referrals-often placement breakdowns or short term.
  - Levels of referrals fell during the height of the pandemic
  - No known Covid related referrals have been reported during my ring arounds

However, admissions have continued throughout and are picking up across the board.

3 x more homes have been opened during the lockdown than the whole of last year-but capacity has not significantly increased

Those on RI or inadequate are concerned regarding Ofsted's inspection plans and their inability to come out of grade for another year.

- As September approaches, hopefully the main amendments will lapse-however, as the Coronavirus Act will presumably stay in force, some things such as PHO's rights to order restraint will remain
- The job of returning our children to school could be fraught-schools are already closing when suspected cases come in
- Reducing anxiety and returning people to a normal acceptance of illness is likely to be an uphill battle-can this be overcome?
- The way we have cared for and interacted with our children during this time has changed-can we retain the good practice/learning?
- Track and trace-does it work? Does it still have the potential to close homes in a second wave? Are we prepared for it?

- **Overall**

- The sector has been amazing. Staff have shown resilience, tolerance, and generally a lot of sense during this pretty mad time.
- There is potentially a lot to learn about the benefits of keeping our children away from social situations more to allow them to heal.
- Local authorities have been more willing to talk to us as equals as their concerns about capacity during this pandemic grow
- Worries about Ofsted's judgement of our actions during this time are growing amongst the sector.
- The sector needs specific guidance. This pandemic has shown what a niche service we provide-and how little people outside of it really understand it.
- Regardless of fears, staff have continued to hug and love their charges without need for PPE-and most seem to have recognised early on that we couldn't do the job without that proximity.
- Fears are growing about the 'second wave'. It would appear to be a winter bug, flu will be coming too. We may yet be in for another bumpy ride!