



Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

Learning and practice



How a creative project found alternative ways to connect with families during COVID-19

What was the challenge faced?

The Creative Kin project provides free, fun activities for families in North Ayrshire with children under five in kinship care.

Children 1st, in partnership with arts and early years organisation Starcatchers, planned to launch the Creative Kin project in 2020. When the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions made the project's planned focus on group activities impossible, the team, Lead Artist Kirsty Pennycook, musician and actor Harri Pitches, and Project Coordinator Anna Downie, had to rethink their approach for identifying and engaging with kinship families.

What change in practice took place?

The Creative Kin team had to find a way to identify families while they weren't able to meet them in person because there were no existing relationships with families. Many kinship carers, who are often grandparents, didn't feel comfortable or confident using digital technology, and young children don't always engage with or understand video calls in the same way older children might. To make contact with kinship families who might be interested, Creative Kin joined some of North Ayrshire Council's Kinship and Early Years social work team meetings, and their Health Visitor team meetings.

In response, to what they heard, Creative Kin created themed activity packs for families during the lockdown restrictions in autumn and winter 2020. Many families said that they were looking for reasons to get outside because they were not leaving the house regularly during lockdown, so the packs were designed to be used inside or outside, and to encourage families to go outdoors together. Kinship families sometimes include a number of sisters and brothers across a wide age range, and the packs are also designed with this in mind. They include materials and suggested crafts children could do together, for example a kite-making kit which could be decorated by younger children and put together by older ones, and homemade bubble mixture with the materials to make bubble wands and create giant bubbles for all.

Creative Kin began to offer doorstep performances this spring (2021) so that families could see them face-to-face, within the lockdown restrictions. As music is something most people can understand and relate to, and can be interactive but not too overwhelming, with less pressure to get involved, they devised the 'jukebox' concept, with a musician playing songs for the whole family, and giving children buttons to pause, play, skip, and decide on the speed and volume. After some trial performances in Glasgow, the team found that younger children just wanted to press the buttons and also struggled to keep a distance, so they were provided with their own silent buttons or musical shakers so they could take part, and a team member who wasn't part of the performance wore a mask so the children could safely approach her.

Who was involved in making the change?

The Creative Kin project is a collaborative project between Starcatchers and Children 1st, so the project team (a project coordinator, artist and musician) was able to problem-solve with and draw support from both organisations. North Ayrshire Council also linked the team up with social work and health teams that could refer kinship families to them.

What difference did this change make?

Visiting separate families and engaging with them on their doorstep has helped the project to reach more families than it may have otherwise. Some parts of North Ayrshire can be difficult to reach by public transport, so visiting families, rather than asking them to travel, shows them what the project offers and creates interest in attending future sessions. The team were also able to involve families who aren't online and who may have felt isolated during lockdown.

Creative Kin plans to continue offering one-to-one visits when first seeking out kinship families to offer their support, even after restrictions ease and the originally planned programme of group activities begins – such as a superhero-themed pizza party scheduled for the summer. They hope that this will be helpful for families to bring them together with others and join in group activities.

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