

## MSD Approval OSCAR Venues and Numbers of Children

In 2006 it became standard practice for MSD (then CYF) Assessors to specify a maximum number of children that an OSCAR service could accommodate.

We encourage you to consider the following factors when discussing the capacity of your programme with a MSD Assessor:

- Layout of room - what areas are set aside for more boisterous play, as well as quiet areas
- What activity is happening in the facility?
  - 1) Provision of space during homework time and other passive activities.
  - 2) Group activities and game time - when larger numbers may be together for a common purpose, as opposed to "free play time".
- How are staff managing the provision of above activities - directing children and ensuring activity is successful and relatively contained in one area.
- What are the actual numbers of children based on arrival/pick up times - in ASC some children may not arrive before 3:30, others may leave by 4pm - check sign out sheets and rolls. Eating time, usually when children arrive at ASC, is another relatively passive period.
- Holiday programmes are for a longer period of time, and so children may need more varied and responsive spaces, but this should be weighed against the provision of off-site activities. Explain your arrival and departure times for trip groups and the drop-off in numbers after 3pm.
- What is the access to other indoor/outdoor space including wet weather options such as verandahs, covered areas/walkways and corridors? Also keep in mind considerations of how programme activities, group management and staff supervision may change in order to manage wet days.
- We have also observed good use being made of walky-talky systems to keep programme staff in various areas in touch with each other.

OSCN staff have commented that they sometimes see venues that are too big (children feel lost and disconnected, not homely places), rather than too small. One of our advisors has commented:

*"I have noticed that with ASC, the size of the room may not be so crucial. There is such a mix of things going on and children basically are either weary and want to potter, dream or create or they are hyped up and have to let off steam. Programmes appear to be catering really well for both groups with their set-up and management. The most successful will divide larger groups into 2 and run an outdoor activity and an indoor one then swap over if needed. If outside conditions are unsuitable, they look for another room or a hall or passageways, corners, covered areas etc. The session time is relatively short for ASC programmes, so staff look at the best possible management of their children and what they can do to accommodate the varying needs per age level. Some of the best programming can be held in classroom sized facilities."*

In conclusion, it is not a case of "anything goes" with mobs of children being squeezed into small, sub-standard classrooms. Far from it. It is vital that the OSCAR Approval process identify facilities that are substandard in terms of space, building materials, contents, inadequate kitchens and toilets and proximity of hazards.

OSCAR venues must be first and foremost safe, accessible and child-friendly. There are many cost-effective and creative solutions to the "venue challenge" out there. Talk to OSCN if you want some ideas.

