

## CASE STUDY: FCSS KEITH

### Strathisla Children's Centre: Our First Year

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland worked with Moray Council to open Strathisla Children's Centre to meet an increase in demand and support the delivery of 1 140 hours of early learning and childcare.



During the pandemic, Flexible Childcare Services utilised to great effect one of the local village halls. Construction of the purpose-built centre was put on hold and the decision was made to open in a temporary setting until the build could be completed.

When FCSS first opened in their temporary setting in August 2020, they were faced with the challenge of no immediate outdoor area. This was quickly addressed by the staff, who were deeply passionate about outdoor play and experiences. They brainstormed and created mind maps to identify locations in the local community for the children to explore safely during unprecedented times. The staff also had to turn a vast empty hall into a creative play space that was cosy, comfortable and welcoming for transitions from home back to the setting.

The lack of outdoor area allowed children to explore their local community by visiting the old train station, the hospital and several other local buildings to focus on social studies. The children also participated in Remembrance Day activities by making wreaths to lay at the war memorial and creating transient art.

The Children spent a significant amount of the nursery day outdoors and quickly became fully embedded in the local community, people started to wave to the children, and they soon became known as "the little yellow ducklings". This came at a time when many people could not see their own families, these interactions meant a great deal to the local community.

Having the freedom to be physically active outdoors had a real positive emotional impact on the children. Not only could the children jump in puddles and roll in the snow, but they developed a genuine interest in nature. The children learnt about, and experienced season changes and took part in the virtual nature schools.

Staff and children moved into their new purpose –built setting during the first week of August 2021. Staff created innovative play spaces for children using a mix of vintage furniture, loose parts and unique resources. Bringing outdoors, indoors created a natural environment that made the temporary setting more cosy.

The children have been part of the Strathisla Children's Centre journey since cutting of the turf. They visited the site regularly to monitor changes and were excited to see it develop. Many of the children recreated their observations in their play, building their own nursery from blocks and loose parts.

Strathisla Children's Centre allows children to engage in free-flow play. The new resources for outdoor play include a poly-tunnel to grow fruit and vegetables, an outdoor seating area, and beautiful wooden resources for sand and water play. Indoors the bright open space will be used for 2–5-year-old children, with added rooms for one-one time or to support individualised programmes. The sensory room offers opportunities to support emotional well-being alongside ASN.



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The children and staff will continue to have relaxed lunches and snacks together, where children take pride in setting the table and making mealtimes a wonderful social event with their peers and the staff team. The kitchen sits in the heart of the setting, the area around the kitchen is decorated with round wooden tables and chairs at children's height. The children will now also be able to be independent when using the toilet and hand washing facilities. Having an area specified for outdoor clothes will allow them to further develop self-help skills.

Children do not need expensive resources to play, learn and thrive—they need resources that allow them to build, create, design, problem solve and imagine. This has always been the vision of the staff, but now they have seen that it works.

*"When we opened in August 2020, we had 11 children on the role. We finished off our term with 33 children on the role and the most amazing memories that have been made during our first year"*

*Eleanor Smith, Nursery Manager*

