

SETTING UP A SHARE SHED

How one school set up a sharing shed to help families

"Whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers, you do to me"

Matthew 25:40



Holy Cross Primary School in Plymouth have created swap sheds to help those in need. These sheds offer parents and parishioners a place to drop off good quality, clean second-hand school uniform and other clothing, books, toys, food and hygiene items on a 'give what you can, take what you need' basis. This fosters a culture of reciprocity and is a visible example of the Mission of Charity in the school. Only parents are allowed in the sheds but children can help sort items and tidy the sheds. Sometimes this might be a GIFT group or school chaplaincy team. The rewards for the children are great, knowing they are helping their school community.

SETTING UP A SHED

There are some practical things to think about and plan when setting up a sharing shed:

- Think about how you are going to set the shed up. It will need a solid base. It is important the sheds are kept watertight and free from damp and infestation.
- You will need a team of volunteers to help to erect a shed.
- A shed needs to be in a good position for access by parents.
- Sheds will need locks if they are visible to the wider public. Sheds may need to be opened and closed at specified times, managed by the school. This will need to be advertised to the families.
- You will need someone to oversee the running of the shed. Are there volunteers who will regularly make sure that the items are suitable, that the sheds are presentable and easy to access? Food items will need to be checked for their dates. Any items that are not suitable could be donated to a charity shop.
- Food and hygiene sheds will need shelving to keep items up off the floor. Only tinned items and those in packaging that will not get damp or degrade quickly are suitable. Toiletries are much in demand for both adults and children.
- Clothing can be hung on a rail or put into clear well marked bags with ages or sizes on. These can be placed in plastic boxes or on shelves.
- Think about the size of items you are willing to accept. If you have a parent support advisor, they may be a good point of contact for parents.
(No electrical or battery-operated items should be shared).

Consider the dignity of people using the sheds. Make it a part of the culture of the school to donate, take, and share what we have, to not be wasteful, but to share the wealth of resources.



If cost of the shed is a barrier, please contact Caritas@prcdtr.org.uk to see if we can help. In some places the parish has purchased the shed.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Elena, the parent support adviser at Holy Cross, shared her thoughts about the sheds



What was the inspiration behind your swap shed project?

They were old PE sheds that we have repurposed. There is a shed for food and books, a shed for uniform and good quality toys, and there is a shed for children's clothes. Parents from the school are free to bring and take anything from the sheds. Some people donate good quality clean items, and some people take what they need and sometimes people do both.

The sheds are open each morning that Elena is working. Elena is able to use the resources when she identifies families in need, but mostly parents help themselves. She has one volunteer who helps to sort out donations and some parents are very good at donating items in marked, clear bags with ages on the outside. Some clothes get hung on hangers and other items are put on shelves or in boxes.

Can you share any stories about the impact of the swap shed on your local school community?

Earlier this year we had a large family who had been evicted from their house. They were put into a hotel as temporary accommodation. They only had a kettle and the mini fridge. I was able to put food parcels together for this family. They now have a new home, and I have been able to source some items to help with living in their new home. Sometimes I will ask parents to get involved. I ask them if there is anybody that they know who needs help and if they will put me in contact with them. Often this provides parents with the opportunity to think about their own needs and to have the confidence to come and ask for help for themselves.

What impact has there been on the GIFT group who help to sort the sheds out?

Sometimes that group helps, but sometimes teachers choose different children to come and help. This is a great way to have time to talk to the children and find out if there are any needs in their family. The children's helping fosters that sense of looking after each other.



What would you say to school team looking to start up something similar?

Definitely do it. We are seeing more of those who are struggling. They're just on the edge and do not qualify for benefits and we are trying to help to fill the gaps. It is important to build true relationships with everyone that you meet. It builds trust and people will turn to you when they need something, because they know they can trust you.

