

Common features of OSCAR services

A well-run OSCAR service is a good option for children and parents. Changes in society mean that neighbourhoods are less likely to be full of people who know each other and children can't so easily play and socialize informally with other children.

OSCAR services can provide a safe and stimulating place that's like a neighbourhood. Children can choose who they play with and interact with friendly and caring adults (who may have special skills like crafts, music, sports etc.)

This relaxed environment is usually less structured than school time and offers children the chance to develop valuable physical and social skills, pursue their interests, exercise their imaginations, relax and re-energise.

There are many different ways that services operate in the OSCAR sector but there are some common features:

- The operator of the service may be a community organisation, a school board, a private company or a local government body. A large number of services are operated by sole traders. Many of the services operated in schools are not under the direct management of the school.
- Services use a wide range of facilities. This may include school halls and classrooms; church facilities; community and recreation centres; scout or guide halls; sports clubs; converted homes; indoor playgrounds. Before and after school services which are not school-based will usually escort children to and from school either by walking (usually under supervision of programme staff) or motor vehicles.
- Children attending are usually primary and intermediate school age. Sometimes older children might have a separate programme within the same facility.
- Services usually operate Monday to Friday. After school programmes typically close between 5.30 and 6.00 pm. Before school programmes may open from 7.00 to 7.30 am, sometimes earlier. Holiday programmes may open from 7.00 am and continue until 6.00 pm, but most children will attend from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm.
- There will usually be some flexibility around bookings. Full time, part time and casual places are likely to be available unless the service has reached capacity. Services need to employ staff based on expected numbers, so if you have booked your child in you may be charged a fee even if your child doesn't attend. To cover ongoing operating costs, services often charge for public holidays.
- Services usually offer a mix of structured activities and free play that is child-directed. Under the MSD OSCAR Standards, operators are required to be responsive to the needs and interests of children and take into consideration the wishes of family / whanau. The programme that each service offers will also reflect the programme hours, available facilities/resources and the particular skills of the staff.

- Most services provide some food – an afternoon snack, and maybe a morning snack in a holiday programme. Children are usually required to bring their lunch to a holiday programme. Children may also prepare food as an activity. It is very important for parents to provide information on any dietary needs or allergies.
- Most services charge fees; actual rates can vary greatly from service to service. Before / after school programmes mostly charge a flat fee for the whole session (possibly with slightly lower full week rate.) Some services may have variable fees based on the hours of attendance. This is more common for holiday programmes, where extra fees may apply if the children attend before 9.00 am or after 3.00 pm.
- Children will need to be enrolled in writing and services require information such as medical conditions, emergency contacts, who is allowed to collect children. Parents are usually asked to sign an agreement covering care arrangements and various terms and conditions.
- There are no mandatory regulations or required qualifications for the OSCAR sector. However, most services are approved by the Ministry of Social Development, under the MSD Social Sector Standards (sometimes referred to as the "OSCAR Standards" or "OSCAR Approved". This is a voluntary set of standards concerning child wellbeing, health and safety, staffing, programme provision and service management. [Click here for more information.](#)?