

“We’re pretty creative over here,” said BGCWLC Resource Development Manager Lisa Crater. “They’re not going to know. If we have to attach six-foot noodles to them until they’re six feet away by default, that’s our goal. Our goal is to get them there, see how they are mentally, and see how they can transition through the difficult time.”

The mental health of children is a core reasoning for the club to begin opening. As parents worry about their next paycheck as a world in turmoil plays out on the news, Trent stated that children need a safe space to “just be a kid.”

“They have so much fun here. They feel safe,” Trent said. “That’s why we felt compelled, no matter how many hoops we have to jump through, which will be painful, to be open.”

When arriving at the club, both children and guardians will have to go through a general health screening. For children, temperatures are taken twice and logged. For guardians, a temperature will be taken once, and they will also have to wear face coverings when dropping children off. Children will not be required to wear face coverings.

“And then there’s a series of questions that we have to ask,” Trent said.

These include “Do you or anyone in your household have respiratory symptoms?” and “Have your child or anyone in your household had fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, vomiting, diarrhea or rash in the last 10 days?”

The club will ask if anyone in the household had contact with a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or if anyone in the household has been to place with community transmission.

“If the parent/guardian, staff member or volunteer answers yes to any of the above questions, they will not be allowed entry to club facilities,” guidelines state.

Instead, they will be required to stay home for 10 days since the symptoms first appeared. Everyone must also be symptom free for 72 hours before they can return to the club. The symptoms are not regulated to the children only. Even if a child is visibly healthy, if a guardian or anybody the child lives with is exhibiting symptoms, the child will be asked to stay home.

Personal information will also be collected to help contact tracing, should an outbreak occur in the region.

The rules also apply to staff. After a screening, if any staff exhibits the above symptoms, they will also be required to stay home.

Check in times will be in the first hour of the day, and the club will be closing early so staff can sanitize.

“All the high-touched sur-

faces have to be continually cleaned and sanitized each night,” Trent said. “Each night we have to completely clean and sanitize everything. All the rooms, all the surfaces, all the floors. Pens, pencils, everything. In order for us to do that and be ready for the next day, we’re going to have to close early.”

Once a child is allowed into the club, they will be separated into different cohorts, which will consist of a 10:1 ratio — 10 children to one staff member.

“That means I can only have as many cohorts as I have staff,” Trent said.

The limited size of the cohorts is expected to limit the size of an outbreak if one were to occur, while simultaneously allowing contact tracing to be done more efficiently if needed.

But the 10:1 ratio has created a staffing problem for BGCWLC. Traditionally, one staff member could instruct anywhere from 15 to 30 children at one time.

“[The elementary] program has about 75 kids that are registered, and they have anywhere from 27 to 47 attend daily,” Trent said, describing a regular summer session.

Staffing has been based on those numbers. But the 10:1 ratio severely limits the number of instructors BGCWLC is able to provide. As of right now, the club is maxed out at three cohorts for the elementary program, with 30 kids in total, and two cohorts for the teen program.

“We don’t really have a clue yet how many kids we’re going to have,” Trent said. “In talking with all the other clubs in Oregon, within the first couple of days, they had to start turning away a significant number of kids, because they had more than they thought they would have.”

As to who the club would turn away, the club will be looking at a priority list based on the occupation of the guardian.

“The first priority is first responders,” Trent said. “The second priority is going to be essential workers. The third will be parents or guardians that are either returning to work or have returned to work. The next priority is existing members that were part of us, who don’t happen to be first responders or essential workers. After that, if we have space, then we’ll take anybody else that wants to join.”

The cohorts themselves won’t be stable. While a school district could regulate a fourth grade classroom as one cohort throughout the year, the transitory nature of the BGCWLC summer program prohibits that.

“In many cases, during our summer program, people will go on vacation,” Trent said. “We may have a different group of kids each week. So I have a stable cohort that starts on June 22. The next week, four or five of those kids might go on

vacation, then each Monday I will have to put together a new group. But once I put that group together, they’re together for the entire week.”

Trent stated this would make communication between the club and guardians vital, as any future plans will be pivotal in structuring cohorts.

The cohorts are also prohibited from mixing, which requires more space. For example, for lunch and snacks, only one cohort will be allowed into the main building at one time. Once a cohort leaves, the area will have to be deep cleaned.

“On top of that, every person has to have 35 square feet of space,” Trent said, which equals a six foot radius between each person.

Even though they are in the same cohort, children will still be required to maintain a six foot distance between one another. They will not be required to wear face coverings, but they also will not be allowed to physically interact with one another. They will also be disallowed from sharing supplies.

“They get their own tote,” Program Manager Jessica Knapp said. “They’ll have their own chalk, their own basketball, their own hula hoops, jump ropes, a whole bunch of stuff in their totes to come outside and play with.”

But providing the individualized equipment comes at a cost. To purchase the material, BGCWLC has spent an additional \$8,000, and the costs continue to rise.

Logistically and financially, “It is a nightmare in order to make this all work,” Trent said.

While schools have been given the summer to work with the guidelines, clubs like BGCWLC have been

given just weeks to implement them.

And the costs have been significant.

“It literally costs us \$10,000 for all the equipment, sanitization, supplies, gloves, masks, all the equipment that we have to use to spray everything down,” Trent said. “That’s \$10,000 that we haven’t planned on.”

Staffing will be an issue. If a staff member gets sick and is out for 10 days, the club does not have enough staff to cover the staff members cohort.

“If we can find qualified people that we can hire and can pass the background check, that’s one thing we can do,” Trent said. “But we probably won’t be able to do that because our expenses have been so dramatic to open up, and our donations dropped off a cliff.”

As the economy shrank during the shutdowns, non-profits through the region saw a considerable dry spell of individual donations.

BGCWLC’s big fundraisers, such as its annual June golf tournament, had to be postponed.

“Best case, it will get pushed out to Aug. 22,” Trent said. “At this point, we’re not even sure how many people we’ll have come out and play.”

There’s also the Senior Homecoming dance for the community in the fall, which also may be delayed, depending on crowd restrictions.

“And that one is where we fund about a quarter of our revenue,” Trent said. “All of our fundraisers are built so we don’t have to turn any kids away because of money. That’s a major challenge that the board has to deal with. How are we going to close that fundraising gap?”

He stated BGCWLC was extremely fortunate to get

the grant from PeaceHealth, and that at the moment the club is financially stable. But unless donations come in, the club will be financially strapped again.

“A lot of this sounds really bad on paper,” Crater said. “Our main goal is, because the kids have been gone so long, we’re really concerned about their mental health.”

Trent pointed to new studies that show stay at home orders are creating emotional issues for children.

“They’re in the home all day long with the parents when the news comes on, you hear all of these people who are dying from COVID, all the confusion about reopening, the national unrest that’s going on right now,” Trent said. “And then to hear their parents hearing about not getting their unemployment check — they’ve been working on this for three months. How are they going to pay rent? Kids are overhearing all of this stuff. That’s the part where we need to be able to open up.”

When children do come to the club, the staff will be striving to ensure the best experience possible.

“We’ve got a lot of stuff planned,” Knapp said. “They have to be able to do it individually, so it took a lot of planning to do it.”

From building rockets to STEM activities, the staff has multiple plans for the youth

in their care.

“We’ll be doing cursive and spelling, problem solving, we’re going to set up computers so they have those over there,” she said. “We’re going to be running our normal programs, our Money Matters, our club store, Smart Girls and Passport to Manhood. We’re still going to fit those in. And we’re going to do a lot of outdoor activities. They say outdoors is the best place to be. We’ve got our gardening club and we have several sports activities we’ve got planned.”

There will be play activities from sprinklers, water balloons and a giant JENGA for kids to puzzle out.

“We’re going to see exactly what we can do and try and have a lot of fun with them,” Knapp said.

On top of all of this is uncertainty. From the possibility of an outbreak in the region to possible treatments that are being discussed that could lessen the severity of the disease, the future is entirely uncertain. But for now, “This is going to be their norm,” Knapp said.

But the club believes the risks of not opening outweigh the logistical issues.

“We’ve done such a good job with those kids, and they love to come here,” Trent said. “For the kids, this will be worthwhile.”

For more information on the local Boys and Girls club, or to donate or volunteer, visit bgcwlc.org.

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