

Cork Sibling Support Project

Over 600 siblings have attended Cork Sibshops over the last 10 years. To celebrate this, teenagers have been invited contribute to this news letter.

Cork Sibshops is an interagency programme developed by Enable Ireland, Cope Foundation and the Brothers of Charity Southern Services to provide support for brothers and sisters of children with an intellectual and physical disability.

The Cork Sibshop programme is based on a model developed by Don Meyer, Director of the Sibling Support Project, Seattle, Washington and has been running since 1998.

Sibshops are run on a group work model, where a group of sibs (aged 8-13 years) come together to share information about their brothers and sisters and to learn about the implications of disabilities. Each participant attends the Sibshops for four sessions. In the third year of the programme, May 2001, research was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the Sibshops. The aims of Sibshops are to reduce isolation, to provide siblings with opportunities to share experiences of having a family member with a disability and to learn about the implications of disabilities and the services available. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 18 children pre and post attendance at Sibshops.

The research found that most of the goals of the Sibshops were met.

- Sibshops were effective in providing siblings with opportunities to meet other siblings in a relaxed recreational setting thus helping reduce isolation. Only half of the siblings had met other siblings of someone with a disability before attending Sibshops.
- Most children reported they had enjoyed Sibshops with more than half describing them as excellent. Over half reported they had opportunities to hear and discuss experiences similar to their own.
- Over half of the participants reported learning something new post-Sibshop attendance and they were more articulate about describing "tricky situations" and reported that the greatest difficulties were in the area of communication and understanding their siblings needs. Over half the participants had not spoken about their siblings within the family prior to Sibshop attendance.
- Almost half of the group reported they had learned something new about their siblings' condition.

Since 2001 more emphasis has been placed on providing siblings with information about disabilities and services. Participants are given two books to take home; "Views from our Shoes - Growing up with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs", Don

Meyer (written by Siblings aged 4-18 years and "Living with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs - A book for Sibs", Don Meyer and Patricia Vadassy.

Parent's responses varied with regard to the impression that they felt Sibshops had made on their children. Two reported that the Sibshops had made a strong impression. Requests for further support by parents included the benefits to children of ongoing contact, a fun weekend and more frequent Sibshops.

THE SIBSHOP PROGRAMME

- ∞ Trickle in and introductory activities.
- ∞ High and low energy familiarisation and fun games.
- ∞ Discussion activities in small groups to facilitate voicing and hearing of feelings and opinions in a relaxed recreational setting.
- ∞ Art and Craft activities are incorporated to increase involvement.
- ∞ The final 2 sessions involve information on disabilities and presentations by Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist and Speech and Language Therapist.
- ∞ Siblings evaluate each session and are consulted about the content of the following sessions.

This interagency and interdisciplinary Sibling Support Service is run by Social Workers and Psychologists from the three services. Two adult siblings and three teenage siblings have been volunteers over the 10 year period.

Many participants have returned for a number of years to Sibshops and now participate in Teenage Sibling Support Service for 13-17 year olds since 2004. Teenagers meet twice a year, summer and winter for a Teenage Support Day and some have become friends through Sibshops and meet outside of the group.

The Teenage Sibling Support Days offer therapeutic, recreational input with information and discussion as part of the day. Activities have included horse riding, skating, bowling and days at a recreational centre such as Trabolgan, Oysterhaven and Kinsale Out door Education Centre.

5/1/2009

RECENT COMMENTS FROM TEENAGE PARTICIPANTS.

Name: Katie White

Age: 14 years



My name is Katie, I am just like you I have a sibling with special needs so do not think that you are the only one. Before I used to go to the under 13 group. It was a great laugh and you meet loads of people there that have a sibling with special needs just like you. It is a great way of making friends and the helpers are all so kind and understanding. I am 14 and I go to the Teenage Sibshops now, it's a great day out, you would have about four or five trips a year to all different places. The last place we went was Supernova in Ballincollig. We were ice skating. It was my first time so I had a few falls!!! So really meeting other brothers and sisters with siblings who have special needs doesn't make you feel like you are the only one and Sibshops does exactly this. It brings brothers and sisters together for a day to remember. I can't wait for the next trip!!!! (29/01/2008)

Name: Fiona Walsh

Age: 14 years



My Experiences:

I have had very good experiences through the Sibshop Programme. I have made good friends and I have been on many fun and exciting days out. I learn more about my sibling's disability and I have met lots of other brothers and sisters who have siblings with a disability. When talking to these people who have a sibling with special needs it was easier to talk to them about my brother as they can understand and relate to what I was saying.

My suggestions for Days Out:

Instead of staying in and around the county, maybe we could go on a train to Dublin. We could go to the Wax Works, shopping or maybe a museum? The train wouldn't be expensive as we would all paying student rates and it would be a day enjoyed by all. Maybe we could go orienteering, we would work in teams and have great fun, also, it being an outdoor activity, this would add to the fun. (4/03/2008)

Reference

Sibshops. An evaluation of an interagency model. Journal of Intellectual Disabilities 2005.Vol 9 (1)43-57.Darcy,Flynn,McCarthy,O'Connor and Tierney.