

Barnardo's Community Links Sibling Support Group **March – May 2014**

Report Compiled by: Kathryn Lock

Date of Support Group:

March 6th - 8th May 2014. The sibling support group was held on a weekly basis for the period of eight weeks, session times approximately 1hr and 45mins.

Attendance:

Six children attended the sibling support group. The children were aged between 7 & 11 years old. They were all from the Vale of Glamorgan. There were four females and two males who attended. All young people who attended the workshops were referred to the service through the local authority Child Health and Disability Team. A number of other children were referred but were not able to attend as the Thursday evening was not convenient or they were in high school. We were clear from the outset that too big an age gap would not be a good idea.

Facilitators of the group:

Kathryn Lock, Sibling Group Coordinator, Gavin Stewart Project Worker and Rebecca Lewis, Volunteer.

Venue for the Sibling Support Group:

Ashgrove School, in the Vale of Glamorgan.

The Purpose of the Sibling Support Group:

The sibling support group provides a unique experience for children and young people whose siblings have Autism. The young people who attend the group have a shared experience and knowledge of their sibling's Autism, enabling them to feel included and supported within their own peer group.

Aims and Objectives of the Sibling Support Group:

- To provide ongoing emotional and psychological wellbeing.
- To encourage fun and friendship building
- To enhance and improve a young person's understanding of Autism

- To improve relationships with their sibling with Autism
- To relieve isolation
- To build coping strategies for difficult times
- To encourage children and young people to build resilience
- To improve their communication within their families

Outcomes for the participating young people:

- To meet other siblings
- To have fun
- To learn more about Autism
- To learn how to get on better with their sibling
- To learn how to get on better with their parent/carer
- To learn how to deal with difficult times
- Have a break from home
- To take part in new experiences

The sibling support group provides a framework of activities for young people to explore their own experiences of having a sibling with Autism. For many young people, this was their first experience of meeting other young people, whose sibling had autism. This enabled young people to feel connected to their peers. This assisted in normalising some of the young people's experiences. Moreover, participants in the group often showed empathy and positive regard towards each other and their siblings, which was validating for the young person concerned.

The eight week programme

- Week 1 – **Introductions & relationship building** between young people and helpers.
- Week 2 – **My world**, where children explore their own worlds and their relationship with their sibling and other family members.
- Week 3 – **Understanding feelings**, helping the young people to understand feelings.
- Week 4 – **Identifying issues** and supporting young people to talk about difficult times.
- Week 5 – **Managing Issues**, building resilience and coping strategies to some of the difficulties the young people were experiencing.
- Week 6 – **Our families**, celebrating their family's strengths.
- Week 7 - **Information session**, further information on Autism and expert talk. The expert on this session was Keith Ingram.
- Week 8 – **Group endings and evaluation.**

During the eight weeks, the children participated in a variety of themed led activities. A lot of the activities encouraged young people to use art and play to express how they were feeling. Some of the children required additional time to complete the activity and benefited from the small group size and one-to-one support.

Observations

Over the weeks, children grew in confidence and self esteem. They felt able to ask questions specifically about their siblings Autism i.e. what is Autism? Will their sibling get better? Why do they hit me? Both staff and volunteers managed these issues sensitively by providing emotional and practical support around managing. As all the children's siblings had an allocated social worker from the Child Health and Disability in the Vale, the service was also able to refer any issues back to them in order to seek additional support around their sibling's behaviour.

For some children it helped them to feel heard and understood about how difficult life can be for them and their sibling. It also enabled them to talk openly about the concerns they have for their sibling's future, indicating that some young people felt a sense of responsibility towards their sibling. Some young people fed back that they felt more able to talk to their parents now about their sibling than previously.

A Lot of the young people were asking about how they could engage their sibling in play, as well as improve their relationship together. We talked about ways this maybe encouraged and information was shared with families.

Feedback from Children:

"Amazing", "I don't want it to end", "I loved it", "When can I come back?" "Why can't we continue?" "Best thing ever" Five children attended the final session and all agreed strongly that they achieved their aims within the group.

Feedback from family:

"It's a real big life line for people like me and Dean";

"in those eight weeks the children bonded so much".

"She was so emotional, when it finished. She absolutely loved it and talked about the group non-stop".

"The small groups helped her to have the attention she needed"

"She has also been talking more about the impact of her brothers Autism".

"Her behaviour improved at home".

"He enjoyed meeting new people and making new friends"

"The feedback was great after every session".

The only difficulty identified was that one mother identified was the timing of the sessions as she had to travel quite a distance to the sessions, this could be reconsidered for future sibling groups.

Feedback from a member of staff:

It didn't take much time for the group to form a close bond. The group easily settled in together and engaged throughout the whole process. Every child was given the chance to be educated about autism and educate others on their experiences. The group engaged well throughout and many of their unanswered questions were answered as the weeks went by. The group's individuals were given a voice to speak out about their siblings, whereas before, they may not have had this opportunity'.

The coping methods they had learnt over the weeks had given them a chance to express their feelings through a variety of ways. Each workshop was practical and the children enjoyed expressing their creativity as they learnt along the way. The ending of the workshops seemed very hard for the children as they had built up relationships within the group. The children were prepared for the ending as it was expressed that relationships have to come to an end at some point.

The group left positively and I feel they gained a lot from the workshops. The feedback from parents on a weekly basis was positive with some noticing change within the household. Overall a great programme and highly beneficial to all involved.