

Appendix A



Project report 2021-22

Introduction

This report summarises the Siblings Forever project in terms of its delivery and impact of the between April 2021 and March 2022.

After a suspension of the project over most of 2020 and 2021 carers, children and project staff were pleased to finally be able to offer two Siblings Forever trips this year; one in October half-term 2021 and one in February half-term 2022.

What is Siblings Forever?

Siblings Forever is a project that brings together brothers and sisters who have been separated through being in care for a 2-night residential multi-activity trip. Based at Grafham Water Centre the project takes the opportunity to build on individual confidence and self-esteem as well as creating memories for the siblings. In addition to the range of adventurous outdoor activities there is also a craft session where the children get the opportunity to create photo frame collages of them and their siblings to take home with them.

Siblings Forever has been running since November 2013. Olly Grant (Independent Reviewing Service Manager) developed the idea to create a space for children who have been separated through care to have some time together that allows them to be siblings first, and everything else second. Since then, there have been 13 trips and a total of 140 Cambridgeshire children have participated so far. Some young people have attended more than once, sometimes with different siblings and sometimes at their request to return a second time if they felt they benefitted a huge amount from the first time.

The young people



This year a total of 6 sibling groups have attended Siblings Forever, which is a total of 19 children. Some groups were pairs of siblings and the largest group was of 6.

The young people's ages ranged from 9 to 16. While it was important not to split the sibling groups within the activities to promote them spending time together, the broad age range did sometimes pose challenges around keeping all of the young people engaged on all of the activities all of the time.

Just over half of the children reside outside of Cambridgeshire, which does impact on how regularly they normally see each other in person. The trip was able to reunite one pair of brothers who were living together up until last year, and now one resides in Kent and the other in Coventry. They hadn't seen each other in person since they had separated.

The usual routines for contact between the young people varied broadly. Some of the sibling groups were able to see each other fairly regularly but it was often the case that one or other members of the group would be unable to attend. For other sibling groups this trip was the first time they had been able to spend quality time together since before the pandemic.

The staff

The trips are staffed by volunteers from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough children's services. The staff ratio is always at least 1:3 in addition to the qualified instructors that are provided by Grafham Water for each individual activity.

Olly Grant continues to be the Project Manager, and this year welcomed Julie Costello (Virtual School Inclusion Manager) as the On-Site Lead for the trips. The other volunteers came from the Independent Reviewing Service, Business Support, and the Leaving Care Service. All staff received specific employee recognition awards after the trips in appreciation of the time and energy that they contributed to the project.

The impact

This project enables brothers and sisters to build on and strengthen their relationships, in a way unlike any other. The length of the trip allows them to re-connect and relax into their natural dynamics while also being able to promote one another's self-esteem and confidence through approaching new activities and challenges together. By nature of the trauma experienced by many of children in care there can be intensity of emotion at times. The staff support the children where rivalries or arguments arise, and they encourage the siblings to comfort one another if there are anxieties or tears.

After each trip each individual young person and their carer is asked for some feedback on how they felt the trip was, and any ideas on how it could have been improved.

Almost all the children said that they would recommend the trips to other young people and even those sibling groups with quite turbulent dynamics fed back that they would like to come again on the trip. This suggests that being together is really important for these children, even when there is drama, high emotion and sometimes conflict.

After the trips each young person who has participated was sent a personalised certificate to recognise their achievements in the activities and also as a sibling.



Testimonies

From young people:

It was really fun! It was kind of exhausting. The best bit was seeing our siblings. There were a few squabbles but it was fine.

I really enjoyed it! I don't think anything had to change. It was good to spend time with my brothers and sister. I really enjoyed all of it.

It was pretty good sharing a room with my brother. We didn't get any sleep the first night and only three hours the second night! I was tired but I've slept loads since I've been back. I would recommend the trip to other people.

From carers:

Yeah he had a lovely time. He said it was lovely to spend time with his brother, even though he got angry at one point. He has his photo collage on his shelf in his bedroom.

He was absolutely exhausted when he got home but he had a fantastic time. He was very quiet on the way home but the next day he was full of it.

She's fine. She had a great time. Hasn't stopped talking about it.

From a volunteer staff member:

It was my first time doing something like this, and I found it incredibly intense, yet rewarding, and fun. I wasn't quite sure what to expect to start with, but I am pleased I did it. It is a big commitment, but it means so much to these kids. It is an event which young people really depend on and get so much from. In my view, an essential event which should be funded to happen multiple times a year. It could easily (finances aside) be upscaled to become a mini service in itself with trained and paid staff attending, organising each event, and building relations with the young people... It was a shame not to be able to reassure young people that they would definitely be able to come back on it again and I feel they would all jump at the opportunity to return.

I found the event genuinely moving at the end, it was hard to see how upset they got when they had to leave each other, or in some instances, unable to say goodbye at all.

The future

The plan is to hold two Siblings Forever trips over the next 12 months. Funding has been agreed for these trips from SQA. Once the dates for the trips are confirmed work will begin on promoting the trips and seeking referrals from interested young people...

