



Don Meyer, Director of the Sibling Support Project, shares a laugh with brothers and sisters of children with special needs during a Sibshop.



Sibshops: Why you need them and how to make them happen

By Margaret Roberts, M.Ed.

Over 4.5 million people in the U.S. have special health, developmental and mental health concerns. Most of these individuals also have typically-developing brothers and sisters. They're too important to ignore, if for only two reasons.

- These brothers and sisters will be in the lives of family members with special needs longer than *anyone*: after their parents are gone and special education services are a distant memory.
- Siblings will share many of their parents' concerns: isolation, need for information, guilt, and deep concerns about the future. But when they are give support, validation, understanding, and information typically developing sibs can be their brothers' and sisters' lifelong advocates.

Agencies, parents, educators and service providers need to address the needs of these critical family members in the present and for the future. The Sibling Support Project does just that.

Through hands-on training and workshops , the Sibling Support Project builds the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities to address the critical needs of brothers and sisters who have siblings with health, developmental and other disabilities.

The two-day Sibshop program includes:

- Training on how to organize and facilitate a local Sibshop.
- A four-hour Demonstration Sibshop for young brothers and sisters of kids with developmental disabilities.
- Workshops for parents, service providers and others interested in sibling issues but not in running a Sibshop.

For more details on the training program and workshops go to www.siblingsupport.org

Sibshops: How to make them happen

In today's tough economic times, agencies must think creatively about how to fund important programs. Below are ideas you can use to bring the Sibling Support Project's Sibshop training and workshops to your community.

Use capacity-building funds. Many government and foundation grants provide support to build agency and community capacity. Our trainings and workshops build the capacity of agencies by training staff how to start Sibshops in their communities.

Use training funds. Agency and program budgets might have extra dollars to cover training needs. The Sibling Support Project trains agency staff on how to start local Sibshops.

Convene a coalition. Invite like-minded agencies to participate in this two-day training and share the costs. Explore ways to help disperse expenses among several agencies who can offer Sibshops for the families they serve. .

Have board members fund the Sibshop training as part of their donation. Board members often decide to make a contribution to a specific cause.

Identify and cultivate major donors in your community who have personal interest in this issue. Meet with these individuals; tell them about the program and why it's important. Make sure they have a direct connection to this issue and a history of giving. Two or three donors might fund this training. Invite them to participate.

Find local business sponsor. Most businesses are looking to give to good causes and opportunities to connect to the community. Is there a local business owner or corporate sponsor who has a personal interest in sibs? Meet with them and explain the importance of this program.

The positive effects of the Sibshop program are not only apparent, but enduring. . .The positive results last into adulthood.

Plan ahead. Think about what other development activities your organization does during the year. Ask if you can earmark revenue to help fund a portion of the training cost. Then identify other fundraising activities or sponsors to help meet the remaining costs.

Sibshops are designed to address a wide range of disabilities and can be customized to meet the needs of your community, agency, or target population and age group.



Sibling Support Project

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