

A Gift of Time

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Disciples-Related Health & Social Service Ministry

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What happens to a family when a child is diagnosed with a disability? Upon that diagnosis, families enter a world that is full of medical, educational, and behavioral stresses. Their child faces an uncertain future. The demands of the child's disability require 24/7 care. Parents get little rest and operate out of a state of fatigue. They have little time for themselves. Relationships are neglected. Marital and parent-sibling relationships suffer. Families who care for children with special needs find themselves isolated from resources, friends, family, the community, and other families who care for children with disabilities. Theirs is a very lonely journey.

In 2005, SHARE was started as a respite care ministry of First Christian Church in Midland, Texas. On Friday nights from 6-10pm, SHARE provided care for children with special needs (birth-18) and their siblings (birth-12). Parents are given a "gift of time" which they use to go on a date, connect with other parents who have children with special needs, take a break from the constant demands of the child's disability, renew their spirit, or simply rest. SHARE also provides 10 hours a month of in-home respite care so that parents can schedule respite when they need it the most. Parents commonly use in-home respite to spend quality time with the sibling.

As SHARE learned about other challenges that parents face, it developed Parent Connection Programs. Parent support groups give parents the opportunity to share "their story" with other parents who genuinely understand their challenges. Parents do not participate in holiday or community celebrations because they are not "special-needs friendly." SHARE provides socials and holiday celebrations in a stress-free environment so that families can overcome their isolation, enjoy these occasions, and connect with other families. A Father's Network gives dads a chance to talk about their concerns from a father's perspective. Mom's Night Out gives moms a chance to socialize and network. Counseling services help family members cope with the never-ending stresses in their family.

Sibling Support Programs give brothers and sisters the opportunity to talk about their joys and concerns. In Sibshops, siblings talk about issues they deal with, such as resentment, guilt, embarrassment, lack of friends, and lack of parental attention. We also help siblings understand the positive aspects of growing up with a sibling who has a disability. Siblings are typically more compassionate, understanding, tolerant, mature, and loyal to their family than their peers. Many siblings will enter the helping professions as adults. A Sibling Scholarship helps them discover the path for their future.

SHARE cares for the needs of family members who care for a child who has special needs. Its mission is to strengthen family relationships and support families in their efforts to establish and maintain successful families. It takes a strong, healthy family to provide effective care for a child with special needs—now and well into the future. In many respects, the family is the future for the child with special needs.

In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the ministries of health and social services have been core to our Disciples identity and faith. The National Benevolent Association (NBA) and Disciples Home Missions (DHM) collaborate to support a network of Disciples-related health and social service ministries. Learn more at www.nbacares.org/connect or contact mkilpatrick@nbacares.org.