

Sheffield Autistic Society

Play Scheme 2009

Registered Charity no. 1024174

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We were all very pleased when the 2009 August play scheme fortnight again had beautiful weather. This meant that the beautiful setting of Whirlow Hall Farm could be enjoyed to the full.

The play scheme has been run since 1992 by Sheffield Autistic Society. The Society is a group of volunteer parents and carers of youngsters on the Autistic Spectrum. We are totally dependent on kind donations to run the Play scheme. We were lucky that Marion and Phil were able to spend time looking for contributors. The amount raised was enough to run the play scheme for 2 weeks, and a bit extra to replace some weary equipment, which is fabulous.

We were able to offer places on the 2009 play scheme to 35 Autistic youngsters from 8 to 14 years old, and 9 of their siblings. The play scheme was held on each weekday from 10am until 3pm.

Obviously organizing and running the play scheme is very hard work and this year our Volunteer Play Leaders were Louise, Sally and Sam, who have more than 30 years of experience between them. They managed to recruit, train and support 26 Volunteer Play Workers, all who have enhanced CRB checks. This high staffing ratio is essential as all the Autistic youngsters require their own 1:1 adult and some need more support i.e. 2 adults per youngster.

Each youngster's needs are carefully assessed and regularly reviewed in consultation with the parents and carers. This is of prime importance as our play scheme is designed to be both an enormously enjoyable experience for these vulnerable youngsters, and also a genuine break for their parents and carers. The youngsters need to feel happy and comfortable and secure with the play scheme and its setting at Whirlow Hall Farm, as well as with their personal helpers. We find that if the youngsters are happy then their often overstretched parents and carers soon feel relaxed and happy to leave their young people in this safe environment.

At Whirlow Hall Farm there are many activities for the youngsters to enjoy. The Farm staff hold daily animal care sessions for us so that any youngster can go with their helper to see the pigs, collect hens eggs, help care for the guinea pigs or even groom a horse. The safe tractor and trailer rides are popular too. The Farm has now got an all weather area where the children can play ball games. The Society also sets up its popular bouncy castle and trampoline in the gardens.

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We use the farm's minibuses to take smaller groups of children out to go bowling if they want to. Some of the youngsters prefer to play indoors and the farm buildings are ideal for playing pool, making hama beads, designing t-shirts, trying out baking skills or watching both of our magicians: Professor Shell and Professor Fiddlesticks.

All of the autistic youngsters have extreme anxiety levels; some have specific phobias, which include fear of dogs, flying insects, loud noises, smells etc. Many need specific diets. This can mean the play scheme is too difficult for some youngsters with Autism to access for the full 2 weeks and some come for just occasional sessions. The Play Leaders maintain close links with the parents and carers to tell them about positive experiences and to talk about any problems that may arise.

We find that the high staffing ratios and the concentration on individually tailored programs mean that the play scheme is highly successful for many youngsters who come back year after year. In fact, 2 of our helpers, who help the siblings enjoy their days, are on the Autistic Spectrum themselves.

The play scheme is only made possible by kind donations of both time and hard work from Play Leaders Louise, Sally, Sam and all the Play Workers; our Principal fundraisers Phil and Marion; our play scheme Accounts Manager Joanne; and thanks too for our 50 week storage facilities at Sarah and Simon, Damian and Katya, and Barry's houses.

Thanks to all our helpers and to the kind donations from local trusts, charities, individuals and businesses that fund these 2 weeks of hard work and fun.