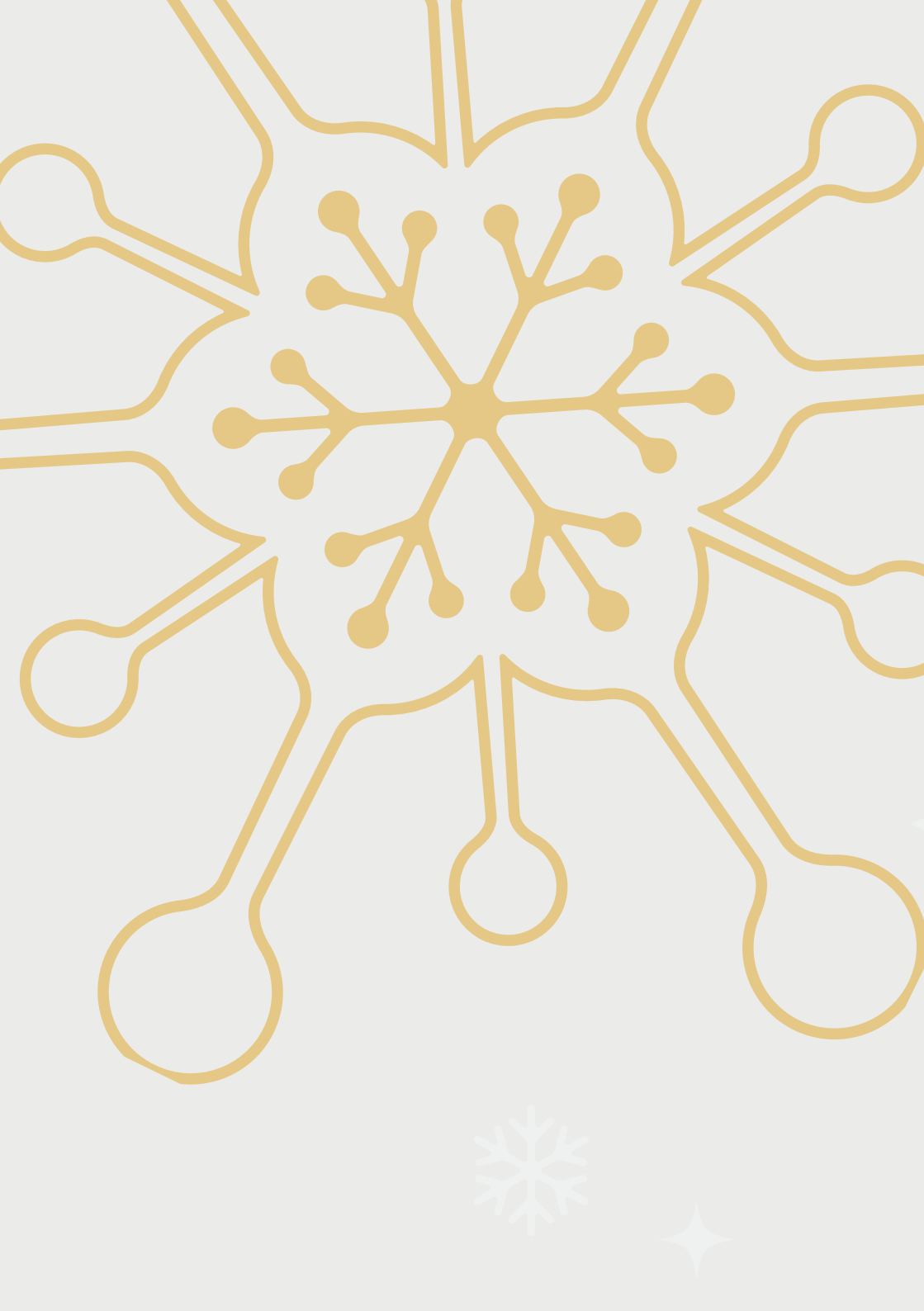




All about Snowflakes Autism Support 2019





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Who Are We?

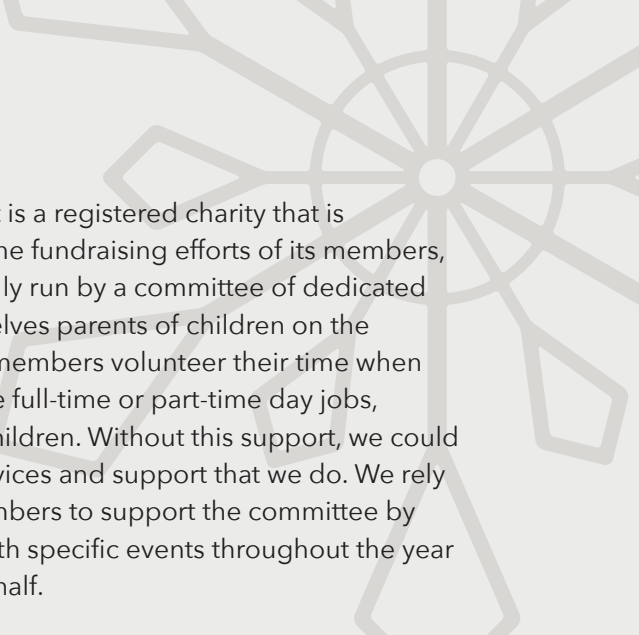


About Snowflakes Autism Support

In January 2012, a group of parents of children with autism, disillusioned with the lack of autism support and services, decided to set up a support group for families affected by autism in Dublin and the surrounding counties. The aim of our group is to organise events for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their parents and siblings and to provide whatever support we can to both pre-diagnosis and post-diagnosis families.

The name Snowflakes was chosen for our group because children with autism are like snowflakes – they are beautiful, each one is uniquely different, and they are liable to meltdown at any time!

To date, we have provided services for over 500 children on the spectrum and their families. The numbers continue to grow week on week. In our short existence, we have brought much needed hope and positivity into the lives of families affected by autism.



Snowflakes Autism Support is a registered charity that is almost entirely funded by the fundraising efforts of its members, friends and family. It is wholly run by a committee of dedicated volunteers, who are themselves parents of children on the spectrum. Our committee members volunteer their time when able to do so, as some have full-time or part-time day jobs, and all are carers to their children. Without this support, we could not provide the events, services and support that we do. We rely on the goodwill of our members to support the committee by volunteering to help out with specific events throughout the year and to fundraise on our behalf.

The next step in our evolution is establishing a Centre for Autism Excellence, a one-stop-shop for autism needs from pre-diagnosis to the transition to adulthood, providing much-needed job and life skills to our ASD members. Most of our work to date has focused on toddlers to pre-teens but as our children are growing older, our organisation is evolving.

We would like to expand into offering services, support and training for young adults in the community transitioning from education to the workplace. A staggering 80% of autistic people are unemployed, which is not only a terrible waste of talent but an active exclusion of a whole tranche of society. This must change, and we would like to pioneer this change. Facilitating all this from a single permanent Centre for Autism Excellence provides a unique focal point for autism services within the community, gives families with autism a one-stop shop for their needs, and gives autistic children, our Snowflakes, a place they can call their own.

We are not funded in any way by the HSE or other government departments.

Our Mission

Engage, educate and support both children with ASD and their families to bring about immediate and lifelong change.

Strategy 1

Engage

Facilitate sporting activities and social events for children with ASD and their siblings allowing interaction in a safe, comfortable and understanding environment. Develop new skills, introduce new experiences and foster an atmosphere of inclusion.

Strategy 2

Educate

Arrange talks and lectures covering leading opinions on key and applicable areas of interest. Facilitate discussion to enable sharing of useable personal experiences and provide parents opportunities to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in their children's current capabilities. Empower parents with knowledge to help them navigate the future.

Our Vision

To create a Centre for Autism Excellence, where we can provide the children we support the skills to realise their potential from youth to adulthood, in the real world.

Strategy 3

Support

Guide parents through their period of transition, install a foundation of knowledge to provide them the ability to support their children, their families and themselves. Enhance their knowledge empowering them to make educated decisions that best suit their unique circumstances.

Strategy 4

Plan for Tomorrow

Find a permanent home which will support our children into adulthood. Develop Work Training Areas, Skills Building Classes that lead to real further education courses and facilitate expansion of social skills through group and external interactions. All of this is in the backdrop of a faculty still offering all the services we currently provide.

What do we do?



Support

Support Group Meetings

Support group meetings are one of the most invaluable services that we provide, bringing parents of newly diagnosed Snowflakes together with parents who are a little further along the journey, in order for them to share experiences and swap stories. They are usually a parent's first introduction to Snowflakes and parents usually leave their first Snowflakes support group meeting feeling hopeful and positive.

Parent and Baby/Toddler Morning

Come join us for a cuppa and a chat with other autism parents! Free event and kids are welcome too. Use the time for a chat and a coffee while the kids enjoy some play time. All are welcome!

Information Talks and Workshops

Struggling with a specific issue? We host information talks and workshops where experts and therapists speak to parents about specific topics. These have included play therapy, sensory processing, parental health and well-being, fussy eaters, to name

but a few. We regularly canvas for ideas on which topics to include in our future talks.

Counselling

This service helps parents maintain their own mental and emotional wellbeing while raising a child with special needs.

Subsidised Speech & Language / Occupational Therapies

Occupational therapy can help to improve daily living skills, such as toilet training, dressing, brushing teeth, and other grooming skills; fine motor skills required for holding objects while handwriting or cutting with scissors; gross motor skills used for walking or riding a bike, sitting, posture, or perceptual skills, such as telling the differences between colours, shapes and sizes; visual skills for reading and writing. Speech therapy can improve overall communication. This makes it possible for children with autism to improve their ability to form relationships and function in day-to-day life.

Subsidised Play Therapy

Play Therapy is a method of working with children who need help in dealing with their emotional and behavioral issues. Play therapy provides them with the opportunity to “play out” their thoughts, feelings and problems in a non-directive way, in a safe environment with a caring therapist.

Card Benefits

Each member is presented with a membership card. Holders of a Snowflakes Autism Support membership card may avail of discounted or free entry (for the carer) to a number of attractions such as Dublin Zoo and Tayto Park. Always check with the venue before paying!

Annual themed events

We always host inclusive celebratory family events where all members of the family can attend. These events include:

- > St Patrick's Day Parade
Snowflakes Autism Support take part in the Swords parade to celebrate our children and families. Families and children who need it can avail of transport provided
- > World Autism Day
We hold a big party to celebrate our children. This includes sensory fun, surprises and treats. It is open to all members
- > Summer Camp
The summer camp runs during the Summer holidays. It includes farm trips, cinema and centre based activities. There is a minimal charge associated with this event
- > Halloween Party
A big party is hosted in Holywell with lots of themed fun
- > Christmas Party
Santa comes to visit all the children in Snowflakes at all party designed for our children.

Activities

Our activities are always change based on the needs of and feedback from our members, but we try to arrange activities around three main areas:

- > Social programme (youth club, cinema club, music, brickx club, messy play etc.)
- > Sporting programme (football, fitness, swimming, horse-riding, karate, rock-climbing etc.)
- > Skills-building programme (coding club, youth council, science workshops, nature club, speech & drama, etc.)



We continue to expand our therapeutic sports and social programme for children with ASD. Given the challenges that children with ASD face (impaired social skills, sensory issues and frequently delayed development and cognitive issues), traditional sporting and social groups are not accessible, and organising them privately can be cost-prohibitive. Children with ASD struggle to participate in activities involving large numbers of people. However, they benefit hugely from the ability to participate in sporting and social activities in smaller, more structured groups with teachers and coaches who are expressly trained in working with children with special needs. All of the activities we run include our sports and social therapeutic ethos and are recognised as being beneficial to children who suffer with sensory, communication, language and social challenges. The service providers are all specialised in dealing with children who have special needs and will provide these activities in small and safe groups.

See below for details on just some of the activities we offer:

Family Days Out

Organising family days out is one of the core principles upon which Snowflakes was founded. We have visited Dublin Zoo, Softplays, bowling venues, Viking Splash Tours, trampoline parks, to name but a few.

Youth Club

This club is aimed at older children. There are different activities each time, e.g. movie night or games night. It is a chance for older kids with autism to socialise and mingle with their peers. The kids drive the agenda for the night!





Messy Play

This session will include Finger Paint, Sand Play, Rainbow Spaghetti, Jelly Bags and lots more. Children and Parents are advised to wear old clothes. All ages & siblings welcome.

Cinema Club

We host a monthly sensory-friendly cinema club in a local cinema. This activity provides a special opportunity for families to enjoy their favorite films in a safe and accepting environment. The cinema ensures that the lights are up, the sound turned down and our Snowflakes can sit back and enjoy the show or actively participate by dancing and singing!



Sibling Workshop

The aim of this club is for our siblings to get to know one another in a fun environment, where they can hang out and just be kids. There is music, games, crafts and more!!

Brickx Club

The Brickx Club is a creative brick building and social activity club for girls and boys aged 4 - 12, including siblings. The Snowflakes Brickx Club takes place weekly in an environment that is specifically tailored for children with ASD.

Nature Club

Snowflakes run a Nature club in collaboration with Owls, the childrens' nature charity. Each scheduled date we head out and explore. We have built campfires, toasted marshmallows and made Christmas decorations out of things we found in Turvey Nature Reserve, we have been rock-pooling at the beach in Donabate and much more!

Snowball

The Gala Snowball takes place every year in November. It's a chance to get all glammed-up, leave the kids with a sitter, forget your worries, put on your dancing shoes and have a night of celebration and fun. All in the aim of raising funds for Snowflakes Autism Support and providing parents with a much needed night out!

It's an uplifting evening when everyone comes together to celebrate our children's achievements and accomplishments.



Good to know



What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which affects information processing in the brain. ASD includes classic Autism, Asperger's syndrome and PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified). ASD is known as a spectrum disorder as it varies significantly in character and severity and occurs in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups. It also affects all age groups.

At present, there are no medical tests that can diagnose Autism. A comprehensive diagnosis must be made by a multidisciplinary team by observing a child's behaviour, communication and development levels. It has been proven that early diagnosis paired with intensive behaviour intervention can significantly enhance a child's quality of life.



Traits of Autism

Autism is characterised by impairments in three key areas, known as the triad of impairments. Children will display elements of the triad of impairments to a varying degree.

- > Lack of communication or difficulty in communicating, unintelligible speech or echolalia (repeating words, phrases or entire conversations), difficulty expressing needs.
- > Lack of social interaction, difficulty understanding social cues, unable to understand facial expressions. Children may also have trouble in group situations, respond negatively to crowds and be unable to mix well with other children.
- > Stereotyped and restrictive patterns of behaviour or self-stimulatory behaviours (hand flapping, vocal utterances, etc.). Children may have a desire for “sameness” – the same daily schedule, toys, food etc.

Other Traits include....

- > Non-responsive to verbal cues
- > Non-existent or poor eye contact
- > Noticeably over or under active
- > Sensitivity to loud noises, clothing, lights, smells, textures
- > Lack of imaginative play
- > Frequent and/or excessive tantrums
- > Lack of empathy
- > Failure to develop peer relationships
- > Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects
- > Lack of spontaneous seeking to share interests or enjoyment with others.
- > The first signs of Autism usually appear before three years of age as developmental delays.

What to do when worried?

Act early. Intervention is key.

1. Make an appointment with an autism spectrum disorder professional

If you think your child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it's best to act quickly and make an appointment with a professional. For example, you could talk to your child and family health nurse, your general practitioner or a paediatrician.

If the professional doesn't have any concerns about your child, but you're still worried, feel free to seek a second opinion and ask for a referral for an 'assessment of need' via the HSE- the sooner you find out your child has ASD, the sooner you can help them.

2. Learn about autism spectrum disorder services

Right away, even while you wait for an appointment, it's good to start learning about autism spectrum disorder and the different services available. Talk to other parents of a child with ASD by joining forums or parent groups like Snowflakes, read up, start researching services in your area – there are lots of ways to begin.

Get an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis

Have your child assessed for autism spectrum disorder (and get an assessment report) as early as you can. A thorough assessment is important for an accurate diagnosis. It helps to think of assessment as a benchmark – you can use it to measure your child's progress later when your child starts using interventions.

For a thorough assessment and a specific ASD diagnosis, make an appointment with a professional trained in diagnosing ASD, like a psychiatrist, psychologist or paediatrician (get a referral from your child's nurse or GP).

Useful Websites

www.middletonautism.com/training/parents

www.asiam.ie

State supports

Please refer to the “Information Booklet for Parents of Children with Autism - Benefits, Allowances & Grants” specially prepared by Snowflakes Autism Support to guide you through the main entitlements and supports you may wish to apply for.





How to help

Snowflakes Autism Support has continued to grow over the last 7 years. Here are some of the ways you can help:

- > Become a Garda vetted volunteer for family events?
- > Become a volunteer at regularly run events like Brickx Club, Cinema Club etc?
- > Host a coffee morning or parental support evening in Holywell?
- > Can you or someone you know participate in events such as the mini marathon, a fun run or the Run a Muck obstacle course?
- > Spare an hour or two to help at our regular supermarket bag packing events?
- > Help with administration work that a charity of this size creates?
- > Fundraise for prizes for various raffles throughout the year?
- > Speak to your employer about volunteering opportunities or policies within your company?
- > Nominate Snowflakes Autism Support as a charity your company / employer could support.
- > Referring families to Snowflakes who have a child going through the diagnosis process.

We are also looking for enthusiastic people to join our Snowflakes committee. The committee is constantly in need of added support. There are all sorts of roles and expertise needed at varying levels within the charity.

If you would like to help in a big or small way, but would like guidance about what is involved please contact us at info@snowflakes.ie



Snowflakes Autism Support

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Charity Number: CHY20282

Registered in Ireland: No.9828733P

