

Toolkit for Your Sensory Specific Program



At Special Journey's, we believe each and every life holds infinite value.

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Introduction

Congratulations on making the decision to establish a program to serve families in the community with special needs members. As you probably already know, families with special needs members can be vulnerable and experience unique challenges and stresses. Your program can become a resource catalyst as much as a welcome respite for the community you serve.

The Special Journeys program at Trinity Church in Lakeville serves the special needs community through our Sensory Sunday School, Wednesday night Awana throughout the school year and our popular monthly Parents Night Out. We take in special needs kids twice a week and the first Friday night of each month so the rest of the family can gear down, take a deep breath, get some rest and rejuvenate themselves for their special journey. Our program serves all family members.

We operate on the principle that all lives hold infinite value and that each child can develop and grow in life in their own unique and amazing way. During our lesson times, we see our kids teaching others by participating in the lesson. We are proud to be stewards in this unique program as we see continuing growth in our kids both relationally as well as spiritually.

We are happy you have chosen to look at our model and get an idea of how we operate our Special Journeys program at Trinity Church. We look forward to partnering with you in the future as your program grows. As always, feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Special Journeys Team
Trinity Church, Lakeville, MN

Outline Your Plan

Define who you are:

“Our program serves families in our community who have friends and family members with disabilities. Our volunteers desire to work within the special needs community to both offer families a respite from their daily rigors and to help grow children in a safe and uplifting environment.”

Our program will be available to participants the following 2 nights per week:

- Sunday School Program – 10:00am Service
- Week Night Program – Tuesday Night Youth Group – 6:00PM – 8:00PM
- Establish a start date:
 - Example: “We will start our program on May the 4th, 2018”
- Service Population
 - Who are you going to serve?
 - “We serve friends and families with members who have a disability.”
 - Volunteer Limitations – are you willing and equipped to handle some disabilities/ all disabilities?
 - We do not have specific age requirements for the children we serve, but we prefer to have conversations with each family to determine if Special Journeys is the right fit for you.
- Brochure
 - Create a brochure so you can get the word out about your program.
 - Use images of your facilities to start with.
 - You will need permissions from families regarding using an image or likeness of their child.
- Website
- Social Media
 - Consider security when establishing a web presence
 - Facebook page?
 - Again, you will need permissions from the family in order to use images or likenesses of their children.

Timeline

Leadership Buy In

- Selling your plan to your leadership council.
 - [Display Area Special Needs Statistics or Resource Article]
 - Other Supporting Documentation
 - Testimonials from members of the faith community
- Informational meeting – Volunteers and Participants
- Introduction and invitation to participants – Message to congregation.
- Call for volunteers – Message to faith community.

Establish a kick off date

Operations begin, May the 4th.

Room Set-Up

- Sensory Overload
- Structure

Create a Brochure

- Advertising
- Sponsorship

Bulletin Message

- Canvass Area Neighborhoods with Brochure/Flier, Social Media, Schools.

Room/Facilities Set-Up

It is important to consider the range of sensory needs within the population you will serve. Light, sound, paint colors, participants and volunteers and more play a role in the experience you create for your population. Some people are hyper sensitive to bright lights, colors and loud noise. Other people are hypo sensitive, they seek more input and need a more stimulating environment.

Set-Up of Your Sensory Specific Respite Rooms

- Audio / visual set up
 - Consider having volume level controls in certain rooms
 - Sound dampening walls could be an option for you
- Lighting options.
 - Dimmers are helpful to have to meet the variety of sensory needs
- Security measures and features
- Be careful what you ask for and accept from your faith community
 - Sensory specific learning materials is a good line to use when defining needs
- Do's and Don'ts
 - Be flexible and willing to see each child for their unique gifts
 - Do be willing to accept as many participants as you can support
 - You may be asked to care for a child for whom you are not equipped to support. Offer to continue to work with the family for future accommodations.
 - Maintain at a minimum a 1:2 Ratio, volunteer / special needs kids, some kids will need 1:1.
 - Make sure you have the volunteer pool ready on day one.
 - Don't underestimate the power of slow growth for your program over time.
- Greeter
 - Secure Check-In Procedures.
 - Drop off and pick up, what does this look like?
 - Emphasize timeliness
 - Secure class rooms / doors / windows.
 - Some children have a lot of energy. Ensure your space is safe for them.
- Technology Set-Up
 - Projector
 - Videos
 - Sound / Lighting

Intake Procedures

Institute a process for new families considering your program.

- Interview
- Documentation – emphasis on the individual
- Evaluation / Acceptance or Alternate Plan

Initial Family Interview / Tour

It is important that families considering your program have a comfort level before they make a choice on a program that works for them. Remember the interview process works both ways, not every program is for every family. An initial tour should include the entire family if possible to come in and see the facilities during off hours. This will allow them to get a feel for your space, and, more importantly, give the individual in question a chance to get to know the room.

Documentation

- Application
- Set up of Participant Family File
- One Page Profile

Gather as much information about the child in question as possible. The more you know about them, the better you will be able to serve them.

- What does the person enjoy?
- What special or unique gifts do they have?
- What are their dislikes?
- What should we avoid while working with them?
- Are there any specific medical concerns?
- What is helpful for us to know about your child when we are working with them?
- How can we best support your child?
- Preventative Care
- Troubleshooting
- Is our program a good fit for your child and your family?

Acceptance or Alternate Plan

You may not be ready to accept some individuals and that's ok. But do consider an alternate plan for this type of situation. It may be that you have more volunteers scheduled in the future, or maybe you are awaiting the starting date for a specific person with appropriate experience to work most effectively with the person in question. In most cases, you will be equipped to take in any child.

Volunteers

Our volunteer pool is a unique mix of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. We have family members of special needs kids – both parents and siblings, Social Worker's, RN's, PT's, Special Needs Teachers, PCA's and others. We are very fortunate to have volunteers trained in a variety of healthcare and social services backgrounds. This unique group of volunteers enables us to not only offer a respite program for the family, but also learning opportunities for the kids.

We also try, when appropriate, to involve neuro-typical peers in the learning activities with the special needs kids. This can be beneficial in many ways for both the special needs kids, as well as the neuro-typical kids.

In order to ensure the highest level of safety, a screening process should be established for the volunteers. This should include reference and background checks. It is vitally important to maintain the trust and integrity of not only the volunteers, but the families and the people you serve as well.

- Encouraging volunteers to be part of your team.

Families of children with special needs are often isolated from their communities. This program is an opportunity to invite them in and not only participate in programming but also develop relationships within the faith community.

- Importance - At Special Journey's, we believe every life holds infinite value.
- Impact - Coming alongside a family to provide them caregiver relief while their loved one gets a chance to spend time with their peers in the community. This allows for upstream supports for the people we are serving.

Free CE's, ASD DHS Training: <https://autismcertificationcenter.org>

- Reaching Out to Your Faith Community.
 - Elder Board.
 - Ministry Leadership Team.
 - Alter Time.
 - Church Bulletin.
 - Ministry Newsletter.

Special Journeys Programming

Sunday School

Sunday mornings during our 10:45 AM service, we gather our Special Journeys kids for our sensory friendly Sunday School program. During this time, parents can be assured their kids are in a safe learning environment while they attend the service. The program includes play time in our sensory safe learning classrooms and a short Bible study followed by a hands-on activity and a light snack mindful of most dietary restrictions.

Awana Sensory Class

Trinity Church offers Awana almost every Wednesday during the school year. Kids learn about the Bible through songs, stories, pictures, puppet shows, games, and group sharing time in our sensory friendly classrooms.

Parents' Night Out

Parents need time to rest, rejuvenate, go on dates or run errands. On the first Friday night of each month, Trinity Church offers this opportunity to families with special needs kids (as well as all of their siblings). All who come enjoy play time with friends in our sensory friendly classrooms. Dietary specific snacks are provided, and a light dinner is sponsored by one of several area restaurants.

“Case Management”

Having documentation on file for each child you serve is important for many reasons. It can be a resource for parents to refer to when checking their child’s progress. It can be useful for guiding the individual you are serving. It should include any dietary questions and concerns. It can serve as a register for when behavioral supports are necessary. Attendance, images, activities and participation are also important to keep note of and track in a case file.

- Case Files for Each Child/Family

Maintain a file that includes initial interview as well as any notes. See sample introductory profile at the bottom of this document.

- Documentation

Application

- Learning Plan

Refer to the one page description provided by the family.
Allow for the parents to be an integral part of what you do. The parents will know best how to handle their child in any situation.

Policies

- Food
 - Allergies
 - Gluten Free
 - Snacks
 - Medications

- Behavioral Supports
 - Hitting
 - Throwing Objects
 - Swearing
 - Threats
 - Other

- Redirection
 - What does it look like?
 - When it is useful

- Emergency Use of Restraint Policy

Only under an emergency are you able to restrain a child. The child must be an immediate risk to self or others.

Sponsors

Sponsorship Cultivation

Make contacts in the community to come alongside you as you grow your program. Restaurants, entertainers, community centers, petting zoos, all can be useful to make your program valuable to the population you serve.

Contacts in the Congregation

A congregation is also a collection of employees, business leaders, social services and academic professionals, home maintenance contractors and many others who may be willing to lend a hand to the families within your service population.

Food Sponsors for Family Night Events

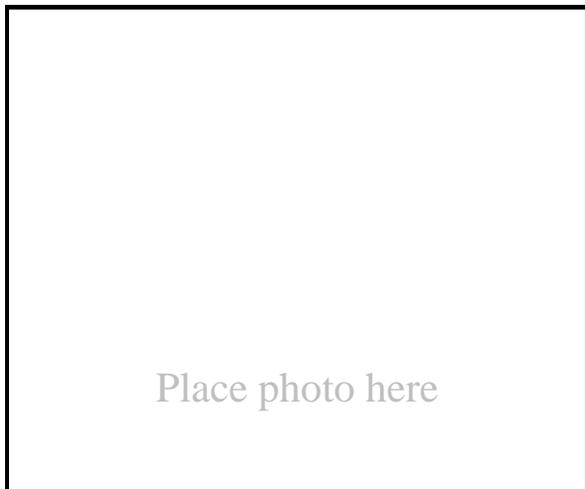
We partner with local restaurants to serve food on our Parents Night Out. Typically, we enjoy up to 25 participants and volunteers who, in turn, enjoy a free dinner of pizzas, chicken fingers, French fries, yogurt, and more all generously donated by the restaurant.

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Each year, we hold a volunteer appreciation dinner to get together as a larger group and celebrate the work we have done over the past year. This event is also sponsored by a local restaurant and is an opportunity to show the volunteers how much they mean to the program.

Holiday Party or Celebrations

Sponsorship will be a big component of your ministry. Sponsors can fund special events, supply food for respite times and purchase supplies necessary to keep your ministry moving forward. Local disability organizations, small groups, local restaurants are all possible sponsors. Consider a Christmas Party or an end of year party to celebrate the families and all of their children.



Name: _____
Age: _____
DOB: _____

Hello! Below are key highlights about my family and I:

I have a diagnosis of (optional): _____

My parent's/guardian's names:

Mom: _____ Cell Phone: _____
Dad: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Our Address: _____

My sibling's name/age:

My medication needs are:

RX: _____ Dose/Time _____
RX: _____ Dose/Time _____
RX: _____ Dose/Time _____

My bathroom needs are:

Some safety concerns you should know about me:

Some things that I am interested in and/or good at:

Some things that are challenging for me:

When I get stuck...here is how to help me:

Say:

Do:

Don't:

Notes:
