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**What is SibStrong?**

SibStrong is a new “by siblings, for siblings” organization seeking to connect and provide support and resources for siblings of people with disabilities and their families.

**SibStrong Elementary Program**

While SibStrong is working with siblings of all ages, one of the initial areas of focus is the support of elementary school-aged siblings. The in-school program aims to provide a regular time and space for siblings to get together with other brothers and sisters of people with disabilities. This can be created as either a during-the-day program or as an after-school enrichment opportunity.

In the pilot program, SibStrong gatherings have occurred every other week for 30-minute sessions. We have found this cadence of gathering to not be overwhelming for the students.

Sessions in the pilot program have been discussion-based featuring a new topic each week. Led by a school counselor and older sibling, we have found these discussions to have an extremely natural flow and feel. Beginning with an overview and opening anecdote or explanation, we encourage the children to share their related experiences. Benefits of the sessions include:

* Meeting other siblings of people with disabilities
* Developing a community of other children who share similar experiences to them
* A safe space for siblings to talk about their experiences—the good and the bad
* An opportunity to celebrate the unique role they play in the lives of their brothers and sisters
* Better understand disability and ways to talk about it to friends and peers
* Learn strategies for dealing with challenging situations
* Ask questions they may have about their role as the sibling of someone with a disability

As a next step in the elementary program, we are working to incorporate teenage siblings of people with disabilities into the elementary school sessions to serve as facilitators and role models for younger siblings.

**High-School Program**

Like all elements of the SibStrong, the primary goal of the high-school program is to bring siblings of people with disabilities together in one place to form community, share experiences and gain resources and information to empower them in their role as siblings.

The primary components of SibStrong High-School program will be:

* **Sibling Sessions:** Occurring bi-weekly (or at a cadence decided on by the school and students), these sessions would provide a venue for siblings to share experiences, access sibling-related resources, develop disability awareness initiatives as a group to further inclusion both at school and in their community, and with parental permission, have chances to speak with older sibling volunteers. This opportunity to interact with older siblings is a key element to SibStrong’s “Laddered Mentorship” approach, allowing siblings to provide perspective and guidance to younger siblings.
* **Mentoring:** As part of Laddered Mentorship, high school siblings will have the opportunity to give back to the sibling community as facilitators in elementary school SibStrong sessions. High-school siblings will assist elementary school counselors during SibStrong elementary school sessions. For students volunteering as facilitators, SibStrong will provide training and support for this role.
* **Social Activities:** Social activities for teens would involve monthly or bi-monthly gatherings. These will be held on-campus as after school activities or at off-site locations (e.g. trips to sporting events, community service projects, bowling outings, etc.) These gatherings will offer siblings additional opportunities to meet and socialize with other siblings. Social and weekend gatherings will also be used as an opportunity to engage the entire family.

**Program Information**

Please visit [SibStrong.org](https://djeholdingsdrive-my.sharepoint.com/personal/walter_suskind_edelman_com/Documents/Desktop/WKS/sibstrong.org) to learn more and sign-up to receive future updates. If you have any questions please reach out to Walter Suskind, the founder of SibStrong at [wksuskind@gmail.com](mailto:wksuskind@gmail.com).