



# A New Home for SIBSPlace



*an affiliate of Mount Sinai South Nassau*

## Abstract

SIBSPlace addresses the needs of children in our community with focus on protecting the most vulnerable, especially during times of crisis. Our program is a refuge for families coping with the life-changing experience of a sibling or parent's diagnosis of cancer or another traumatic illness. We provide essential support services to children as they try to understand the unimaginable losses due to the death of a loved one. We are forever grateful to our donors, because they enable us to offer and grow a free therapeutic support program that helps children learn skills to decrease anxiety and feelings of depression, while growing their imaginations and problem-solving skills, all fostering their resiliency. SIBS isn't just another after-school program; it provides essential, life-changing skill building for life-changing events.



**Our Mission** is as valued today as it was 20 years ago, as we continue to assist children who have brothers and sisters with cancer or another devastating medical illness. We have enhanced our mission and program to provide services to children who have a parent with a cancer diagnosis and bereaved families. We continue to recognize and meet the shifting needs of children as they adapt to the changes in their family system.





## A Personal Message From our Executive Director Joanna Formont, LMHC

SIBSPlace children know all too well that a devastating medical diagnosis can throw a family system completely

off-balance. If you walked into SIBSPlace on any given evening you would be surprised to hear how easily the SIBS Kids share stories with one another and gain relief from the support offered by empathetic peers. You might hear a six-year old talk about her eight-year-old sister who was diagnosed with leukemia and being totally unprepared for the separation from her sister due to a medical protocol that required a 30-day inpatient hospitalization. Her loneliness was all the more painful because her mother also stayed at the hospital. During group, she can express feelings of abandonment, fear and confusion. Using expressive arts materials, she creates a rollercoaster representing her sometimes out of control emotions. Another SIBS Kid shares his story about watching his father struggle with terminal cancer and his own overwhelming sadness and anxiety. He expresses relief as he journals his feelings with children “just like him.” After the death of his father, he was able to cope with his grief because he felt accepted and supported by his SIBSPlace peers. A SIBS Teen whose sister routinely is treated for a chronic medical illness at multiple hospitals in different states works alongside peers to create a volcano. This activity explores unpredictable medical disruptions that often lead to explosive jealous and frustrated feelings. SIBSPlace is a safe space for children living through similar crises and separations. Peers validate, normalize and understand the common impact of these traumatic experiences. Therapeutic work lead by mental health professionals, helps SIBS Kids give voice to their feelings and encourages the development and practice of coping skills. Creativity and empowerment are balanced with opportunities to explore, play and laugh, which help SIBSPlace participants demonstrate resilience. I am often amazed at the capacity children have to help one another heal. We invite you to be part of this healing process by helping us build a New Home for SIBSPlace where we can foster strength in children and families as they journey through this most vulnerable time in their lives.



## Project Overview

We are currently housed in the basement of a building owned by Mount Sinai South Nassau in Hewlett. Due to dynamic program expansion and increased participation, we have outgrown that space. SIBSPlace began in 2000, as a free program for children ages 5-17 living with a sibling with cancer or another devastating medical illness. But over the years, we have expanded to include children coping with a parent’s cancer diagnosis and then further expanded to offer bereavement services. Parent psychoeducation, support and groups are also provided. Our program has also evolved to include a free six-week summer camp, monthly peer empowerment activities and the celebration of holidays and milestones through family engagement events.

As a result, SIBSPlace is constructing our new home, a 5,100 square foot freestanding building in Rockville Centre, NY. The new building is tailored to specifically meet the needs of our expanding program. This new location will increase our visibility to the community and will provide easier and greater access to children from all over Long Island and the five Boroughs. Our new home will have:

- **Expressive Arts Activity Rooms, an Art Therapy Room and Game Room** that will be places for exploration of feelings, creativity and development of essential coping skills; additional rooms allow us to offer multiple groups simultaneously
- **Beautiful and spacious Kitchen and Dining areas** to foster empowerment and camaraderie through preparation and sharing of meals
- **Resource Library and Family Group Room** will provide space for family meetings and parent group
- **Conference and Training Room**, as a dedicated space where we will offer professional trainings to increase understanding of the impact of a traumatic illness or death on children and the family system
- **An Outdoor Patio** to offer opportunities to nurture and care for a garden with benches for small group conversations

## The Situation Today: Key Statistics About SIBSPlace

Over the last 20 years,

**43%** INCREASE IN  
UNIQUE CHILD  
PARTICIPANTS  
we have outgrown our space

During the last year,

**73%** INCREASE IN  
PARTICIPANT  
ENGAGEMENTS

**57%** INCREASE IN  
BEREAVEMENT  
SERVICES

In 2020, we served,

**92** UNIQUE CHILD  
PARTICIPANTS

with a total of 2,176 Participant Engagements

This increase in Participant Engagements and Bereavement Services highlights the community need for our preventive peer support program

SIBS Kids represent an at-risk population who during the pandemic were seeking social interactions to reduce sense of isolation and benefited from having a space to process their anxiety, frustration and sense of loss



Whether parents are caring for an ill child, spouse or themselves, they know that at SIBSPlace, their well child is given much needed attention that will help them heal and thrive. Participant feedback from our SIBS Family informs us that engaging in a dynamic expressive arts curriculum stimulates their interest in attending SIBSPlace with consistency. It is this commitment that encourages their emotional growth and is the foundation of our prevention-based program. SIBSPlace offers pro-active services to provide support before a family may seek clinical intervention to help their child adjust to the impact of a medical diagnosis or death. We provide a safe outlet to express feelings with peers and foster the development of coping skills. Treating the family as a nuclear unit, recognizing the need for support that each member deserves, ultimately leads to a healthier community environment.

During challenging times, it is essential for the SIBSPlace participants to develop a sense of empowerment and adaptive coping skills to not only benefit them now, but also strengthen their resolve throughout their lifetime.



FAMILIES TRAVEL TO OUR PROGRAM from across Long Island and the five Boroughs; our new Rockville Centre home increases our visibility, awareness of our program and allows for greater accessibility for our current families and future referrals who can benefit from our essential free services.



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### The Capital Campaign

SIBSPlace is conducting a major Capital Campaign to

provide the resources necessary to establish our new home. **The goal for this campaign is \$1.25 million dollars.** See our separate opportunities sheet for the range of opportunities available to begin making a difference in our SIBS Kids' lives right away.



# The Grateful Voices of our SIBS Family

## A family coping with a child's traumatic medical illness:

“SIBSPlace gave our daughter the individual attention that she desperately needed and began to show us how to best manage to do the same even with the “New Norm” that we all faced on a daily basis.”

## A bereaved parent of young children:

“When we started at SIBSPlace I wasn't expecting my wife to die. She was so happy and at peace to know that her children were at SIBSPlace. She wanted them to be in an environment where they can have their own space with friends that will understand their reality a little better than others. A place to have positive experiences during a tough stretch in their young lives.”

## A family coping with a parent's cancer diagnosis:

“SIBSPlace has provided us with a source of light in the darkest of times and made us smile when we didn't think we could. Going through a cancer diagnosis is scary, uncertain and over-whelming. To have a place where people not only listen to and comfort you but also understand what you are going through is priceless.”

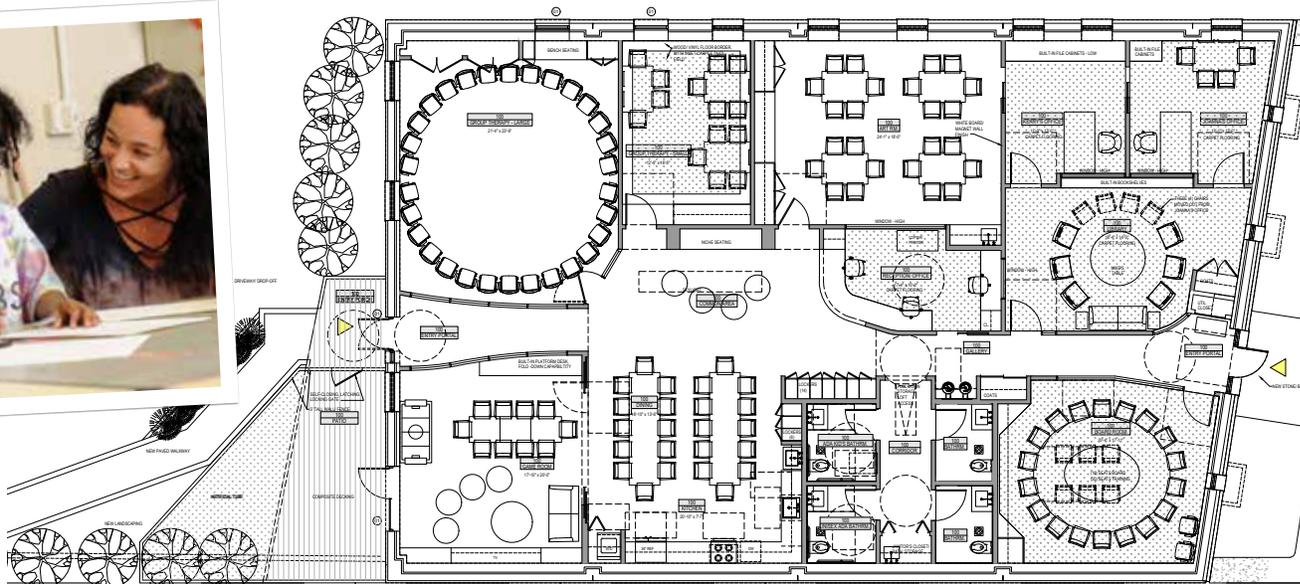
## A SIBS Kid coping with a sibling's cancer diagnosis

“My years as a SIBS Kid has been a lifelong journey that no words can really describe. I have some outstanding friendships that became a family community. The support that SIBS has given me has really helped me through some pretty tough times, my sister's cancer. SIBS will always be my home, my family.”

## A SIBSPlace teen coping with a parent's illness and death

“Not only did SIBSPlace help me cope with my mother's cancer and death, they completely changed my perspective on how I should live my life. I truly believe I wouldn't be the hopeful and intelligent girl I am today without the help of SIBS.”

## A New Home for SIBSPlace: Designed to Meets the Needs of our Expanding Program



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All photos were taken prior to the COVID pandemic. Our practitioners and patients are required to wear appropriate PPE at all times.