

Nursing and Allied Health Abstracts

Title: A UNIQUE OUTREACH EFFORT TO UNITE TEENS WITH SPINA BIFIDA, WHO ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY DISTANT FROM THE METRO AREA, WITH MENTORS WAS SUCCESSFUL AND CAN BE READILY APPLIED TO ALL STATES

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Background: Teens with spina bifida may not be able to participate in opportunities offered in metropolitan areas due to distance and transportation issues. Parents often asked Spina Bifida Association of Wisconsin's (SBAWI) staff if there was something that could be done to include their teens. An outreach effort was piloted with teen girls, with the intent of offering it to teen boys if the pilot was successful.

Method: Letters were sent to teen girls, inviting them to participate in a short weekend retreat with adult mentors at a motel that offered a pool, game room, and a meeting room. Retreat goals were: 1) Meet women with spina bifida who have successfully met the challenges of independence, employment and marriage; 2) Talk about things that bother you and learn about ways to overcome the difficulties from people who really do know and understand; 3) Get out of the house and have some fun.

Results: Three teens and four mentors attended the retreat, a number very conducive to meaningful small group discussions. All the mentors drove, two used wheelchair mobility. A Likert type scale with 20 items was constructed as the Teen Outreach Evaluation Tool. When the teens were asked to rate the items to the degree that the discussions were helpful, all items were rated as somewhat or very much (as opposed to not much or not at all).

Conclusion: Direct face to face interactions between a teen and mentor are often superior to other methods to help teens in the process of reaching their goals. Mini weekend retreats can be very helpful in this process.