

Just as the sibling role changes over the lifespan, one's relationship with WisconSibs changes too. Some get involved as children, others not until they are adults. Still, others come and go as they seek information, peer support from other siblings, or become leaders.

along our journey



Amanda with fellow WisconSib Alaina

I attended the very first Fox Valley Sibling Support Network (FVSSN) Sibshop held in 1997 when I was 6 years old. FVSSN and WisconSibs have played a major role in how I approach being a sibling and how I choose to react to various events in my life.

Without WisconSibs, I would have probably never gone outside my comfort zone and gotten everything out of being a sib that I have. I love that we all support one another and that we have this unspoken bond and that no matter where you are, your WisconSibs family is with you.

Ben with sister Amanda

I started with WisconSibs (FVSSN at the time) when I was around 12 or 13. I really enjoyed Sibshops. In high school, I realized that I could be helpful and WisconSibs was a great opportunity. I wanted to help other sibs have the same experiences. I began volunteering as a Sibshop facilitator.

I'm 32 now and continue as a board member because I find a great deal of value in this organization. I'm very proud of it. Being a part of WisconSibs has shown me that I can help people deal with the things going on in their lives, by listening and being part of the group.



Barbara & Jane with sister Marybeth

Growing up, Jane and I learned to internalize our feelings. We didn't want to be an extra burden on our parents. I definitely could have benefitted from WisconSibs as a kid. When I attended my first Adult Sibling Conference, it was eye-opening. To have something for siblings was like a miracle.

WisconSibs has made me feel a sense of empowerment.



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CONNECT WITH US:



WisconSibs (wis-kahn'-sibs)
n. pl. sisters and brothers of people with disabilities

WisconSibs, Inc. is proud to serve WisconSibs as the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sibling Leadership Network. For more information, visit siblingleadership.org



why WisconSibs matter



Most have at least one sibling who will be in their life longer than any other person.



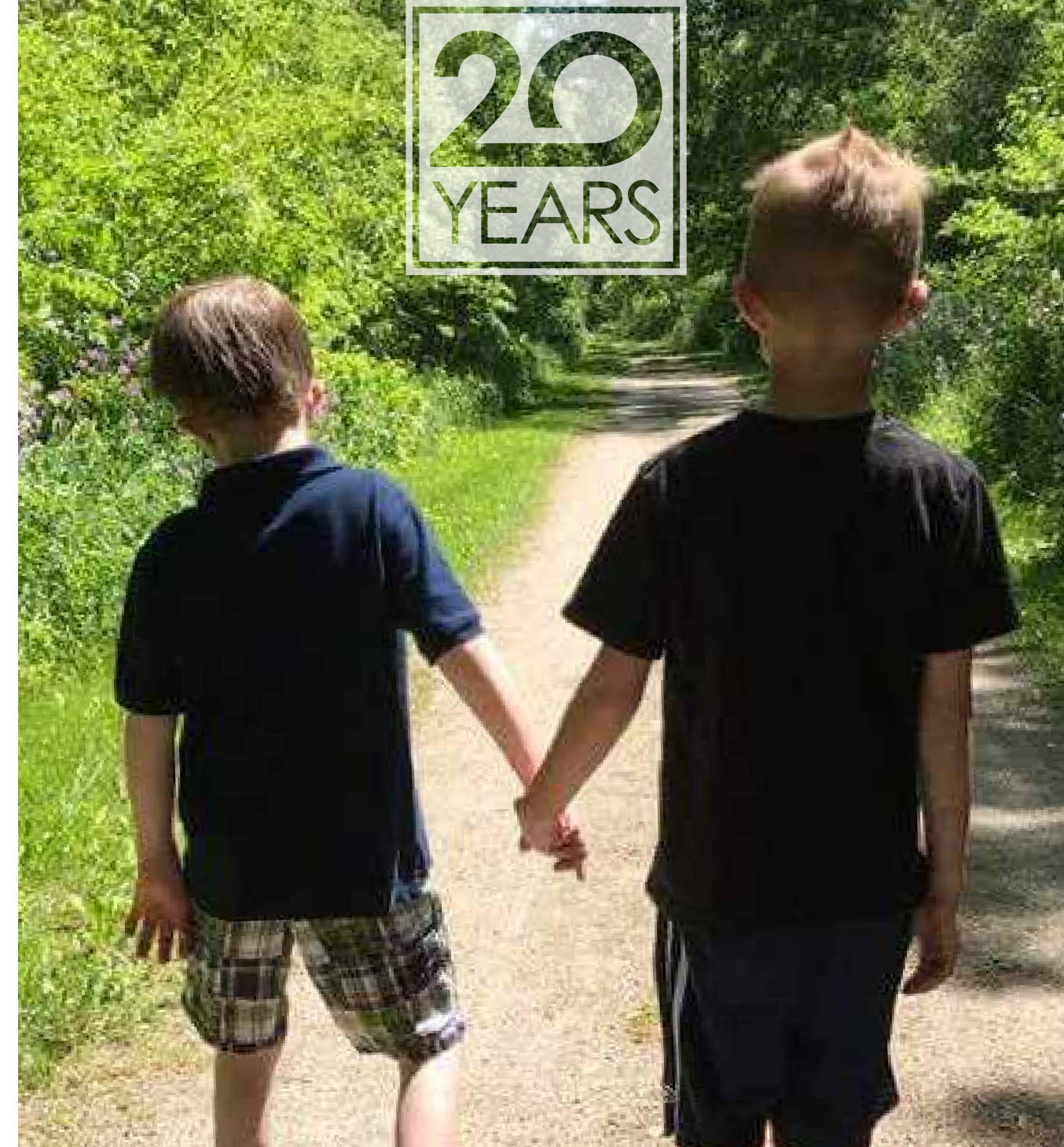
Siblings of children with disabilities are **3 times**** more likely to:

- Feel sad, nervous or afraid
- Have difficulties in school
- Have relationship problems

*Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2018
**Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, Vol. 132, No. 2., 8/2013
***Source: Heller et al, 2008

"Along this 20-year journey, WisconSibs, Inc. has been blessed by individuals, families, businesses and foundations who have invested in this important work. We thank you for that and offer this progress report as evidence that your investment in our work has been, and will continue to be, an investment in the future!"

— Ed Ruffolo, Miron Construction Co., Inc., WisconSibs, Inc. Board Chair



wisconsibs
Sisters & Brothers of People with Disabilities

joy in the journey

joy in the journey

Some of you may already know the story. When our six-month-old son was diagnosed with significant disabilities in 1993, I was concerned about how this would affect his three-year-old sister. So, I began to look for information about the impact of disability on siblings.

My research eventually led to the work of Don Meyer, creator of a model called Sibshops — lively workshops designed for kids who had siblings with special needs — who was training people across the country to organize and lead them. A few local school psychologists had become trained Sibshop leaders, and experimented with an occasional Sibshop.

When our daughter at age seven looked me in the eye and asked, "When you and Daddy die, will I be taking care of Phillip?"; I knew the time had come to get serious about helping sisters and brothers of people with disabilities proactively deal with the challenges and the joys in their life's journey.

So, a group of us formed a one-of-a-kind nonprofit — the Fox Valley Sibling Support Network — which was granted 501(c)(3) status on July 28, 1998.

During these first twenty years, our organization, now known as WisconSibs, Inc., has pioneered innovative programs across the lifespan. And, through collaboration with dozens of agencies, foundations and businesses, we've helped thousands of families and siblings be better prepared for their lifelong journey.

For me, there is no greater joy than watching siblings grow up, prepared to take their journey forward. I'm filled with hope as I watch them lead the next generation of WisconSibs.

Harriet M. Redman

Harriet Redman, Executive Director
Fox Valley Sibling Support Network/WisconSibs, Inc.



During these first twenty years, we've pioneered innovative programs that help siblings be better prepared for their lifelong journey.



CELEBRATING THE FIRST 20 YEARS

more stories at

Sibshops

Since our first Sibshop in October 1997, we've hosted more than 170 of these workshops for young WisconSibs. Each combines fun with information and discussion. Guided by trained facilitators, all give young WisconSibs a chance to connect with others who know the joys and challenges of having a sib with a disability, mental health concern, or long-term illness.

"I never spoke up much in Sibshops when I was younger. I had fun. After a while, I realized I absorbed a lot and it was making an impact on how I was hanging with my brother, and things like how to bring it up with friends..."
— Anna, 20-something sib



"That is her favorite week all summer – she lives for it, she keeps a countdown on her phone."
— Leah, parent of SibDays participant who is now a Teen Sib Leader

SibDays of Summer

Our Appleton-based camp launched in 2003 with 12 young siblings and has grown to 72 in the past few years. It welcomes WisconSibs ages 6-12 for a week of themed adventures and making friends. WisconSibs ages 14 and older develop their leadership skills by serving as group leaders. Sharing a carnival with Camp Hope, a YMCA camp for kids with disabilities taking place at the same park, is always a highlight of the week.



Sib Camp

Now in its 14th year, Sib Camp is a 4-day, 3-night camp that brings siblings ages 9-16 to the Team Leadership Center in Door County for lots of outdoor activities – biking, paddling, hiking, zip-lining, and campfires. It provides respite for WisconSibs and the opportunity to experience the freedom and thrill of adventure with peers who truly understand the ups and downs of life with siblings who have special needs.



"We're so grateful that we got our boys into your programs when we moved here. That, plus maturity, has made a real impact on their relationships with their sister and others with disabilities. Thank you!"
— Kate, mother of teen boys who have a sister with disabilities

Teen Sib Leadership

Teen Sib Leadership Day first took place in 2011. Each year since, teen WisconSibs who are eager for a challenge and demonstrate a heart for serving others apply for a Teen Sib Leadership Award. Award recipients are invited to Leadership Day to focus on team building and developing their leadership skills that prepare them for their unique roles as advocates and strong leaders in their families and communities.

CONNECTING ADULT SIBLINGS

20-somethings and beyond

As they get older, brothers and sisters of siblings with disabilities often take on even more responsibility for the well-being of their sibling – especially as their parents get to the point where they can no longer provide the care they have in the past. Our organization plays an important role in connecting adult WisconSibs with each other, and with resources they need.

Sometimes, that's a call to the office that results in being pointed to a helpful book, a website, a local agency or professional, or an upcoming WisconSibs program or conference.

But being a sibling isn't just about being informed. Adult WisconSibs like to have fun at WisconSibs social events with their siblings. They have had so much success with one of their favorites, a casino games night called Vegas Madness, that it has become an important fundraiser to support Sib Camp for younger WisconSibs.



"Journey Forward gave me peace of mind and my sister a new life."

— Linda, adult WisconSib

journeyforward

Our flagship program for adults is Journey Forward, a two-session future-planning workshop uniquely designed to help create a written action plan that offers peace of mind for the whole family. Originally launched in 2007 as Future is Now!, it helps adult WisconSibs prepare for the future around financial, legal, government benefits, family support, and other issues.

Serving Parents

of young children and adult siblings

Part of our mission from the very beginning has been to serve as a resource to parents of children with disabilities. Sometimes that simply means providing a listening ear as they wonder how to address the needs of siblings, pointing them to a book in the SibSpot Resource Library, an online resource, or another parent who has experienced WisconSibs programs or presentations.

"I am so grateful for these programs where I learn so much. It has a tremendous ripple effect in my life and our family's life."
— Breda, parent

"The summer camps and Sibshops have really helped with self-esteem and he has really strongly attached to this group! It's so nice to see."
— Jenni, mother of a boy who attended Sibshops and is now a Teen Sib Leader



Working with Professionals

WisconSibs' work with professionals has always been a two-way relationship. We regularly collaborate with their organizations or schools to connect siblings to a variety of presentations, seminars, panel discussions, and other events that support siblings and people with disabilities. Likewise, these professionals help inform families they serve of the programs and services of WisconSibs, and how to access them.

"I was so impressed with your mission and your organization, and I can see it being a great help to our clients. I would love to share WisconSibs' information with families when the issue of incorporating a sibling as a successor fiduciary is discussed."
— Meghan, attorney-at-law



CONNECTING YOUNG SIBLINGS ages 6 - teen

1996-97

The Arc of Outagamie County organizes a Sibshop, sparking a small group of parents and professionals to offer a series of Sibshops in the Fox Valley.

1998

The Fox Valley Sibling Support Network (FVSSN) is granted 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Founder: Harriet Redman. Founding Board of Directors – Barb Arndt, Amy and Craig Jordan, and Jim Johnson. 18 siblings attend a Sibshop at the Appleton YMCA, create a time capsule, and discuss their future dreams for their siblings.

1999

First issue of SibNews newsletter. Organization continues with all-volunteer leadership.

2003

To launch program expansion, Harriet Redman is hired as part-time Executive Director. The first SibDays of Summer camp, innovative S.P.A., and H.U.L.K. Sibshops added.

2005

First overnight Sib Camp. First fundraiser to support programs for young siblings; the "Big Fling" disc golf competition. Later that year, focus group research uncovers needs of adult siblings. First Adult Sibling Coordinator is hired.

2006

First Wisconsin Adult Sibling Conference includes psychiatrist Dr. Darold Treffert and Don Meyer, director of the Sibling Support Project. FVSSN Sibshop featured on ABC World News and ABC Nightline.

2007

Begins offering Future is Now! (now called Journey Forward), a program to help adult siblings with future planning. First casino night is held in response to adult siblings' interest in social activities with their siblings with disabilities.

11 • 2007

The Fox Valley Sibling Support Network helps found the national Sibling Leadership Network and becomes the Wisconsin chapter.

2009

Introduces "Siblings Choice Award," a program providing siblings the opportunity to acknowledge and honor caregivers or individuals who do an outstanding job of promoting the independence and quality of life of a person with a disability.

2011

First Teen Sib Leadership Day is held. Fox Valley adult siblings meet with Illinois siblings for Disability Pride Parade in Chicago.

2014

Fox Valley Sibling Support Network is officially renamed WisconSibs, Inc. to reflect statewide outreach and its role as the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sibling Leadership Network.

2016-17

10th anniversary of the "Celebrate Sisterhood" fundraiser and the "Show Off Your Purple-onality" auction. Celebrates National Siblings Day at first Fox Cities Kidz Expo.