

A Difficult Advertising: A Preventive Intervention for Siblings of Children with down Syndrome

Authors : Valentina Manna, Oscar Pisanti

Abstract : The term sibling has been adopted by Italian brothers and sisters of people with disabilities, to define themselves as a group with shared features. This choice is due to the importance of underlying the centrality of what being a brother/sister means to these people because of and beyond the disability. Being a sibling offers great opportunities to develop empathy and relational skills but it may also amplify the typical dynamics of fraternal relationships dealing with envy, rivalry and concern. This outlines a condition of potential developmental risk for the non-disabled sibling, being at the same time a great resource for the child with special needs, as actor of an intimate relationship usually lasting after that one with parents. However, young siblings are often unheeded in their needs for comprehension of disability and not considered as persons requiring attention themselves. Moreover, scholars have scarcely undertaken an exploration of siblings' perspective as competent contributors for producing knowledge useful to the benefit of families with special needs children. This contribution describes a preventive intervention for young siblings (6 - 16 years) of children with Down syndrome, by means of a psychodynamic-oriented group where participants could communicate, explore and share their emotional experiences as siblings. Based on a participatory approach, the program represents an action-research project, involving siblings as key experts for our understanding of siblings' lives. The initiative used social media and video technologies to rise children's voice: as a final product, participants were involved in the realization of a video campaign -which they defined 'a difficult advertising'- built on the insights generated by the program and addressed to other siblings to help them facing and recognizing resources and difficulties related to their status. The final video campaign realized by the participants summarizes the main themes emerged during the intervention; as revealed by a thematic analysis, they are related to the difficulty in feeling to have a personal identity, to face disability as a form of 'untought known' and to integrate ambivalent emotions. In conclusion, the group device revealed its efficacy as a preventive tool: it allowed participants to deeply reflect on their own experiences and to communicate them for the first time in a verbal and mentalized form.

Keywords : down syndrome, group, siblings, prevention

Conference Title : ICDD 2017 : International Conference on Disability and Diversity

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : May 04-05, 2017