

Foróige fun at White Strand

White Strand Foróige Youth Club for Children with High Functioning Autism has marked one year in existence with a special birthday party (header across top of right page)

WHITE Strand Foróige Youth Club for Children with High Functioning Autism recently celebrated one year in existence.



Pictured with the new banner designed for the White Strand Foróige Youth Club for Children with High Functioning Autism are club volunteers along with Cllr Damien Geoghegan and Clothilde Mignot, Designer. Photos: Dan McGrath.

This progressive and innovative club, which is based at White Strand, Abbeyside, is providing a valuable service to local children and their families. In recognition of the fact that young people with autism spectrum conditions can often face difficulties in socialising and maintaining friendships, the motivation behind the creation of the club was to establish a fun, social outlet tailored to the needs of such individuals.

The special first birthday party, held at the club's White Strand base on Friday March 22nd, was a celebration of how being 'different' can be actually be a good thing.

Group Leader Kara Baumann, who co-founded the club along with Ita Whelan, outlined the development of the club. Around two years ago, Kara received a letter from the HSE asking if anyone would be interested in setting up a youth club for children with high functioning autism in conjunction with Foróige.

"I remember that day clearly," she said. "My daughter Ariel was just 10 and I thought about her having somewhere to go; somewhere she might fit in and not be the square peg in the round hole; somewhere she might make a friend and learn how to become a friend; somewhere she might meet children who would come to her birthday party and invite her back." She continued: "At the time I had a daughter who had no friends, no playdates and no sleepovers. What I did have was a darling, beautiful, kind girl who watched too much TV and lived in the clouds as it was a nicer place to be."

Kara said she didn't "set out" to become a Group Leader of the club. "It would seem that the club chose me," she said. "From the moment we started to look into venues and the logistics of running the club, everything just fell into place." Kara outlined her belief in the mantra 'ask for it to happen, believe that it will happen, wait for it to happen and say thank you when it

happens'. "It would seem that this is the way the club came into being," she said, paying tribute to the past and current leaders involved with the club.

"Looking back, I didn't set out to be a leader. I set out to make a difference. For me it is never about the role but always about the goal. Apart from having my children Axel and Ariel, I think this is one of the few things I will always think of that I was involved in that has really counted for something." Disability Officer with the HSE Katherine Twomey was in attendance and also spoke about the formation and development of the club. "Many families had raised concerns about the limited socialising opportunities for their children in the local community," she said. "For many of these families their children were experiencing difficulties forming friendships and finding a place where their child was allowed to be themselves without fear of being seen as different."