

RTÉ's Miriam O'Callaghan Officially Opens The Meadows

"A home away from home," is how RTÉ's Miriam O'Callaghan described The Meadows as she officially opened RehabCare's new Children's Respite Service in Navan, Co. Meath in early October. The well-known TV presenter arrived to rapturous applause from the children who use the service, their families, staff and friends, who didn't let the wet and windy weather dampen their spirits on their special day!

A **SPECIAL EFFORT** of cleaning, painting, polishing and gardening meant that The Meadows was looking even more fantastic than usual as Miriam and other guests took a tour of the service. Everyone was very impressed with the facilities and a few requests from adults to book in for a night were heard! But The Meadows is all about the children who use the service and they were keen to show off what makes this house so special, from the murals on the walls and the Snoozelen Room to the trampoline and the "cool" adjustable beds.

In partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE), The Meadows provides a residential and day respite service for children with intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities as well as those on the Autistic Spectrum, between the ages of six and 18 years. The service was initially opened in 2007 at a temporary location and in 2010 moved to its new purpose-built premises.

Many of the children who use the service attended the official opening of what they regard as their "sleepover" club. Darragh Hastings stole the show along with Molly Hessmann (pictured above) when they helped Miriam O'Callaghan to cut the ribbon



The ribbon is officially cut by Darragh Hastings, Miriam O'Callaghan and Molly Hessmann.

while Christa Phillips-Brown and Liam Hargadon presented Miriam with flowers and a memento of her visit.

Miriam took time to meet all the children and their families and posed for lots of photos, despite the raindrops! She described her pleasure at attending, saying, "The Meadows is a unique place and it is my honour and privilege to be here today to officially open this beautiful house. This is a home away from home for children with disabilities who deserve it more than anything. The Meadows is the type of place that

defines us as a society. It's what we want Ireland to reflect."

The Meadows also provides a much-needed break for parents, allowing them to pursue other activities, spend time with family members or, in many cases, simply get a full night's sleep. Many of them attended the official opening, including Gillian Phillips-Brown, whose daughter uses the service. She said, "When my daughter comes here to The Meadows, she's not going to 'Respite', she's going for a sleepover with her pals. For parents of a special child, this is the

stuff of dreams and wishes. For your child to participate in this rite of passage, that all other children take for granted, is simply magical. A home away from home – what more could I wish for.”

The new facility, which is all on one level, has five bedrooms, a TV room, a playroom and a specially-designed Snoozelen Room, which provides sensory intervention therapy using colour, light and sound. A sensory garden for the children is also being developed in consultation with the HSE’s Occupational Therapy department.

Margaret Gillard, Director of RehabCare, attended the official opening and was delighted to meet so many of the children who use the service. She said, “The children get to make some wonderful friends here, try out some new activities and have a mini-holiday. The smiles on their faces tell it all.”

The staff at The Meadows work very closely with the HSE’s Disability Services Team for six to 18-year-olds, through which all referrals are channelled. Consistency of care across the board is a key element of each child’s development. Monthly meetings are held with the HSE to review referrals



The unveiling of the plaque by Miriam O’Callaghan, Liam Hargadon and Darragh Hastings.

and to highlight supports that families or the service may need to cater for an individual child’s needs. Staff also work closely with the schools attended by the children, to ensure follow-up on programmes being implemented in the service.

Louise Tinne, Residential Services Manager, explains how the service works. “We currently have 72 children accessing the service on a monthly basis, each child receiving two nights per month. The service is made as flexible as possible to allow families to utilise their nights when it suits them best. We are

fundraising at the moment for a sensory garden, which will really enhance the service as it will create a space that will encourage the children to explore and play independently. And what is a home without great neighbours who can be called upon to grit and clear driveways, as happened here last year!”

Louise was delighted to show everyone the fantastic facilities as they enjoyed food and musical entertainment and she thanked everyone who had made it possible, from the HSE and the builders to Rehab staff and fundraisers. ■

WHO TO CONTACT



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Miriam O’Callaghan (back row, centre) with the children who use the Children’s Respite Service and staff at the official opening of The Meadows.