

THE ANNUAL CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY

One of the Society's projects which is most valued by families and children is the annual children's holiday. The holiday brings together families who are facing the same challenges in life and children who have a common medical background. The families and children are able to create mutually supportive networks so reducing their social isolation, reducing fear and anxieties.

The holiday takes place for one week each year in August. Children are eligible for inclusion on the holiday if they are aged between 7 and 17 years and are nominated by their local support group, sickle cell centre, doctor, social worker, pastor or other family members or friends.

The week is divided into arts and crafts activities, music, sports and excursions as well as informal sessions in which the children can learn more about their condition and explore their feelings and thoughts about their future.

A combination of specialist staff, trained and police checked volunteers create an environment where the children can feel accepted and valued. The children are kept motivated and expectations of behaviour are high. Some of the volunteers who work on the project are selected because they themselves are living with a sickle cell disorder and can provide good and positive role models for the children.

The holiday has been an annual event for the last 16 years. Places are limited to 25 children for whom there will be 14 carers and one full time nurse. The holiday is provided free of charge to all children and the cost of travel to and from the pick up point is subsidised whenever possible for the lowest income families.

Children who have enjoyed a Sickle Cell Society annual holiday return with more confidence, more independence and with a network of friends who know and understand the difficulties they are facing. Children are encouraged to keep in touch after the holiday. Parents whose children have benefited from the holiday are able to enjoy valuable respite time from their caring responsibilities, leaving them free to concentrate on their other healthy children or simply to take some time for themselves.