

Appeal for families to open homes to special guests

Alan O'Keeffe

GILLIAN Barron looks forward to a special weekend once a month when 11-year-old Adam comes to visit.

Gillian describes Adam, who has Down syndrome, as "a lovely character" who brings "a lot of fun and joy" when he stays with her and her husband Kevin and their three daughters Leah (14), Hannah (8) and Emily (4).

Adam's trips from his home in Sandyford, Dublin, to the Barron family in Ballon, Co Carlow, give his mother Susan a chance to have a break from her parenting and caring duties. "It's great having Adam to stay with us. Everyone benefits," said Gillian (36).

An appeal has been launched for more families who are willing to consider taking a child or adult with an intellectual disability into their homes for short breaks.

As part of the HSE National Service Plan in 2016, the HSE

made a commitment to further develop 'Home Sharing' as an added alternative to respite care for carer families.

'Home Sharing' short breaks are organised in the different regions across Ireland.

Saint Michael's House is a service that offers care for people with intellectual disabilities and their families in the greater Dublin area.

It begins a new drive this week to find more 'short break' home-sharing families.

Fidelma Kelly, who manages the home sharing service for Saint Michael's House, said it has the help of 50 families who offer short breaks for 31 children and 26 adults.

But there are more than 100 other children and adults in the region on a waiting list for other families to come forward to offer them breaks in their homes in return for an allowance, she said.

All families who offer to help are assessed and vetted.

Those accepted receive mandatory training which gives them the skills to be competent short-term hosts.

Ms Kelly said: "Home sharing families build deep and meaningful relationships that go beyond the call of duty. It's a privilege to work with them."

She welcomes inquiries from families. They can make contact at smh.ie or email homeshaaring@smh.ie

Gillian Barron believes her daughters benefit greatly from having Adam in their lives.

Nationally, more than 800 individuals avail of home sharing supports. The National Homesharing and Short Breaks Network website is nhsn.ie.

Adam's mother, Susan Murphy, said: "Since Adam starting visiting Gillian and Kevin's home 18 months ago, it has been wonderful. He never had playdates or sleepovers in the past. He gets excited about going and he is full of chat when he comes back."



FAMILY LIFE: Adam and Susan Murphy at home in Dublin