

# What The Butterfly Club means to The Harnett Family

In September 2012 our journey with The Butterfly Club began.

Erin, is our only child & in 2011 (age 4) she was diagnosed with Autism & Sensory Processing Disorder. Autism is a condition that can affect the way a person thinks, communicates, interacts, and experiences the world around them. Autism is referred to as a spectrum, and it affects different people in different ways.

Sensory processing disorder (SPD) is the inability to use information received through the senses in order to function smoothly in daily life. Sensory overload is very common for Erin as she is unable to filter out information hitting her senses.

We were delighted that Erin was given a place with The Butterfly Club as we had no respite. We were nervous because Erin at the time had no speech & was reliant on communication through pictures, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).

September 2012 my social media entry: *"Don't know what to do with myself.....Erin's first time at the Butterfly Club this afternoon. It's a club for special needs children & was set up to give parents respite once a month on a Saturday afternoon. I do miss her though & looking forward to collecting her at 5pm"*

November 2012 my social media entry: *"Big adventure for Erin...first outing with the Butterfly club this afternoon She'll be going on the mini bus to swimming & then after to Supermac's for chips. I feel very nervous but I know she'll be fine."*

I really had no reason to worry as the last 12 years have been incredible & we have developed a wonderful friendship with the amazing volunteers who have been a constant in our life.

Erin is so happy each month to see the picture of The Butterfly Club on her monthly Calendar.

This wonderful group have worked wonders with Erin & introduced her to such a variety of activities & people.

The club is run by volunteers who have no idea of the joy that they bring to families & individuals who attend the monthly club.

As parents, to see your child being part of a social group, interacting with others of all abilities & experiencing the outside world is amazing.

Then add into the mix 5 hours of respite monthly on a Saturday afternoon for parents/families, it is priceless. Myself & Michael have been able to go to the movies, eat out & have some time just for the 2 of us because of these amazing people.

The Butterfly Club also run a summer camp in July, daily from 10am to 2pm. Again, this gave valuable respite to us, enabling us to do things at home whilst Erin enjoyed being at camp.

We were so impressed during Covid with how The Butterfly Club looked at ways to still help families. They offered the clubhouse to families to use, adhering to the Covid guidelines.

Christmas 2020 was the first time the Club was not able to hold it's annual Christmas party. Again, The Butterfly Club put the members & their families first. They came up with the idea of a Santa run. Visiting their Club members at home to deliver a Christmas gift.

Families were blown away by this amazing act of altruism. Neighbours also came out to witness the wonderful event. It was the talk of the community for months after & gave everyone a huge lift in those unprecedented times. They continued bringing joy to families at Easter time too, the Easter bunny was very busy delivering eggs to Club members.

During the 12 years that Erin has been a Club member she has been introduced to:

- ♥ Being a member of an inclusive club
- ♥ Travelling on a mini bus
- ♥ Swimming
- ♥ Eating out
- ♥ Music therapy
- ♥ Bowling
- ♥ Visits to Bunratty folk park
- ♥ Baking
- ♥ Drumming workshop
- ♥ Trying new foods
- ♥ Pottery

In 2018 The Butterfly Club moved to it's "Forever Home" which is absolutely perfect for the users. It was purpose built to take into account the varied abilities across the members who attend.

This has been such an advantage for The Club & it really is a home from home for everyone.

All of this wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for the amazing volunteers who look after our children like they are their own.

We trust them with our most valued possession, knowing that they only want the best for them like we do as parents.

The founding members had a vision in 2004 to create a club for local children. I'm sure they had no idea then, what it would mean for so many families who have & will pass through the doors of The Butterfly club.

To summarise, "What The Butterfly Club means to The Harnett family" ~ We have become a better family for having them in our lives. They have given us confidence to take Erin out into the community. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

## Photos that say it all 2014 ~ 2024



Erin has enjoyed so many activities over her 12 years with The Butterfly Club.

This means the world to us.





In July 2023 we went out for dinner as a family for the first time.

Our usual outing would be the drive through at McDonalds & eating in the car.

The Butterfly Club had previously taken Erin to Off the Bone restaurant & she did great.

That gave us the idea to try it for our 27<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary.

It was a huge success & the start of eating out as a family. This happened because of The Butterfly Club!