Importance of Barretstown Serious Fun Concept from a Scientific Point of View

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Abstract

When a child has a serious medical problem, it’s stressful for everyone in the family. This child needs extra support to manage the distress that comes with being sick. This support is not limited only to the medical team accompanying or responsible for the treatment process; it also extends to include many stakeholders and individuals who may be able to provide significant assistance and support in various aspects and related fields. Here, comes Barretstown, as one of the most important organisations which standing beside sick children and their families. Barretstown offering a unique, serious, fun, therapeutic recreation-based program that seeks to provide a positive lifelong experience for children with life-threatening illnesses, and their families. Each program and activity at Barretstown is specially designed to help each child cope and recover from the devastating effects of a serious illness. In this short article, I want to enlighten readers on the importance of the Barretstown therapeutic concept from a scientific point of view by reviewing the available evidence related to that topic.

Introduction

Children are the bright future of life, and taking care of them is considered one of the most challenging processes at the present time. However, there is another challenge that is more difficult. This challenge is taking care of children and young people who suffer from serious illnesses. There are many recent reports and studies that indicate a continuing rise in the number of children experiencing serious illness that usually leads to a massive limitation on their life and threaten their childhood. These children face a multitude of restrictions through fatigue and social isolation. In addition to the stress, confusion and fear that dominate these children and their families. And as we all know, a serious illness can make children feel different and lonely. They may miss school, activities or time with family and friends. And if a child is diagnosed young and stays sick into their teens, it can disrupt normal growth. Therefore, the best thing to do is to make their life as normal as we can. To give these children their childhood back, and this is exactly what they need. But is that possible? Can children who suffer from serious illnesses have their childhood and normal life back, even during treatment phase? The answer is: Yes, and where? The answer is: Barretstown.

Barretstown Children’s Charity

Barretstown is a not-profit organisation that provides a therapeutic camp for children with cancer and other serious illnesses. The camp located at Barretstown Castle, Ballymore Eustace, County Kildare, Ireland. It was founded by Hollywood actor Paul Newman in 1994. Barretstown is a member of the SeriousFun Children’s Network around the world. Barretstown offers free, specially designed camps and programmers for children and their families living with a serious illness. Children attending, come from different countries around the world to take part in several therapeutic activities at the camp such as climbing, low ropes, cooking, film making, scrapbooking, fishing, canoeing, dancing, arts and crafts, mini golf, archery, horse riding, and adventure. All the children and families come to Barretstown free of charge. Everything, including accommodation, transportation, meals, and medical care are provided at no cost to the family.
Barretstown has its own unique mission, which focuses on rebuilding the lives of children affected by serious illness, and their families, through a life changing Therapeutic Recreation programme in a safe, fun, and supportive environment.

**Impact of Barretstown therapeutic concept**

Barretstown helps children and their families deal with the emotional, social, and physiological scares often left after months and years of treatment. After attending the camp and participating in its activities, children go home with increased confidence, self-esteem, and the skills they need to face the rest of their journey to recovery. They discover their own strength, gain new skills, and make friends for life.

### Scientific evidence

Barretstown unique therapeutic programme is widely endorsed by many leading medical and scientific professionals around the world as having invaluable benefits to a child’s confidence and self-esteem and is recognized as being a vital part in their recovery from a wide range of serious illnesses.

Study in (2002) has shown a positive experience of Barretstown therapeutic camp emphasized themes pertaining to fun, therapeutic activities, scenic surroundings, staff, and multiculturalism.[2]

A (2004) study investigated the symptom and psychosocial outcomes of Barretstown Camp therapeutic recreation programme on children attended the camp. Barretstown camp benefits were noted in children’s experience of physical symptoms, affect pertaining to physiological hyperarousal and quality of life in the short and longer term. Positive changes were also noted in relation to self-esteem as it pertains to global self-worth and physical attractiveness though these were, for the most part, in the longer term only and were preceded by adverse effects in the short term.[3]

A (2005) Qualitative study on children aged 7–16 years affected by life-threatening illness, who attended Barretstown Camp found that most children noted an improvement in their social skills after attending the Barretstown therapeutic camp such as teamwork, cooperation, and friendship making. The children also reported acquiring personal and social functioning skills through their success in the challenges. They also learnt the importance of having fun and acquired a more positive attitude to their illness as they realized they are not alone and that many other children also have similar conditions.[4]

Another study in (2009) shows that the Barretstown experience is a life-enhancing ritual process and an important social experience in chronic severe childhood illnesses. The study describes how Barretstown therapeutic concept focus positively impacts children with its cyclical model of Challenge, Success, Reflection and Discovery. By getting comfortable in the protected and safe camp environment, the children begin to realize their previously unrecognized potential, through meeting the challenges with success, which has an enormous effect on their confidence and self-esteem. [1]

One more study in (2006) confirms the safety of a well-organized, medically supervised Barretstown therapeutic recreational program for children with chronic conditions, including those undergoing chemotherapy treatment and factor replacement.[5]

As the available studies show, Barretstown provides a safe, well-organized, inclusive, unique, supportive, effective and lifelong impact programs that are considered an important aspect of treatment for children with serious illnesses.

### Conclusion

Evidence from the available studies demonstrates that the Barretstown therapeutic concept is safe, effective, and can positively enhance children’s abilities and skills. Barretstown helps children overcome their mental constraints, such as lack of confidence and self-confidence. Experiencing a Barretstown Camp can restore hope in humanity and the power of the human spirit.

### Recommendations

Almost all employees and volunteers at Barretstown try to bring a smile or even just a little comfort to the children and young people who are struggling with their illness. I would like to encourage healthcare professionals to consider Barretstown as an essential partner in their treatment concept.

Future studies should examine the positive impact of Barretstown serious fun concept and its role in pediatric rehabilitation.

### Disclaimer

No content in this article, regardless of date, should ever be used as a substitute for direct medical advice from your doctor or other qualified clinician.

### Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest to disclose.

### References


