



History of 22q at the Zoo - Worldwide Awareness Day

22q at the Zoo – Worldwide Awareness Day launched for the first time on May 22, 2011. It was originally planned as a Philadelphia (USA) event to promote fund raising and awareness. Thanks to families, professionals and other support organizations around the globe this “local” function morphed into a worldwide phenomenon where people gathered at their closet zoo for a day of fun and solidarity sporting our unique 22q at the Zoo T-shirts. While adults socialize, children enjoy the animals, face painting, music, dancing, parades, and craft activities. During all of this fun, teams of volunteers distribute fact sheets informing the lay public about 22q11.2 Deletion and Duplication Syndromes.

Just 12 weeks prior to that first event in 2011, Donna McDonald-McGinn, MS, LCGC, Founding Board Member of the International 22q11.2 Foundation and Director of the 22q and You Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and priding herself on rhyming 22q related events, called one of our then, newest board members, Sheila Kambin, and said, “I was thinking...what if we made 22q at the Zoo a worldwide event?”... “I will contact my international colleagues and support organizations and you can generate interest with families using social media.” That year, 65 cities around the world participated in the first ever 22q at the Zoo - Worldwide Awareness Day.

This success was certainly the result of dedicated families and professionals joining in and doing their part, combined with the amazing reach of social media. With the help of Facebook alone, we reached a massive audience around the globe, including those just waiting for an organization to take the lead in promoting solidarity around 22q.

On our 22q at the Zoo day, everyone is included. There are no barriers. All cities, states, provinces, counties, towns, nations, districts, and continents are welcome to participate. Those without a zoo go to a park or someone’s backyard. Those where it is too hot or too cold gather at an indoor location. Those who use the terms DiGeorge, VCFS, CTAF, Opitz G/BBB, Cayler Cardiofacial, and 22q11.2 are all equally welcome. 22q at the Zoo, at last, is a day where everyone can join in making friends, having fun, promoting public awareness, and sharing a common bond.

Since our initial inception, additional locations from all around the globe have joined in the annual fun. In 2015 a record 115 cities celebrated our Worldwide Awareness Day posting photos from Down Under to the South Pacific and everywhere in between. Moving forward, it is our sincere hope that 22q at the Zoo will continue to grow each and every year. It is our hope that one day we will have a zoo event in every country around the world. It is our hope that our world will remain small - small enough that we can continue to support one another around 22q. 22q at the Zoo is a happy experience fiercely battling isolation and hopelessness. 22q at the Zoo - Worldwide Awareness Day is a day to remember, a day to celebrate, a day to make friends while creating awareness, and most importantly a day to stand together. Please join with us because we cannot do it without you!