

The gift of children

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I am writing this to you from the ballroom of the Radisson Hotel in Galway. I don't often go to events beyond the counties of Munster when I am not in Brussels but I would not have missed this. Once I arrived on the quays in Galway, I didn't have to worry about finding the hotel, I just followed the children.

By the time I arrived the room was bustling with babies and young children and their very proud mommy's and Daddy's.

There are yellow, pink and blue balloons everywhere and on the tables are three tiered "cakes" decorated with bright ribbons and flowers and topped with a cuddly teddy in a basket. This is after all a birthday party. With teddy bears and flower jumping on the bouncy castle, dancing, snacking, playing with balloons and each other.

The layers of the cake are made of disposable nappies because this is not an ordinary birthday but a celebration of 10 years of NaPro Practice in Ireland which in turn is a celebration of the birth of hundreds of Irish "miracle" babies who have been born in that decade since Dr Philip Boyle a young Galway GP dropped everything to spend time in the states to study under NaPro's founder, Dr Hilgers of Omaha Nebraska, to learn the tool kit of skills to help the couples he saw in his GP practice struggling with infertility or miscarriage to conceive and carry a child through to birth.

What he learned in Nebraska is that infertility and miscarriage have underlying causes and often they are correctable or can be mitigated or managed so that the couple can have a baby. About 50% of couples who go through the NaPro program will be successful. Many of these couples will go on to have more children. About 25%, who do, do so without any more assistance. And judging by the amount of families at the party with two, three and even four children a lot of couples do come back for more.

Dr. Boyle started alone in his GP practice. But good news spreads and as more and more couples were helped more and more came and with them they brought more medical professionals and an army of NaPro teachers who guide the couple through the process in between the doctor's visits. Nationwide there are 50 NaPro teachers, five NaPro Gp's, two more away in training and a consultant Obstetrician/Gynecologist. At this stage Dr Boyle has had to leave General Practice and works full time in NaPro helping couples and training doctors, teachers. And I have to say meeting him and popping into his office in the Galway Clinic and seeing the bulletin board full of hundreds of baby pictures sent by proud parents, he is the happiest doctor I have ever met.

At the party I talked to some of the teachers who attended, many were NaPro parents who trained because they now want to help others. I asked them what about the 50% of couples who don't have a baby. Every teacher described the same thing from their experiences; couples are of course disappointed but usually are glad they tried NaPro. They know a lot more about their bodies and finally get the answer to their question of why they do not have a baby.

I also asked the teachers what they would advise people especially teenagers who will one day want to have a family. They talked about eating well, exercise and all the usual. But more specifically that we have only one body, its systems are very delicately balanced and this is especially true of the reproductive system. Don't take it for granted; treat it with respect and care. For many people who experience infertility there are genetic, physiological difficulties, for many it is a general health problem.

Most of Dr Boyle's couples come after years of infertility and miscarriage, he told me it is his dearest wish that people would come early when the situation is much easier to correct even before they try for a baby, if they know there is potential for a problem lets say they have a thyroid problem, there is infertility in the family medical history, their cycles are unusual, a history of eating disorder, abortion, STI's, etc they can work with NaPro to head off difficulties and as with everything else, early intervention is always best.

A dad told me that the party was like heaven, full of miracles. I do not want to give the impression that NaPro practitioners have a magic wand. NaPro takes perseverance, patience and working together (maybe that's why the couples all looked so together) but when I asked Two year old Holly's mom and dad who in their early forties after 6 miscarriages came to NaPro and spent two years working towards her conception and safe arrival was it all worth it, They just looked at Holly at each other with an amazing love and then burst out laughing and said that it absolutely was.