

Submission

No 108

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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The Parks Sibling Support Group

Due to a number of requests from community members our organisation will be starting a support group for siblings of children with a disability. The support group allows siblings to come and share with other siblings experiencing a similar situation.

According to American and Australian studies research documented the concerns of siblings of children with special health and developmental needs. The concerns include feelings of loss and isolation when a parent's time and attention is consumed by a sibling's disability or illness. Siblings may feel "left out of the loop" when parents and service providers, wanting to protect them from possible stress, do not share information about a sibling's condition. They may feel isolated with their concerns if they do not have opportunities to talk with peers who are experiencing similar concerns.

Although they frequently have a life-long need for information about the disability or illness and its implications, siblings have far fewer opportunities for obtaining information than their parents do. Other concerns siblings may have include over identification (fearing that they also have the siblings' condition); a perceived pressure to achieve in academics, or sports; feelings of guilt about having caused the illness or disability or of being spared the condition; feelings of resentment when the child with special needs becomes the focus of the family's attention or is permitted to engage in behavior unacceptable for other family members and concerns about their and their sibling's future.

The Parks Sibling Support Group will be running a pilot program from 1 September to 13 October 2008. The groups will be held after school from 3.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. and will include different workshops, activities, snacks and the opportunity to make new friends.

Each week a new topic will be discussed:

- **Week 1** Getting To Know Each Other
- **Week 2:** Exploring Differences
- **Week 3:** Friendly and No-So Friendly Feelings
- **Week 4:** Problem Squashing
- **Week 5:** Wiping Out Worries
- **Week 6:** Feeling Stronger and Supported
- **Week 7:** School Holiday Activity

The Parks Sibling Support Group program is based on the therapeutic support program aimed at siblings of children with special needs aged 8 to 12 years. The program was developed and written by Kate Strohm (Executive Director, Siblings Australia) and Dr Monique Nesa (Curtin University, WA). Both authors have had a long history working in sibling support and the program grew out of their combined experiences. However, as of recently Siblings Australia has experienced funding rejection by the Federal Government..

I believe that this type of project should be funded. From our experience there seems to be more children with special needs and there are not many programs funded for their siblings in the 9-14 year age group.