

Appendix – Section 3

A guide to terms used by Department of Education and Training

Support classes

SSPs	(schools for specific purposes) meaning segregated schools for students with disabilities
IS classes	for students with a severe intellectual disability
IO classes	for students with a moderate intellectual disability
IM classes	for students with a mild intellectual disability
P classes	for students with a physical disability (may also have intellectual disability)
BD classes	for students (primary or secondary) with behaviour disorders
ED classes	for students (primary or secondary) with emotional disability
L classes	for students with receptive and expressive language disorders
R classes	for students (infants or primary) with severe reading disability. Part of support role may be an itinerant one (travels from school to school)

H classes for students (at preschool, primary or secondary level) with hearing disability. Part of support role may be itinerant.

V classes for students (at primary and secondary level) with a visual disability. Part of support role may be itinerant.

EI classes early intervention classes for young children (primarily preschoolers) with disabilities

See Section 3 page 32 for information on how these may be arranged in your school.

Support teachers and classroom aides

IST (I) Itinerant Support Teacher (Integration)

IST (V) Itinerant Support Teacher (Vision)

IST (H) Itinerant Support Teacher (Hearing)

IST (BD) Itinerant Support Teacher (Behaviour Disorders)

IST (IM) Itinerant Support Teacher (Mild Intellectual Disability) K-2

ESS Early School Support
Teacher

STLD Support Teacher (Learning
Difficulties)

These itinerant (travelling) teachers go into schools to support students individually. A support teacher may work full-time with students and staff at a particular school for a brief period, to set up programs for a particular group of students. Alternatively, a support teacher may work regularly at a particular school on a part-time or full-time basis (eg. two days a week). Support teachers may be assisted by classroom aides:

TA (R) Teacher's aide (regular)

TA (S) Teacher's aide (special)

Other facilities and support people

OT Occupational Therapist

PT Physiotherapist

SP Speech Pathologist

CN Community Nurse

School Counsellor

Specialist Counsellor

Special Education Resource
Centres

There is detailed information on the above in The *Special Education Handbook for Schools* (January 1998)

Source: Family Advocacy

A Guide to Working with the Department of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training is a large organisation which can be very confusing for a parent who is trying to understand how it all works. Different district and state offices have different staff and responsibilities. Positions which exist in one office don't exist in another. Instead of trying to understand the whole structure of the Department, it is better to find out where the decisions which most affect your child will be made. The following are some answers to questions parents frequently ask.

Who can tell me about enrolment options? A Special Education Consultant in your district office is responsible for making sure you are well informed about your rights and possible choices. For information about the Department's Guidelines for the *Transition from Preschool Settings to School*, see page 37 above. According to these Guidelines, the Early Learning Support team should contact the Special Education Consultant between 9 and 12 months before enrolment is due, to obtain information about the various options available.

Who chooses a school for my child? You do, after hearing all about your possible options. See Sections 1 and 3 for information about your legal rights, in particular the right to an inclusive education for your child in your local school.

Who decides whether to enrol my child? The principal makes the final decision after following Departmental policies in relation to information gathering and resource allocation. This is also described in Sections 3 and 4.

Who decides what information may be used to evaluate my child's needs? You do. Department of Education guidelines stress that this is parents' basic right. Page 38 above contains important information about the need for parental permission to use any information about a child.

Who will decide what resources my child needs? Under Departmental guidelines, the principal will form a school learning support team, of which the parent/carer is a member. This team considers the child's needs, supports available in the school and district and whether additional target funding is required.

Who will apply for funding and resources to support my child? The 'principal or nominee' will apply. In some schools, the application may be prepared by – the Learning Support Team. The application should be seen by parents, but not all schools offer this. Ask to see the final application. The process is supposed to involve you at all stages.

Who decides what support my child will receive? The Special Education Consultant sends the principal's application to the district Special Education Committee, which makes recommendations to the Student Services Directorate.

When is this decision made?

Applications usually need to be in early in Term Four and decisions are made after all are received.

Who should I see if I'm not happy about the resources the school received?

The Principal. The *Special Education Handbook* for schools includes an appeal form. Parents can appeal again, if the result is unfavourable, to the Student Services Director.

How do I appeal against a principal's decision not to enrol my child?

First try the steps described in Section 5, page 66 You may be able to convince the principal to change the decision yourself. If not, arrange to see the District Superintendent (at your district office).

Who will be responsible for planning my child's program?

If children are enrolled in a regular class at the local school or spend their time in an ordinary classroom, the teacher (not the teacher's aide) is responsible, although he or she may seek advice from you.

If your child is enrolled in a support class (integrated or not) the support class teacher has responsibility for planning for your child. Classroom teachers and special education teachers may form planning teams to prepare a program. These arrangements vary from school to school.



Section 4

School funding, resources and supports

In this Section you will read about the following:

- ★ the funding, resources and supports available for your child
- ★ how decisions are made about your child's support needs
- ★ natural school/neighbourhood supports
- ★ some of the supports which may already be available in schools

(Note: This Section should be read in conjunction with Section 3 above)



Funding and resources for State Schools

Funding for the inclusion of children with disabilities in state schools in New South Wales is always something of a 'minefield'. Funding is guaranteed if a child is enrolled in a special school but if parents seek their child's inclusion in a regular class, funding applications are made by the schools for different 'pots' of money. The continual complaint of parents and schools has been that 'pots' of money have not been increased in line with the overwhelming growth in parent requests for the enrolment of their children in the local school.

In 1996, the Carr Government commissioned the McRae report, (see Section 1, page 10). This report recommended large increases in the amount of money provided for the inclusion of children with disabilities, as well as important changes in the way that money is allocated. Since schools often cite lack of resources as reason for not wanting to enrol children with disabilities, it is a good idea for parents to be well informed about the government's intentions regarding funding for students with disabilities. Currently a student's funding share is "reappraised" regularly, at least annually.

If a child's needs cannot be met in the regular classroom with school and district resources, the school will apply for 'targeted funding' from the state integration program. Under this program, students are counted in the general population of the School and enrolled in ordinary classes. Additional 'target funding' is allocated to students in "priority" order, with those having what are judged to be "high" support needs being funded before those who are judged to have "low" support needs. The needs are appraised in relation to access to the curriculum in key learning areas, communication, social skills, personal care, safety and mobility.

Money may be granted for teachers' aide time, and sometimes for time for teachers to be released for preparation or staff development. Parents whose child is likely to have a teachers' aide working with him or her should ask questions about how that person will be selected and what sort of things they will do. Even if an aide is employed, the teaching and development of the student's program should still be the responsibility of the classroom teacher.

Resources which may be used to support the inclusion of children with disabilities are now described in some detail in the Department of Education and Training's *Special Education Handbook for Schools* (January, 1998)

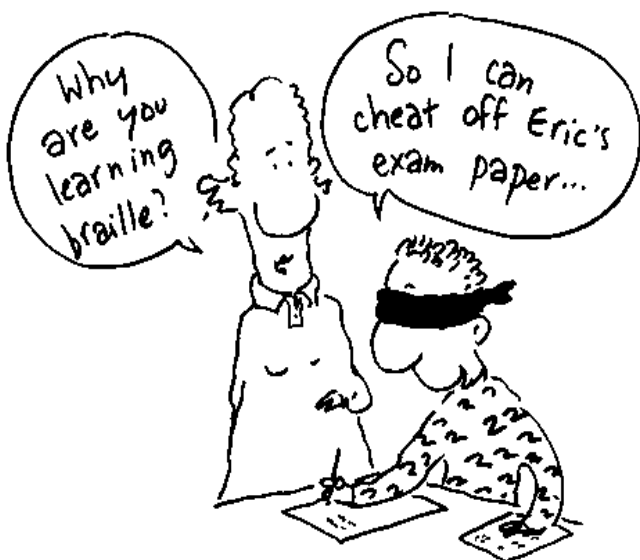
Some Support Services

Resource Support Unit: This Unit offers a consultancy service for school staff involved in providing the educational program for children with high support needs, whether the children are enrolled in State or Independent schools. The team includes educators and therapists who can visit schools and offer advice, information and resources. Schools should contact the Unit to request support. Contact details are: Special Education Directorate, Block G, GPO Box 33, Sydney 1001 or 3a Smalls Road, Ryde, 2112. Ph: (02) 9886 7378; Fax: (02) 9886 7377.

Special Education Support Centres:

There are currently ten Special Education Resource Centres in New South Wales.

These Centres provide assessment and remediation services, particularly to children with learning difficulties. Each Centre covers a number of Department of Education and Training Districts. Contact your local District Office to find out which Centre covers your area.



Special Provision for Students with a Disability:

Students with disabilities are eligible to apply for assistance when sitting for school and external examinations. This assistance may come in a variety of forms, depending on how the disability affects a student's ability to do the exam. If, for example, the disability prevents a student from being able to see the standard paper, he or she may be able to have assistance in the form of a large print or Braille exam paper. Alternatively, the student may be provided with a 'Brailer', a computer or other low vision aid, or someone to read the paper and/or write the answers. The student may also be allocated extra time to complete the exam. Similarly, adjustments may be made for other difficulties, including problems with handwriting, spelling or comprehension, fatigue or the effects of medication.

For arrangements tailored to meet individual students' needs, apply through your school well in advance (eg. at the start of Year 9 for the School Certificate, or year 11 for the HSC.) Don't worry if you haven't got in this early. You can apply at any time. It just makes everyone's job easier if you give plenty of time for the arrangements to be made.

If it is not possible to find a way of modifying the way the assessment or exam is done, schools can offer alternative tasks, or even exempt some students from some assessment tasks.

Students who are unable to meet basic curriculum requirements, even when adjustments are made, may still be able to obtain a School Certificate through a special program of study, or a Year 11/12 Special Record of Achievement in place of an HSC.

For more information more about the special arrangements which can be made, call the Special Provisions Section, Board of Studies NSW on (02) 9367 8182 or (02) 9367 8325

Funding and resources for Independent and Catholic schools

Funding is currently allocated on a similar basis to the State system. It is, therefore, important that parents give the school all relevant information about their child's needs. Assessments of students' cognitive, self-help, communication, and social and /or emotional functioning, are used to complete the funding application. Parents and schools work on this application together. The Association of Independent Schools or the Catholic Diocesan Office reviews the applications and money is allocated on a 'points' system. The school is then advised if the extra resources applied for will be available.

Independent and Catholic schools receive integration funding from the Federal government. This money has also not increased in recent years and so does not always amount to much. There are, however, many cases where money is not a primary issue, and where a good program and flexible use of existing resources in a school are more important. The Association for Independent Schools(AIS) can be called in by a school to give advice about how to achieve this.

Therapy services

Therapy services, such as speech pathology or occupational therapy, are offered by the Department of Community Services. Special schools have been using these services for some time. Local schools are also entitled to use them.

As there are heavy workloads and long waiting lists, services are provided according to need. This means that a child with high support needs qualifies for a service before a child with low support needs. It makes no difference whether the child attends a special school or local neighbourhood school. Failure to provide services on the basis of greatest need could constitute a breach of the Disability Service Standards as outlined in the Disability Services Act and parents may be able to make a complaint. Further information may be obtained from The Community Services Appeals Tribunal, Ph: (02) 9384 4900; Free Call: 1800 060 410.

When looking at what therapy services are available in a school, parents should first ask themselves what they expect this 'therapy' to achieve. Parents know that they are often the ones who do much of the day-to-day therapy. They also know that, in general, therapy is something which needs to be integrated into a person's life and daily activities; it is not something which is achieved in a one-hour therapy session. Therapists in a school setting may, therefore, be seen more as visiting consultants than as 'hands on' therapists. As they may visit the school only occasionally their role may be simply to advise parents and teachers

on how a child's therapy needs can best be met within the ordinary school day. After all, what therapy should be aiming to achieve is to help children participate as actively and effectively as possible in the daily activities of school and community.

How do schools evaluate children's needs?

The 'appraisal' process for an inclusive enrolment in a state school is described in full in the Department of Education and Training's *Special Education Handbook for Schools*. (January 1998, 2.2, pp1-3 and 2.3)

Appraisal...

- is described as a collaborative process. It should be carried out by a school 'learning support team', which should include the parent or carer.
- should involve a consideration of the student's achievements and strengths as well as needs in
 - curriculum key learning areas
 - communication
 - personal care and safety
 - social skills
 - mobility
- should lead to decisions about longer term goals and intended learning outcomes. (The process should not just be about securing funds, but about educational planning for your child.)
- should, after consideration of

strengths, needs and goals, lead to decisions about the sort of support and level of support needed, both from within the school and beyond.

After the school team considers the supports it thinks are appropriate for the student, the principal will apply for access to any additional service required. A District Special Committee will consider all district applications and make a recommendation to the Student Services Directorate.

You should remember these things, and, if necessary remind the school of them:

- Parents should be involved in the process from the beginning. You should be a core member of the school learning support team.
- The appraisal process will involve gathering information about your child. Parental consent should be sought for information about a child to be used.
- Information which forms part of the appraisal process can include reports from you. Use this opportunity to write something which describes your child as a real person. Show a whole child with a unique personality, with value, strengths and interests as well as support needs.
- There is no requirement for an IQ score for enrolment on the integration program. This is entirely optional, and you do not need to give consent to one to complete the appraisal process.
- The appraisal process should be as much about deciding on goals and desired outcomes for your child as it is about securing necessary funding.

Natural school/ neighbourhood supports

Parents sometimes get into the habit of thinking of support as help which is funded, such as a teacher's aide, a special education teacher, a therapist, etc. Yet support can come in many forms, some of which are probably already there in your school or neighbourhood.

Parents of children who do not have a disability tend to take for granted the following common, everyday forms of support for families:

- ★ the neighbour who is happy to drop the children at school when the parent is sick or has an appointment
- ★ the parent they've got to know at the school gate who invites their child home to play or stay over.

Families of children with disabilities may find that this support doesn't come quite as easily; they have to make it happen.

There may be many people who would be happy to be involved with your family but either don't know what to offer or, afraid of offending, are waiting to be asked. Some may be holding back because they think they need special skills, when in many cases the things you want are quite simple. Living among people who know us, care about us, and want to be involved with us, is an important part of most people's dream of a happy, valued life. You may need to help this along. You could make the first move, by:

- ★ inviting children home to play or sleep over
- ★ inviting children on an outing with your family
- ★ having a birthday party for your child
- ★ going along to sporting events (even if your child is not yet involved)
- ★ attending school fairs, concerts etc.
- ★ talking to other parents outside the classroom or at the school gate.



These little acts can break the ice and be a really important first step in creating a supportive circle of friends and acquaintances around your family.

Being seen out and about as an involved member of your local community can also help others to see your child as an individual, with an active and varied life and a caring family.

Supports which may already be available in your school

Some programs already in common use in schools may also help support your child better. Some of the programs you could ask about are as follows.

- ★ **Cooperative groups** in which students work in groups and activities are structured so that success depends on the contribution of all members of the group and students support one another's learning. Children with disabilities may receive natural support from their group and may also be able to use their own particular strengths.
- ★ **Peer support programs** in which students learn to support each other

- ★ **"Friendship" systems for the playground** where older or more reliable, socially skilled students support those needing help at lunch/recess or moving around the school
- ★ **Peer tutoring programs** where a student who is more skilled in a particular area is paired with and 'teaches' a less skilled student.
- ★ **Volunteer tutors** where adults enter the school to act as voluntary helpers, for reading or other activities.

All these programs involve children being supported. They can create an environment in a school where children who want to get involved with your child are encouraged to do so. If the programs don't already operate in the school, you, as a parent, can suggest them. The advantages of these programs are that they benefit ALL children and do they not require special 'integration' funding.

Appendix – Section 4

WHY DO THEY WANT AN IQ TEST?

Many parents instinctively mistrust IQ tests. For them, IQ tests cannot accurately reflect their child's abilities or take into account the whole child. They believe that IQ tests cannot take into account each child's individual personality and interests, inherited character traits, health at the time of the test, and feelings about 'performing' in front of strangers. In other words, parents cannot accept that this wonderful, endearing, frustrating, funny, annoying, rewarding, tiring, adorable and varied mixture that is their child can be summed up in a number. And of course they're right.

Although IQ tests are supposed to measure a prescribed inventory of skills there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they are not only limited in their usefulness but also invalid, inaccurate and unreliable. In spite of doubts about their value, you are more than likely to be asked for an IQ test of your child. If you ask why, you will probably be told that it is required for funding or placement decisions. If you continue to ask why, you may be told that "that's just the way it has to be".

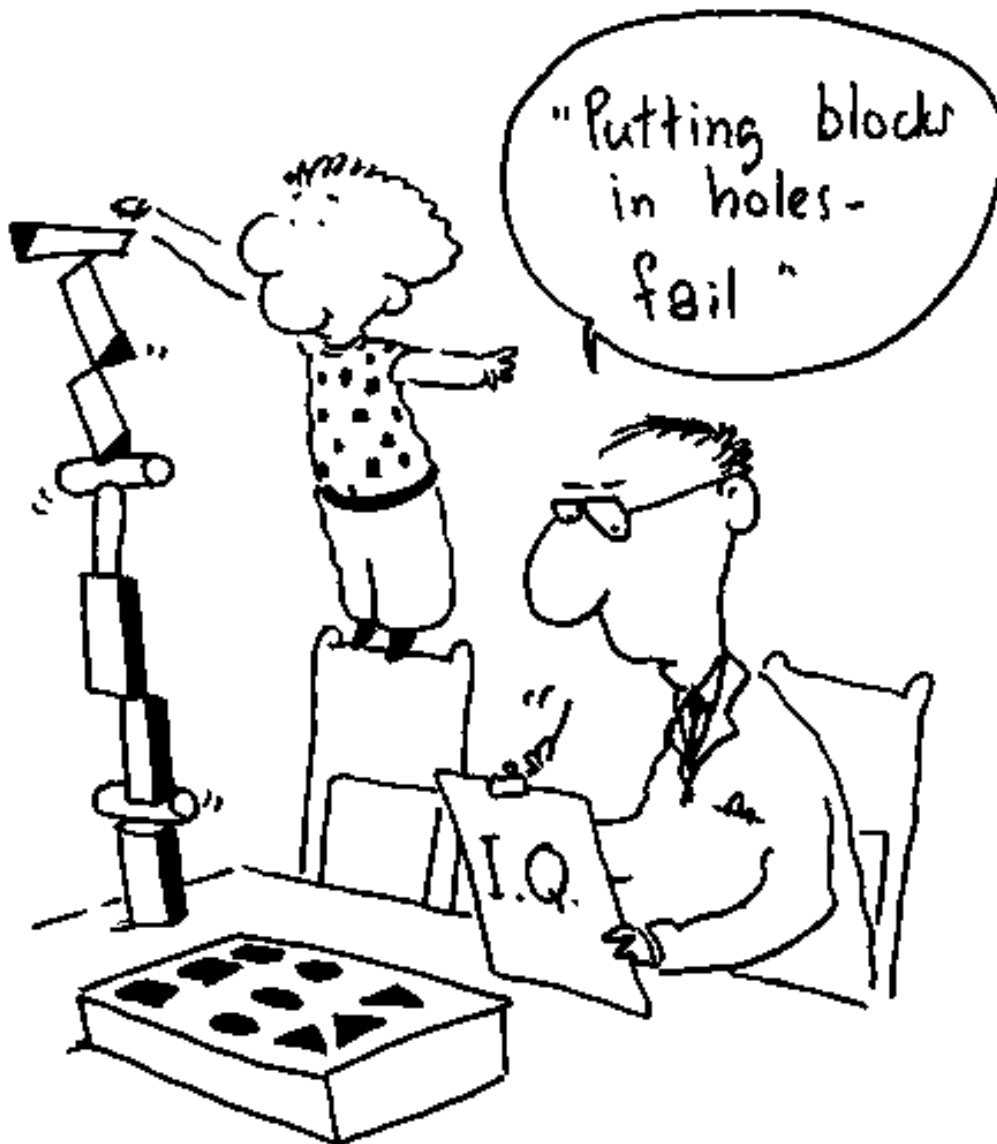
Still, it's worth persisting with your questions by asking: "What do you hope to gain from this type of assessment at this time? What value does this test have in planning a suitable educational program for my child?" The answer will be interesting.

If you don't want your child to have an IQ test say so. The special Education Handbook for Schools (January 1998) lists standardised testing as just one of many possible options for appraising a child's needs. The school should respect your views and use other methods to complete the process.

In general, when an assessment report is required, try the following ideas.

- ★ Find someone to do the test who is happy to listen to your dream, your priorities and your ideas about how you want the report to be written. Ask them if they support inclusion. (Just as you 'shop around' to choose a doctor who best suits you and your family, choose the people who best understand your family's needs for this too.) You don't have to use the person suggested by the school or Department of Education and Training.
- ★ Insist that the report include **NO LABELS**.
- ★ Ask the person writing the report to emphasise the descriptive, individualised observations of the whole child rather than just giving him or her a score or number.
- ★ Ask that the report stress the positives (what your child can do) as much as reflecting his/her needs.

- ★ Ask the person to listen to your own observations about your child's skills and needs and reflect these observations in the report. (Parents observations of their children's capabilities are generally very accurate).
- ★ Write a letter requesting that the report should go only to you. If you like the report you may wish to show it to others.
- ★ If you don't like the report you can ask for changes to be made or seek another report from someone else.
- ★ Stay with your child during the assessment, and try if possible to allow plenty of time so that he or she may start to feel at home with the person doing the assessment.
- ★ Write a letter to go with the report which says that you do not give permission for any copy to be made or kept by the school. Also indicate that the test result may be used only for the funding application, or whatever you have agreed to, and only by those people who need to see it for this purpose.





Section 5

Getting the best for your family

In this Section you will read about the following:

- ★ letting your dream for your child help you to decide what you want and what to ask for
- ★ what the term advocacy means and what an advocate does
- ★ how to get the best out of meetings about your child's schooling
- ★ what to do if you don't agree with decisions which have been made about your child
- ★ how important you are to your child's schooling and how important it is for you to stay involved.



I knew life was going to get better when I found myself being able to laugh at the situations I found myself in. One time I remember was when our consoling doctor looked at our son at nearly two years and commented that he himself had not walked until he was nearly two. I turned to him and said: "He's probably going to be a doctor too"

(M. De Roover).

MAKING CHOICES

As you try to find out more about what schools have to offer your child, you may, from time to time, become confused. When this happens, it is time to go back to your "dream". Your dream will guide you to the questions you need to ask to obtain all the different information you need. Never worry about asking too many questions. Sometimes, asking the right question early on will avoid difficult situations later.



Staying Focused on Your Dream

The following is an example of the sort of situation you may find yourself facing.

You are in a meeting with a representative of the Department of Education and Training. You have a strong feeling that your dream of a happy and valued life for your child would be easier to achieve if she attended the local school in an ordinary class, amongst the children from the neighbourhood and her friends from preschool. You don't, however, know whether this is possible or whether she would receive enough support at the local school.

Mr Grey Suit: *Good morning, Mr & Mrs Smith.*

Mr & Mrs Smith: *Good Morning.*

Mr Grey Suit: *Well, I know you've come for a chat about Sarah. What do you need help with?*

Mrs Smith: *We really need to know as much as we can about the different choices we could make for Sarah's enrolment.*

Mr Grey Suit: *I see. Well, you may not know this, but you really are lucky to live in an area with such excellent special education services. The special school here is really well resourced, the staff is dedicated, and what they do over there is just terrific. There are a couple of support units in some schools doing some great things with integration, too.*

Mr Smith: *I believe we could also choose a class in our local school, too?*

Mr Grey Suit: *Oh, yes, of course. There's a process to be worked through, but yes, that's also an option. Though, I believe as Sarah's support needs are quite high you might want to consider all your options very carefully before you choose.*

Mrs Smith: *Her support needs are high, but Jeff and I feel very strongly about helping her life to be full of all the ordinary things other kids get the chance to do. So we are definitely also interested in what would be available for her at our local school.*

Mr Grey Suit: *OK. How about we work through the full range of options?*

Mr Smith: *Fine. I'm afraid we'll be asking quite a few questions.*

Mr Grey Suit: *No problem. Well, I'll start with the special school. I understand what you're saying about the local school, but I would advise that you at least make an appointment to speak with the principal and maybe visit the school so you can see what it offers. Sometimes parents are quick to reject that option without really knowing what's available there. For a start, every child has their own IEP, worked out with the family. The class size ...*

Mrs Smith: *An IEP?*

Mr Grey Suit: *An individual education plan, based on what your child's individual needs are. If she needs to learn living skills, like dressing herself, catching a bus, doing the shopping or cooking, they can all be a part of her program.*

Mr Smith: *An individualised program sounds good, but I'm sure Sarah can learn many of the kinds of things you mention at home. We'd like to know she was getting a wide range of curriculum experiences and opportunities, just like her older brother, Jack. We want her to be sharing things with other children, too, who do and who don't have disabilities. Would that be happening in the special school?*

Mr Grey Suit: *I only mentioned some examples, of course. A program would be worked out just for Sarah. A specialised program could be worked out for her language development, for example. There would certainly also be some 'integration' opportunities, too. Kids from the local school visit every week and there are plenty of community activities like horse riding and swimming where there'd be other children.*

Mrs Smith: *Language is an important consideration for us. Her speech therapist has always spoken about giving Sarah lots of opportunities to hear and practise everyday communication. Wouldn't that be more likely in an ordinary class, where she'd be hearing lots of children speaking each day? Sarah would have lots of models to copy from. I've heard, too, that individualised goals can be worked on in the ordinary class as well.*

Mr Grey Suit: *Yes, that can be an advantage of the 'regular' class. Unless you were concerned about the number in her class. That might be confusing for her. The special school class size for Sarah would be no larger than six, with a special education*

trained teacher and teacher's aide special. The support is terrific.

Mrs Smith: *The support does sound good. But we really believe Sarah's future depends on her being around other children more often. If we chose the local school, couldn't she be supported well there, too?*

Mr Grey Suit: *Well, that would depend on available funds, but with her higher support needs, she would probably be a priority for receiving reasonable support. Her program would be the responsibility of the classroom teacher and there could most likely be some teacher's aide time. The teacher could change or simplify the curriculum to suit Sarah's individual goals. There may be other programs like peer support or cooperative groups which could also help to support her.*

Of course, there is also the option of a "support" unit, where there is a special education teacher and aide, a smaller class size, and lots of opportunities for integration.

There isn't a unit at your local school, but there's one a few more kilometres away. They could use another student next year to keep their numbers up. And it has the added bonus of offering more protection for Sarah. I know some parents are worried about bullies and their children's safety in the playground and around the school.

Mr Smith: *Well, of course we want Sarah to be safe. She has attended the local preschool and made some friends there, and there are a few children from our neighbourhood*

starting at the school next year. They all know her and would help her. That's actually one reason we thought the local school might be a good choice. Sarah would have to travel away from those kids and her brother to attend the school with the unit. Wouldn't the policy the school already has on bullying also apply to Sarah?

Mr Grey Suit: *Yes, it should. Sometimes kids can be very cruel, though.*

Mr Smith: *We would like Sarah and Jack to go to the same school if possible. It helps make our family situation a little more manageable. We also feel it would help both kids and their friends deal with Sarah as just one of them. We've never done anything too different with Sarah, and we'd like to continue that as long as we can. We also think other kids have a lot to learn from Sarah. We've always found them very accepting of her differences and happy to be involved with her.*

Mr Grey Suit: *Well, the local school certainly seems to be what you feel would suit Sarah best. I suggest you meet the principal and discuss whether the school could cater for her. Once some information has been gathered together about Sarah, an application can be made for whatever Integration support you both think she would need.*

What worked for Mr and Mrs Smith was that they stayed focused on what they wanted, even though Mr Grey Suit tried to divert them from this. He gave his own judgement of where Sarah 'belonged' before hearing anything about her, or her family's dream. There

were times when he ignored what Mr and Mrs Smith were saying about their priorities or clearly tried to change their minds. He even tried to introduce issues such as bullying which had not been one of their concerns.

Of course, the conversations you have will be different. Parents will not always come across people who don't want to hear about their choice of inclusion. The important things are:

- ★ to focus on your own vision or 'dream' for your child
- ★ to ask any questions you need to ask to help you decide how you can best achieve that dream.

Advocacy?

What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy means acting clearly on the side of a person with a disability (or other disadvantage) to make sure that person's rights and welfare are protected and promoted. A person who supports and acts on behalf of another in this way is called an advocate.

An advocate for your child would be someone who:

- ★ is clearly on your child's side only
- ★ is working to make sure your child's needs are recognised
- ★ is working to make sure your child's rights as a worthwhile individual within the community are respected

- ★ will speak out on your's child's behalf
- ★ is determined that your child should have equality with other children, be offered the same opportunities as other children and be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

Advantages of Having an Advocate

The above description probably sounds like you, because, quite often, parents act strongly as advocates for their own children. There are, however, good reasons for parents to find others to act as advocates too. This is because parents can suffer from 'burnout' if they are continually battling for their child's rights and interests in difficult circumstances.

There are also times when parents do not act as advocates for their children, such as when they make choices which are not going to promote the rights and welfare of their children. As parents, we need to be especially aware of times when our own interests and our children's are not the same. This doesn't happen only to the parents of children with disabilities. In some families, for example, a young adult son or daughter wanting to leave home to develop their own lives, might find that their parents wants to 'cling' to them, because they will be missed.

Also, advocacy can be costly in personal and emotional terms. Will you always have energy for the 'long haul'? Will you have to battle for your child's rights and interests so much that you have little left for anything else? Will you have the strength to stand alone if

no-one is supporting you? It is vital to try to surround yourself with people who are supportive. They need to be people who share your vision; people who can help to support you in your choices and battles. They also need to be people who can help you nurture yourself and all your family relationships, not just your relationship with your child with a disability.

Who Can Be an Advocate for My Child?

Anyone who is willing to act as described above can be an advocate for your child.

An advocate should be a person who is independent of any other cause which would conflict with his or her ability to promote the interests of your son or daughter. Often other family members or friends of the family are chosen as advocates, because they know the child well. An advocate can, however, also be someone less well known, as long as that person is prepared to commit themselves to promoting the interests of your son or daughter.

People cannot be good advocates if they have a conflict of interest. In other words, where they cannot completely commit themselves to the interests of your child because they represent other interests which conflict with your child's interests.

In a situation involving your child's education, for example, a person who works for the school or the Department of Education and Training (like a teacher or counsellor) cannot also be an effective advocate for your child. They may be wonderful people who

really seem to understand what you want for your child. But they also have to consider the interests of the school system and so cannot act independently as advocates for your child. By all means, sign them up to help you get what you want; but do not use them as an advocate.



Some Examples of What Advocates Do

The job of an advocate will vary according to the situation and the needs of particular people. An advocate might, for example:

- ★ help you discuss possible solutions to problems facing your child
- ★ help you sort out your ideas before going to a meeting

- ★ help you to work through your concerns and think about strategies for the forthcoming meeting (maybe even listen to a rehearsal)
- ★ go with you to a meeting, to help 'balance' the numbers (it can give you a confidence boost to know there's someone else on your side)
- ★ listen and take notes at a meeting, saying little or nothing, but showing that there will be a record of what is said, and giving you someone to talk it over with afterwards
- ★ perhaps remind you in a meeting of something you meant to say but have forgotten
- ★ perhaps help steer a meeting back to the issues that concern you, if it appears to be going 'off track'
- ★ perhaps make you a coffee afterwards while your hands are still shaking, offer you a shoulder to cry on before planning your next move, or even crack open the champagne.

Having someone to support you is really important for looking after yourself for the 'long haul'. An advocate may help remind you to take care of yourself and avoid exhausting yourself emotionally.

If you are thinking about asking someone to be an advocate for your child, show them this job description. Remember that you have the right to take an advocate with you to meetings. These might be meetings with a school principal or staff member, meetings of the Early Learning Support Team described in the Education Department's Guidelines for the

Transition to School, or some other meeting. You should not be made to feel that having an advocate with you is unnecessary or unwelcome. The support of an advocate can be an important part of making sure your child's rights and welfare are promoted.

See the Appendix to this Section for details of organisations which provide advocacy. If you would like to know more about being an advocate, you may find it helpful to contact one of these organisations. They can also give you information on how to become more active in trying to make positive changes for people with disabilities.

MEETINGS

Meetings can be overwhelming, especially if you haven't had much experience with them. Formal meeting procedures can be puzzling if you don't know the "rules". If everyone else seems to know what they're talking about, it's often hard to find the courage to ask questions about what's going on. Also, the 'power relationship' is often uneven. Professional people are usually in their own setting, which is comfortable for them but not for you. They may also be referring to policies which are familiar to them but not to you. Sometimes they may even seem to be speaking a language all their own. It doesn't help that you have to rely on them to give your child a fair deal. All this can create a real feeling of powerlessness for parents.

Types of Meetings

If your child is to be enrolled at the local school, there are various types of meetings you will be asked to attend. These may include:

- ★ a meeting with the principal to discuss the enrolment
- ★ meetings of your child's Early Learning Support Team
- ★ meetings to discuss any individualised objectives or program for your child
- ★ from time to time, meetings known as 'appraisal' meetings to evaluate the program or funding requirements of your child.

Preparing For Meetings

Here are some ways of preparing yourself and helping to take the 'sting' out of meetings.

- ★ Talk over your concerns and the issues you think you will have to face in a meeting beforehand. You might do this with a spouse or partner, relative or friend. Remember the advocate? If you haven't already thought about it, consider finding someone who is willing to come to all the meetings you might have to attend about your child's education. Some parents feel they would like to go to a first meeting with a principal without an advocate, to avoid giving the impression that they are expecting difficulties or conflicts. Even so, it may be a good idea to talk through your concerns with someone before the meeting.

- ★ Try to think of all the things you want to deal with in the meeting, and make a list you can take with you. If possible, copy your list for the others who will be present. It will be harder for them to pass over your concerns if these are clearly indicated on a piece of paper they have in front of them.
- ★ Before your meeting, try to think of any opposition you might have to deal with. With your friend or partner, think of the points you can make in answer to this opposition.
- ★ Try to find out who will be at the meeting. Sometimes extra people, such as a school counsellor, may be 'sprung' on you when you arrive. If you don't think someone needs to be there, ask why they're going. If you don't want them there, say why.
- ★ Be aware of your rights before the meeting. This will help you to know if you're being offered less than you are entitled to, or if you experience discrimination.
- ★ For your own confidence, and so that you present yourself and your child as valued people, take care with your appearance and be on time.
- ★ Take the trouble to write and thank people for their time or input to the meeting. It can be very helpful for you to show that you value other people's time and effort. This may also encourage the school to value yours.

Formal meetings

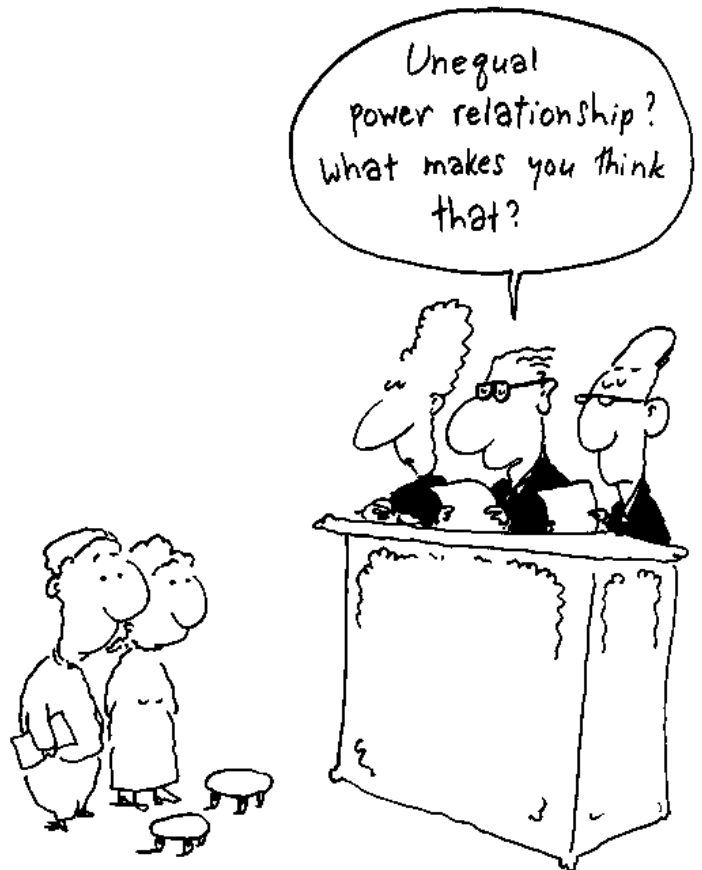
Meetings with parents should not have to follow formal meeting procedures. Ask for a less formal meeting if you wish. Remember, these are meetings about your child. You are entitled to understand what is happening there, and to feel as comfortable as possible. You may need to bring this to the attention of others at the meeting. Professional people are sometimes so familiar with meeting procedures that they forget others may not be so comfortable. Simple guides to meetings may be found in most libraries or bookshops. You may find it helpful to obtain a copy.

Whatever style of meeting you choose, it is important to make sure that an accurate record is kept of what happens. Minutes (or notes about what is said) should be taken. This protects you against people 'forgetting' about things they said they would do. If you like, your advocate can do the job of minute taking.

It is better not to discuss important issues over the phone, because there are no minutes of phone conversations to record the decisions which are made. If you do use the phone, follow up any conversations with a letter which outlines the decisions made.

The meeting environment

Sometimes the physical surroundings in which meetings are held can create unequal 'power relationships'. Some



hints for overcoming this problem are as follows.

- ★ Try to find out how many people will be at the meeting so that you avoid a situation where you are overwhelmed by numbers.
- ★ Some meetings, especially your first ones with the principal, may be better if they are small and informal; so ask for this.
- ★ At meetings which more people may need to attend, you should consider using an advocate, even if only to help balance the numbers a bit or keep track of what all the people have said.

- ★ A desk placed between you and the person you are meeting can create an unequal relationship, or make you feel less confident. If possible, move to a less formal arrangement, such as two comfortable chairs around a coffee or low table.
- ★ If you can, move chairs so that you and your partner or advocate can make eye contact with one another. This will help you both to know when the other needs support.
- ★ Meetings should be in places where confidential matters may be discussed without others overhearing them and where there will not be unnecessary interruptions. A stroll around the playground may seem informal and friendly, but it is not appropriate for the discussion of important matters.

Meeting checklist

It helps to be clear about what you want to ask or discuss at each of these meetings. Working through a checklist, like the one on page 69 may help you to decide what the important issues are for your child and family. Keep these issues in focus, and ask questions about them.

Meeting agenda

Most meetings work from an agenda (meeting outline). These are usually written beforehand.

If you receive an agenda, but haven't had a chance to add to it, ring up and give notice of things you want to cover.

Bring a list of these points to the meeting. Make sure that your topics have been added to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

If a second meeting is scheduled to follow the one you're currently attending, suggest that you all decide on the agenda before you leave. If this doesn't happen, at least make it clear that you would like the chance to add to the next agenda. It is also best to try to decide on a date beforehand, too.

Meeting minutes

Sometimes, people who have been to a meeting do not agree on what was said. To avoid this situation, make sure someone takes minutes. To make sure that the minutes accurately reflect what was discussed or decided:

- ★ Suggest the minutes be put on butcher's paper or a whiteboard, where everyone can see them and agree to them.
- ★ If one person is writing minutes on a pad, ask for these to be read out as you go along. Each point can be agreed to as you go. The minutes can even be signed by everyone before they leave the meeting.
- ★ Never leave a meeting without sorting out who will do what. At meetings, people often say, "someone should" or "I think we should". If you don't write down who "someone" is or who "we" are, you can be sure no one will do anything.

Being positive

- ★ Try to be as positive and constructive as you can in meetings.
- ★ Set the example for others at the meeting by using appropriate language for referring to your child or to disability. Choose words which reflect your child's individuality, dignity and value.
- ★ Set a positive tone for the meeting by showing others how important your child is to you and how much you love, value, and take pride in that child.
- ★ Even if you feel frustrated or angry, remember that once you are successful in enrolling your child, these people may be ones you will have to work with frequently in the future. This doesn't mean you have to accept things you don't want to accept. It just means that it's worth trying to be assertive or firm rather than aggressive.
- ★ Try to promote a constructive approach. Encourage those at the meeting to focus on strengths and positives. If problems arise, try to focus on what can be done. Rather than seeing your child as the problem, the meeting should focus on why problems occur and what strategies or structures can be used to avoid the problems.

Advantages of having an advocate with you

As discussed earlier, it's worth considering taking an advocate with you because this person can:

- ★ help you keep on track and make sure you cover everything you wanted to say
- ★ take notes to provide a record of what was said
- ★ back you up and give you moral support if you're feeling overwhelmed by opposition
- ★ share your dream for your child.

Remember that all decisions made about your child should be made with your family's dream in mind.

Advantages of regular meetings

Consider having a regular meeting, even when things are going well. Some of the advantages of regular meetings are:

- ★ each of the main people involved with your child can get to know one another better
- ★ you have more opportunities to share your dream about your child
- ★ you can take the opportunity to praise people for the things that are going well (this can do wonders for your relationships at the school)
- ★ you can make plans when no-one is in a crisis situation



Don't be too informal

Try not to become too close to the people you will need to work with. Aim to be polite, pleasant and friendly, but don't become too informal. You need to feel able to say so when you are not happy about the way something is being done. This can become very difficult if you become too informal, especially if the person thinks they are doing a terrific job and you don't agree.

Appealing Against A Decision

If you don't get what you want from a meeting, you may decide it is worth taking things further. When this happens, go home and think about it first. Talk things over with your partner and/or advocate. Ask yourselves if what you are seeking is reasonable. Sometimes, after thinking about it, you may decide that the matter is unimportant when compared to the other, good things that are happening at the school. You may decide that you would lose more than you gained by making an issue of it this time. Other issues you may decide you cannot ignore.

If what you are asking for is within your legal rights, you may believe that the decision amounts to discrimination. If so, you will probably want to take the matter further.

Decision by a School Principal

Some basic steps to follow if you have a disagreement about your child's enrolment or some other aspect of his or her schooling are outlined below.

1. Get out your records of past meetings and, from this point on, keep very full records of all discussion that follows.

2. Ask for another meeting to talk over the particular issue you disagreed on last time. If the school is reluctant to arrange this, let it be known that you are not dropping the matter but would like to talk things over before you take it further. (That will often do the trick)
3. Plan new approaches to this meeting. Try to be very clear about your legal rights. If you haven't already used an advocate, find one now and explain the role you would like this person to play at this next meeting.
4. If you haven't already done so, let the principal know what you believe your rights to be. Mention the laws by name, showing that you know what you are talking about. Some principals may not fully understand these laws.
5. If you still cannot reach agreement, make it known that you will be appealing against the decision to the District Superintendent. Sometimes just saying that you will be taking the matter further is enough to make a person rethink their position. Make sure you ask for the principal's reasons for his or her decision and that these reasons are recorded in the meeting's minutes.
6. Make an appointment to see the District Superintendent. Take along an advocate and copies (not originals) of minutes from meetings with the school. Outline where you think your rights are not being respected. Again, make reference to the laws if possible.
7. Tell the District Superintendent anything you were told by the Principal that you don't agree with. Ask the District Superintendent for his/her view of your legal rights.
8. If there is still no agreement, make it clear that you intend to get further legal advice from the Anti-Discrimination Board and Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.

Most conflicts will have been resolved well before reaching this stage. If, however, you still haven't reached a satisfactory result, get advice from one of the contacts listed in the Appendix to Section 1: A Guide to Your Child's Legal Rights (page 19).

You may also write what is known as a 'ministerial' (a letter to a government Minister) outlining the situation and asking for action. Ministerials are supposed to be dealt with by the Minister as a matter of priority. If you need help to do this most effectively, get advice from a solicitor or other experienced person.

The NSW Government Administrative Decisions Tribunal

At the time of the writing, the NSW Government promised to set up an Administrative Decisions Tribunal to review decisions made by government agencies. The government also promised to legislate to give citizens the right to find out the reasons for government decisions. The proposed tribunal will have the power to review the legality of those decisions.

The proposed new body would also offer parents an additional avenue for challenging decisions made about enrolment, discipline or expulsion of children.

Decision by an Independent School

In the Independent school system, principals are also responsible for decisions about enrolment. In making decisions, they are also bound by the laws about discrimination. Independent schools usually also have school boards. A parent who disagrees with a decision made by the principal may ask to speak to the board.

As explained in Section 3, the Association for Independent Schools is available to advise both parents and schools on the best and most flexible use of sources to allow enrolment to go ahead.

A parent who is not getting very far with a principal may suggest that the school contact the Association before reaching a final decision about enrolment. The Association would certainly make clear to the school its responsibilities under the law.

Appendix to Section 5

What do I Think Is Important for my Child at School?

Making up your own list of "Things I Want From A School" might help you in making choices or going to meetings.

Look through the list below, and think about how important each of these things is to you. They are not in any particular order.

- ★ Making friends
- ★ Being actively involved with other children in the class
- ★ Being helped to play with other children in the playground
- ★ Having other children encouraged to be involved with him/her
- ★ Being safe in the playground, and before and after school
- ★ Keeping up with other children academically
- ★ Having work which is based on the class work, but might be changed to meet his/her own needs or abilities.
- ★ Having necessary support: human, technological or organisational to allow him/her to participate as actively as possible.
- ★ Having a teacher who cares about his/her well being and progress
- ★ Being treated with and spoken about with respect
- ★ Being welcomed as a valuable member of the school
- ★ Being seen as a child, not a "problem"
- ★ Having staff at the school who understand and respect our family's 'dream'
- ★ Having staff at the school who have high expectations of him/her
- ★ Having staff at the school who want him/her to succeed there
- ★ Being given time to respond
- ★ Being given time and/or assistance for eating
- ★ Getting help with personal hygiene/going to the toilet etc
- ★ Being encouraged to develop his/her abilities
- ★ Having his/her strengths and interests recognised and used as much as possible

Add your own.

What Can I Say When ... ?

Sometimes, when you have made a decision to achieve an inclusive education for your child, you find yourselves having to answer everyone else's concerns about your choice. You know you have thought long and hard about this, and have made the choice you think is best for your child's future. Nevertheless you will probably find yourself being asked to justify your choice to others. You may, for example hear people make some of the following statements. Each statement is accompanied by some suggestions for answers you might think appropriate.

Statement: "Some kids just can't learn like everyone else"

Possible responses:

- ★ Everyone can learn, at their own pace and in their own way.
- ★ All kids have different learning styles, and the different learning styles of all children should be catered for.
- ★ The emphasis should be on students learning at their own pace.
- ★ Inclusion isn't necessarily based on academic achievement at the same level as others in a class. Schools should respond to widely different needs within the one grade.

- ★ Common teaching strategies like cooperative learning can be used to promote students' learning in different ways in the same environment.

Statement: "Your child will take up too much of the teacher's time."

Possible responses

- ★ There are often extra resources available when a student with a disability is included. When things are planned properly, all students should benefit.
- ★ Many children demand the teacher's attention more than others. It is the same with children with disabilities. Not all will require more attention. Extra resources for the child with a disability sometimes mean the teacher has more time for everyone.

Statement: "Your child will be a bad influence on mine."

Possible responses:

- ★ There is no research evidence that shows that.
- ★ All children have an impact on others in their classroom. Some more, some less. Children with disabilities are the same. There is no evidence that they will make any more impact on your child than anyone else would.

- ★ Children without disabilities often have improved outcomes when a child with a disability is included in their class. They often grow up more appreciative of individual differences.
- ★ Children can all learn something from each other.

Statement: "It's not worth the money."

Possible responses:

- ★ You can't count the value of children.
- ★ No one questions resources that might go into a gifted and talented program.
- ★ If your child had a disability, you would be fighting for resources to provide him with a good education.
- ★ Resources are guaranteed in segregated settings. It's just that most people don't see that money.

Statement: "I've tried it and it didn't work."

Possible responses:

- ★ Children have often been "set up to fail" because Inclusion has been inadequately resourced.

- ★ Attitudes today may be more welcoming.
- ★ The knowledge and expertise to make it work has been growing steadily.

Statement: "Other children will be too mean and unkind."

Possible responses:

- ★ Better attitudes grow with familiarity over time.
- ★ That's not borne out by the research findings. Children tend to become more accepting of difference, especially when children with disabilities have always been fully included at their school.
- ★ I would expect the school to deal with bullying or cruelty towards ANY child.
- ★ Inclusion requires the preparation of the whole school community.

Adapted from resources provided by Family Advocacy

Organisations Which Provide Advocacy Services

If you would like more information about being an advocate, you may find it helpful to contact one of the following organisations. They can also give you information on how to become more active in trying to make positive changes for people with disabilities.

Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development:

Ph: (02) 9869 0866 or 1800 620 588

(non-metropolitan callers)

Fax: (02) 9869 0722

Home Page:

<http://www.family-advocacy.com/>

This is an independent, community based organisation which works with families who a member who has a developmental disability. The organisation aims to strengthen the knowledge and skills of families so that they become effective advocates for people with disabilities. They have a collection of information about advocacy and inclusion which parents may use. They may also be able to put you in touch with other parents who belong to an advocacy network. The organisation runs information and skills workshops for parents and family members and can help parents to become more involved in 'systems advocacy' campaigns. They do not provide individual advocacy (advocates to go to meetings).

Speaking for Ourselves

Speaking for Ourselves is a self-advocacy organisation run by and for people with intellectual disabilities. It aims to encourage people with disabilities to become their own advocates, to know their rights, speak up for themselves, make real choices and learn new skills.

People with Disabilities Inc.

51 Pitt Street, Redfern, NSW 2016

Ph: (02) 9319 6622; Freecall 1800 424 007;

TTY (02) 9318 2138 Fax: (02) 9318 1372)

This service is run by and for people with disabilities. The service can provide advocates for people, link them up with services, educate them about their rights, and help to protect them. Also runs the Disability Complaints Service mentioned in the Appendix to Section 1

Disability Advocacy Service Hunter (DASH)

Ph:4927 0111; Fax: 4927 0114

Coordinator Mark Grieson

This organisation provides an advocacy service to people with disabilities living in the Newcastle, Hunter Valley, Pt Macquarie and Pt Stevens regions. It also provides an information line on all disability related services in the area.

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association

Level 3, Suite 32, 181

Church St Parramatta

Ph: (02) 9891 6400

Fax: (02) 9635 5355

Freecall (Outside Sydney) 1800 629 072



Section 6

Continuing the effort

In this Section you will read about the following:

- ★ maintaining your involvement throughout your child's schooling
- ★ preparing your child for life after school
- ★ planning your child's future work and leisure opportunities
- ★ keeping your dream alive.



Maintaining involvement throughout your child's schooling

Once their child has been enrolled, many parents are so relieved that they relax, feeling that they have achieved all they wanted. But enrolment is only one step. What happens at school is also vital to achieving your dream of a happy and valued life for your child. In fact achieving this dream calls for a life-long commitment.

Parents often comment on how hard they worked to get to know their child's teacher, only to have to repeat the process with a different teacher the following year.

As parents, we would all like to think that our children are valued for who they are and that schools welcome and value their enrolment. Some schools do this: they recognise the valuable knowledge and direction parents can provide and are happy to involve parents in their children's educational planning. At other schools, staff or principal may be less welcoming, and parents may have to make an extra effort to keep communication positive and helpful. In either case, parents' involvement with the school is likely to be ongoing.

This does not mean that parents have a responsibility to participate physically in their child's school day. Enrolment of a child should not be made conditional upon a parent's agreement to come in and act as an aide, supervise at recess

or lunch, give medication, etc. These things are not the responsibility of families. They place an unreasonable burden on families, (often already experiencing the hidden costs of disability), and deny them a chance to pursue ordinary activities, such as work. All involvement with the school should be voluntary.

Some parents find it helpful to be recognised as people who make a valuable contribution to the school community. They become as involved in the school's activities as their time allows. Of course, this varies from family to family.

Although, for most of us, time is short, the following are some of the ways we can show interest and involvement in the school, as time allows: These activities should, of course, be voluntary, and never expected of you:

- ★ attending important school sports or cultural events
- ★ supporting fund raising events or helping to organise them
- ★ attending P & C, Parent Auxiliary or School Council meetings
- ★ working in the school canteen or doing voluntary work, such as reading programs, in the classroom.

You may be able to find out from other parents, or the local Special Education Consultant, which schools in your area are doing a good job. You may be able to arrange to visit these schools yourself, or arrange for staff from your child's school to visit to look at their practices.

Rightly or wrongly, a school will probably value more highly parents who show more interest in the school.

By doing as much as your time allows, you are helping to achieve what you want from the school for your child. This sort of involvement won't be everyone's choice, of course; nor should it be. Each parent must decide how they can best help to make their child's school experience a happy one. And each parent must decide which school is most likely to help the family to achieve its dream.

Preparing your Son or Daughter for Life After School

How their child will make a life out in the world is something many parents worry about from the time a child with a disability is born. While that child is at school, the thoughts and efforts of most parents are concentrated on getting the best out of the school. As children get ready to leave school, parents enter a different stage of planning and face a new set of challenges. How, for example, can they help the child:

- ★ to keep the social contact that has been a big part of being at school with others the same age?
- ★ to develop skills for employment?
- ★ to find a job?
- ★ to become involved in rewarding leisure-time activities?

Preparing your child for adult life after school should begin early. Parents need to encourage their child to think about the skills and interests they would like to develop.

These days, it is possible for people with significant disabilities to find work and have positive work experiences. Details of services which are specifically funded to help them do this are listed in the Appendix at the end of this Section. Contact these services as early as you like, even as soon as your son or daughter starts secondary school. This will give you plenty of time to find out all about available programs and resources, and funds that can be applied for. The more time you give yourself to find out about these things, the better chance you have of understanding how everything works. Staff at your child's school (for example, a careers adviser) may be able to help you to start finding information and look around for suitable work experience opportunities.

You may already have been trying to ensure that, during his or her school years, your child has had a range of interesting out-of-school activities and involvements. If so, you will have an understanding of your child's interests and capabilities. You will probably also have built up a group of people in the community who know your family and have seen your child grow into an adult. This longterm involvement and activity in the community can be a vitally important factor in finding appropriate work and leisure experiences for your son or daughter.

One of the benefits of an inclusive education is that more people get to know your son or daughter while he or she is developing the social and other skills needed for the workplace. People who know your son or daughter as an individual are more likely to be willing to give them a job opportunity. Also, the wider the circle of contacts for both you and your child, the more people you are likely to know who have business or social contacts which might suit your child's needs.

Some parents decide that the time to start working for better opportunities in the future for school leavers with disabilities is when their young child starts school.

Remember the power of the parent voice? Things are greatly improved now by comparison to ten or twenty years ago. Much of what is available now came about through the efforts of parents to get better choices for their children. You can do the same.

APPENDIX TO SECTION 6

Services Which Will Help You to Plan Ahead

The following are some places where parents could begin to investigate their children's opportunities

TAFE: Consultancy Service

TAFE NSW Disabilities Services Office

Phone: (02) 9965 6522 or

Fax: (02) 9965 6595 or the TAFE

Information Service: Phone: 131 601.

TAFE NSW has a range of services for students with disabilities including specialist disability consultants. They can be of help in planning ahead for your son or daughter, and can arrange for the appropriate support services before enrolment. Students can attend flexibly, receive tutorial assistance, use note-takers or interpreters, have extra support with exams, use necessary adaptive equipment, or study externally through Distance Education.

Ageing & Disability Department

Phone: (02) 9367 6811;

TTY (02) 9367 6868;

Fax: (02) 9367 6850

Post School Options programs are designed specifically to help young people with high support needs find employment. These are coordinated through the Office of Ageing and Disability. Schools, especially School Counsellors, should also have details.

Planning for Post-School Options programs begin well before students leave school, so again, it is in families' best interests to enquire about them well before the student with a disability nears the end of his or her schooling.

Dept Health & Family Services

Freecall: 1800 048 998.

This Federal Department runs various programs of supported employment. Parents can ring to find out about possible options.

Community Colleges

Your local Community College is another place to begin making enquiries about training and leisure activities.

KEEPING YOUR DREAM ALIVE

So how do you feel now after reading this manual? No one would blame you for feeling a little overwhelmed by what's ahead. How many times, since your child was born, have you thought that life seems very hard or unfair? We may realise that having a child with a disability is likely to build our characters, skills, and strengths. Yet there are still times when we wish it was building someone else's, and that we had an easier path through life. At the same time, we also know that our child has brought us many rewards and joys which, for some of us, were most unexpected. Through all the mixed emotions, we also know in our hearts that we face a life-long challenge.

If there is one message you take with you from this manual, let it be the message about the importance of having a dream to guide you. Your dream will help you to know where you want to go. It will help you to choose between alternatives. It will help you see long-term goals in insignificant daily activities.

The Little Things Matter

Your dream will make you more conscious of how important the little things are in working towards a happy, valued life for your child, and what a big difference they can make. Here are some examples:

- ★ how the language we use helps to create a valued image of our child
- ★ the importance of letting others see that your child is actively involved in life, and 'belongs' in their community
- ★ the fact that we enjoy our children and so convey that joy to others
- ★ that we discuss our dream within our family and consciously gather around us a circle of people to support that dream and keep it alive
- ★ the fact that we ask for help when we need it, without feeling this makes us any less capable
- ★ that we allow ourselves and our children to take some 'risks' in asking for and allowing others to become involved in our lives.
- ★ that we take time to nurture ourselves and our partners and to strengthen our relationships with both family and friends, so that we can stay committed and find support over the 'long haul'
- ★ that we are prepared at times to feel very lonely when we stand up for our child's rights when no-one else is being supportive
- ★ that we don't just accept things the way they are, but strive for something better

Each of your successes paves the way for success for others.

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