

R E P O R T

Your United Way of Broome County investment at work

February, 2000

Support group helps parents with special needs children

“I know everyone there will be able to empathize and understand the issues that a parent of a child with special needs faces.”

That is how one parent describes the value of the Parents’ Support Group for Children With Special Needs sponsored by The Handicapped Children’s Association of Southern New York, Inc. (HCA). Although most parents in the support group have a pre-school age child who participates in HCA programs, neither of these conditions are requirements for joining the group. The group is facilitated by a professional staff member of HCA, but is designed to maximize parental interactions. It provides an arena for parents to feel comfortable talking among themselves without disruptions by their children.

Support from other parents who have “been there”

Another parent comments that the Parents’ Support Group “is a place where you can receive positive feedback and education from other parents who have already been there and can provide you with knowledgeable support and understanding.” She adds that what she has learned from the group “often applies not only to my special needs child but also to my other child.”

The Parents’ Support Group meets weekly to discuss a variety of topics. Among them are questions relating to disciplining, appropriate behaviors, appropriate expectations of developmental milestones, and which doctors or

specialists are right for your child in different situations.

In addition, parents who have already been through the system and have dealt with physicians, service providers, and school districts often share their experiences, providing background and encouragement to those who are just beginning to deal with these areas.

Best advocate for each child is his or her parent

“The group has been helpful in teaching me that I am my child’s best advocate,” a third parent adds. “I’ve learned how to be assertive with professionals who come into contact with my child. Since I’ve had a child with special needs I am also more prepared and informed about getting the needs of my typical children met.”

The support group also enables parents to deal with their fears and concerns so that they are freed up to address other issues. For example, one group member reports that the Parents’ Support Group “provided me with the emotional support and encouragement to get through some difficult times. I’ve found I’m not just the parent of a child with special needs, but also an individual who can develop my own identity, and someone who has a lot to offer. It has increased my self-confidence and self-esteem.”

The Parents’ Support Group has outside speakers each month who address specific concerns of the group. These meetings are open to the public

and non-group members are encouraged to attend.

New members welcome at any support group meeting

New members are welcome to join the group at any time. Regular meetings are held every Thursday morning from 9:30 to 11:30 in the conference room of the HCA. The size of the group is comfortable for most people, as it is not too large. Members of the group have varied backgrounds and a variety of information to share. Child-care is provided on premises, without charge.

If you are interested in attending a meeting of the Parents’ Support Group, but would first like to meet with the group facilitator or a parent who is a member, please contact Penny Burnside at Handicapped Children’s Association, 798-7117. She would also welcome any questions you may have about the group.

Your contribution to United Way of Broome County helps the Parents’ Support Group and similar support activities throughout our community. Since United Way keeps its costs low, more than 85 cents of every dollar donated goes directly to member agencies and activities.

