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*People Helping People Achieve*



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# *FAMILY NETWORKS* A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONALS & FAMILIES



*Ann Slater Yooralla Victoria*  
*2007*



## *FAMILY NETWORKS*

Some times it is the journey' .... Our Family Network parent support programs began as an opportunity for Families to meet together. Over the past 5 years these programs have enabled **Families and Professionals opportunities to collaborate together** to identify service gaps, then support and design the development of our ECI services- including new innovative Early Childhood intervention programs. This is what we have learnt from this journey.



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# In the beginning

- **Our Yooralla Family Networks support program** enables families who have children with a disability to come together on a regular basis for support and to share information. Within our groups families raise issues, share resources, importantly they take some time out for themselves and developed a social network

Family Networks began as

- The opportunity for Parents of young children to meet together as a group facilitated by a Professional **in addition to** their ECI program.



## AIMS for families

To build the capacity of families:

For families to

- make informed decisions especially at transition times /times of stress
- access community resources and general information about services
- identify and build their own support networks.
- develop their own coping-strategies esp. at transition times



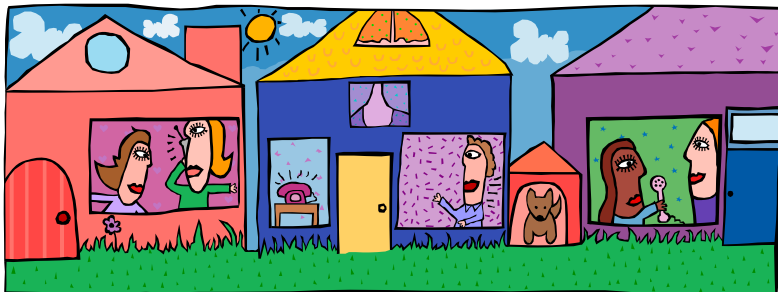
## AIMS for Professionals

- To build professional's capacity to:
  - create partnerships with families
  - identify strengths of parents, their extended family and community networks.
  - Develop their skills in strength- based support
  - foster innovative local approaches to delivering family support and Early Childhood Intervention



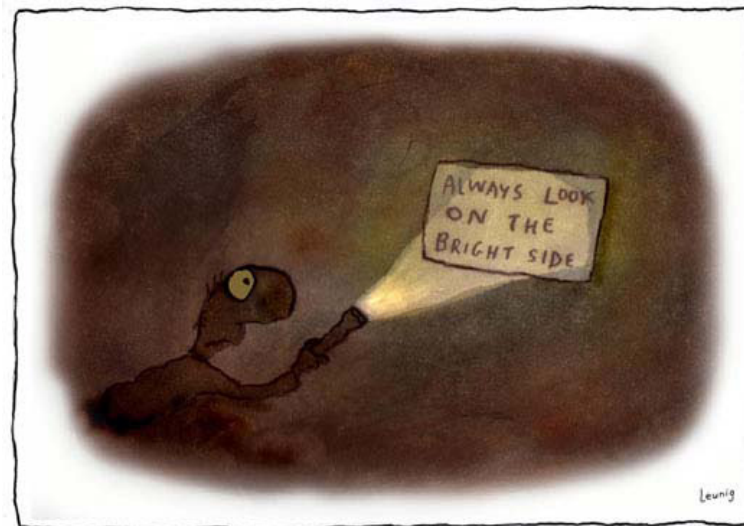
## Basic Principles of Family Networks

- Professionals do not take a ‘power’ role, play a rescuing role or give “the answers”.
- Believing that each individual has an inherent ability to solve their problems and achieve their goals.
- Fostering positive attitudes and strengths in family members to deal with current difficulties and future challenges.





- Participation in the Family Networks program and the development, direction, activities and discussion topics of the program are all choices made by parents.
- Recognizing and acknowledging how difficult it can be to be a parent and building confidence through supporting them to access information & resources.
- Parents/ families are the experts of their children, they need access to information to enable them to make informed decisions





## Why is *Family Networks* different?

- Parents support each other
- Parents do their own problem solving, sharing of resources & information.
- Parents set the agenda of group times.
- Group facilitators help structure & support this process, providing information & resources as requested or required.
- Parents “take the driver’s seat” and we “go along for the ride”.
- Anyone can be trained as a *Family Networks* group facilitator- including Parents.

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# Outcomes for Parents & Families:

We have provided a structured program with the agenda totally driven by the parents. They set the discussion topics

Parents learn from other parents:

- what they can do to build their child's abilities and skills
- what they can do to look after themselves and their family
- about early childhood intervention and professional roles
- about community resources and gain the confidence to access them.



## Outcomes for Professionals:

- A true partnership with parents develops (equal relationship)
  - parents get to know what you can do and can't do, your role
  - parents don't expect you to “work miracles” or to have all the answers
  - parents are clearer about goals and what they want from the professionals and therefore it's easier to ‘get on with the job’
  - professionals develop a greater understanding of parents as the experts on their child & family

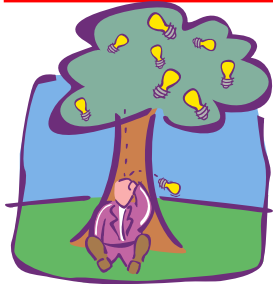
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## Outcomes for Yooralla ECI

- Family Networks groups are offered by each of the 8 Yooralla ECI Services in metropolitan Melbourne.
- Each and every group is different and we learn something new from each group of parents.
- We have Parent Leaders at a number of our services that assist our ECI staff to run groups and support other parents.
- All professional staff are trained as Family Networks Facilitators as part of their induction and professional development.



## New ideas

As part of their discussion participants have identified needs and gaps in current ECI service systems. From this feedback we have developed new and innovative programs within our service.

Program development- Outreach services, therapy groups, pamper times

- Dads Playgroup 'Papa Bear
- sibling groups,
- telephone link ups for Grand parents,
- groups for families who are on waitlists for ECI services
- transition to school groups--drop in group
- Inclusive playgroups
- Playgroups combined with parent workshops
- Parent Education- Makaton, behavioural scripts sessions etc.



## *Parents in Partnership*

As part of our Family Networks journey we have now developed our Parent Leader program. Parents are now part of our team. We are using Parent skills throughout our ECI service including co-facilitating Parent groups.

Parent Leaders play an active role in advocacy, presenting at conferences, employment of staff and in focus groups.

Development of

- Parent-leader training and
- Training of professionals & parents as group facilitators.



## There Is A Rainbow After the Storm

"These are our wishes for our child's Future..."



To cope with being in a big crowd and enjoy life best as he can



To be a dancer



To wake up and have a clear mind



To make a statement



For him to play with children



To independently live in a shared house with friends

### 5 Things you should wish for in the future

1. "To be positive, and allow yourself to be negative occasionally - it is normal, because then you can see the positives again".
2. "For our children to be more accepted by the world - universe. To be included not excluded".
3. "For my child to be a friend".
4. "For my child to be happy; to be themselves; to enjoy what they are doing".
5. "You should take the time to appreciate your child's achievements and for you to learn".



## Paradigm

*“Different people different lives  
Different backgrounds, different times  
Confused and lost within a maze  
In search of help to clear the haze  
Time to stop, to breathe, relax,  
No fear of judgement or personal attacks  
Some one to listen, a chance to be heard  
It’s the very least that we deserve.....  
Weve now the confidence to stand and say  
This is my child I’ll do it my way Hope I know has been restored  
As timid mice we’ve learn to roar”*

*Karen Jensen (Mother) 2004*

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## “Thinking outside the Chair”

- Family Networks has challenged us to evaluate and think beyond our current ECI service delivery models.
- We continue this journey with our Parents showing us the way.
- Final words reflecting thinking beyond.....



## To Dylan from Zoe aged 5

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“This is for you

You are having a rest.

You are dreaming of  
what you are going to  
do when you grow up

You can fly a rocket

(Dylan has Cerebral Palsy and uses  
a wheelchair for mobility- Zoe is his  
Kinda friend)

