

2 to 4 August 2004

Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre
Darling Harbour Sydney

SESSION #12

"Someone to turn to..."™

Development of the Program

1. March 2003: a Coordinator was appointed.
2. The Coordinator met with some other NGO organisations to discuss their volunteer programs - policies, procedures and practice.
3. With this input, the concept of the **"Someone to turn to..."™** Parent Support Network was developed.
4. Information about the Program, inviting parents/carers to participate for support or as a volunteer, began to be distributed to parent groups, schools and other community service providers – by brochure, newsletter and presentation.
5. August 2003: the first weekend of initial training for 13 volunteers was held. Trainers came from both within and outside the Autism Association of NSW (AANSW).
6. August 2003: the first volunteer - parent/carer links were made. Parents/carers and volunteers come from all over Sydney. Support is of both an emotional and practical nature. It is by phone, and also face-to-face.
7. October 2003: the first evening of ongoing training took place. It was decided to hold these workshops every 8-10 weeks, with a guest speaker/s and time for the volunteers to discuss their work. Speakers to date have included: Anthony Warren, Director of Outreach & Consultancy, AANSW; Trevor Clark, Director of Education & Research, AANSW; Eleanor Gittens, Family Counsellor, AANSW; the AANSW BIS team; Joanne Mulligan, Carers NSW; and, Patrick Concannon, Paediatrician.
8. April 2004: The first link in another language was made - in Japanese.
9. By May 2004: Three volunteers have left the program for personal reasons.
10. Parents/carers' waiting time for an appropriate match varies from 2 weeks to 6 months, depending on availability of a volunteer match. As of mid July 2004, there are 23 parents waiting.
11. July 2004: 24 volunteers currently linked to 34 families. Children of volunteers range in age from 5-36, parents' children with ASD from 2-15. Thus support can be offered to parents of both young and adult children. The most recent intake of volunteers allows for support for those carers whose first language is Arabic, Filipino and Japanese.

"Someone to turn to..."™

Goals of the Program

- a. To meet the frequently expressed needs of parents with a child/children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to discuss their concerns in a 1-1 situation with another parent of a child with ASD.
- b. By matching parents with volunteers, to provide parents with the comfort that others have experienced similar difficulties and that they 'are not alone.'
- c. To facilitate a supportive relationship between the parent and volunteer based on mutual trust and understanding.
- d. To provide the opportunity for parents seeking peer support to meet face-to-face or speak on the telephone with a trained volunteer parent.
- e. To provide parents with an empathic listening ear.
- f. To enable parents to access practical support to help meet their family challenges.
- g. To help parents focus on the strengths of their child.
- h. To provide initial training for volunteers to ensure maximum effectiveness in their support role.
- i. To seek regular feedback from volunteers to enable the Autism Association of NSW to provide ongoing training and support for them.
- j. To continuously evaluate the "Someone to turn to..."™ Program, thus enabling program development and improvement.
- k. To complement other forms of support for carers of children with ASD.