

SUPPORT NETWORK FOR ADVENTIST PARENTS

"Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Issue 13 – October 2008

Welcome & Introduction

Welcome to Issue 13 of SNAP newsletter.

Since the last issue we are delighted to report a few positive events in the life of SNAP.

On September 7 we went up to Stanborough Press Open Day and spent time promoting SNAP. As a result we have several new members, whom we welcome this time around. We look forward to their contributions.

On the last weekend in September we were up in Scotland for a family occasion and whilst there, were invited to take a small SNAP discussion group at Dundee Church on the Sabbath afternoon, which was a lovely time we spent together; and a couple of new members registered in the process. This we hope will be the first of a good number as our intention is that we can bring other such programmes to other churches. Please let us know if you would like us to do this for you.

It is also our aim to encourage parents at local churches to set up their own SNAP discussion groups.

Enjoy this issue, please contribute your responses & be encouraged.

Mike & Vicky

Topic for Discussion

THIS ISSUE – TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION

In this issue we are exploring what it is like to be a parent to/care for children with special needs. We would particularly welcome your experiences if you are/have been a parent/carer for a special needs child.

My Experience as a Brother – by Mike

Up until four years ago I had an autistic brother, but sadly he died unexpectedly. However there are some valuable things that I have learned and appreciated from having grown up with him and spent a lot of time with him. There have also been some significant challenges which we, as a family had to cope with.

In the early years of Mark's life both before and after he was diagnosed, the awareness of autism was a lot less than it is now and I know for my parents that practical help, both within and outside of church circles, was very limited. For those who perhaps do not understand autism it basically presents itself on different degrees of severity in terms of social and academic development, although most are capable of developing specific talents. Mark was fairly limited in both the social and academic spheres but had other talents that he developed throughout his life.

Much could be written about the challenges, particularly of a behavioural nature but that is not the way I remember Mark and I will only mention these briefly inasmuch

as they did affect not just me but the rest of the family. There were many 'temper tantrums', which were extreme in some cases, and it was at times like these that we did need some support and respite as a family. Not many people outside of family truly understood Mark but there were some individuals who made some special lasting one-to-one relationships with him which helped enormously.

There are, more importantly, some very positive lessons to be learned from him. The main aspect of Mark's character which I will always remember was that his moods were always genuine. He never said he was ok if he wasn't. He said exactly what he felt. If he smiled we knew he was happy; there was nothing false underneath it. I have often thought if only the rest of us humans could be like that but too often we will put on a front and say we are ok when we are not. We can smile falsely.

The other thing with Mark was that his pleasures in life were simple – he enjoyed food, music and the company of the special people in his life. Sometimes we complicate our lives by wanting too much out of it, and our lives are far often happier when we keep things simple.

One can only begin to imagine, as I did at Marks funeral, what he, and others like him, will be like at the Second Coming when all things will be made new and he will truly achieve his full potential as a person. This is something I keep in my mind which I never did think about while Mark was alive.

Remember Special Needs people are always special people even in this imperfect world but just imagine what they will be in Heaven. That is something I am looking forward to.

Our Experience as Parents by Mike & Vicky

We are relatively new to the idea of being parents of a child with special needs. For a few years we have wondered if our younger son is on the autistic spectrum. Some of his behavioural patterns and social interactions led us to believe this. Our first quest for a diagnosis was inconclusive leaving us wondering if some of our parenting skills were inadequate. We were subsequently encouraged by independent observations from some church members and other friends who thought that there was definitely a case for diagnosis on the autistic spectrum. We resumed our quest for a diagnosis earlier this year and during the last month we have been told by a child psychiatrist that he is, "without doubt", on the spectrum. He has been classified as having High Functioning Autism (very similar to Asperger Syndrome). The diagnosis means that in some ways he is very intelligent but he faces some significant challenges on a social level. Whilst we have not sought a 'label' for our son, it is important for us to be able to explain to others why he is the way he is. The diagnosis will also help us to know how to help him manage his day to day life.

What has been very encouraging for us has been how understanding our church family have been about his behaviour which some would find inappropriate in a group setting. We have never been 'lectured' on how to handle our child but they have allowed him to be himself and praised him for his positive contributions.

Our extended family were, at first, sceptical as to whether there was anything to diagnose, but over time they have become much more aware of his differences and are now not surprised at the recent diagnosis. We are grateful to certain members of our family who are able and willing to look after both him and his older brother on occasions in order that we can have a little respite and recharge our batteries!

It has also been very good to talk to other parents whose children have a similar special need. It is helpful to know that we all face the same challenges and perhaps we can share coping strategies. It also reinforces our belief that our parenting skills are not as inadequate as we may sometimes feel.

We have also started to read books on the subject which helps us in a similar way to talking to other parents.

We are not quite sure what the future will bring but we pray that God will help us to appreciate his abilities and to help him with his challenges.

We welcome any questions on our experience and we would also like to hear from those of you who might have any experiences to share.

Next Issue

In our next issue we are going to discuss what it is like to be a single parent, especially looking at the challenges and rewards of this form of parenting. We know that amongst the SNAP membership there are a number of single parents and we would love to hear your experiences and pray for you.

Remember, if you have a topic that you would like covered, do let us know.

SNAP Prayer Network

Let us pray for those families with special needs children, that God will continue to meet their needs and that they will experience joy as well as challenges in their family experience.

Let us also thank God for the work of ASNA (Adventist Special Needs Association) and ask for His continued blessing on the terrific work that they are doing.

We would also like to hear about your specific requests, however great or small.

Useful Websites for Parents

The following may be of use to you:

www.asna.info – relevant to this issue's discussion

www.heritagebuilders.com

www.christianitytoday.com

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/families

www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk

www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Your Contact Details

Please be sure to let us know if your contact details or family circumstances change so that we may update our records.

Our Contact Details

Mike & Vicky Beamish

16 Red Poll Close

Banbury

OX16 1UG

E-Mail: - snap.sda@tesco.net

Please ensure all contributions reach us for the next issue by 10th December 2008.