Thank you to Jo Freitag from Gifted Resources and Carolyn Jennings from Active Minds Warrnambool for talking to interested parents in February this year about setting up a parent support group. Since then a public meeting was held on Wednesday 11th March. As a result the Chip Family Support Group was developed by parents for parents.

**CHIP Family Support Group Geelong Inc.**

The CHIP Family Support Group Inc. was formally established as a not for profit incorporated association at a public meeting on Wednesday 11th March. The purpose of the group is to support parents of children with high intellectual potential; encourage the development and education of children with high intellectual potential; foster the special talents and interests of its members; provide an opportunity for children to interact with like-minded peers; the advancement of education generally; and the advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science.

Anyone interested in becoming part of the group, or participating in enrichment and extension activities, can contact any of the new committee members:
- President Sonia Petering on 52457 409
- Secretary Meg Kingsley on 52227763
- Treasurer Jo Bailey on 0409231220
- Professional Liaison Dr Sandra Lea-Wood on 0407320043

Membership is welcomed. Entrance fee to join the incorporated association is $10, annual fee is $20 per family.

It is intended that the group will arrange enrichment and educational activities for children. The first event planned is a Circus and clowning Workshop to be held on Sunday April 26th at 1pm at Highton Primary School. A Family Picnic has also been arranged for members of the group to meet each other on Sunday 29th March at 12 noon, BYO picnic lunch to be held at the Botanical Gardens, Geelong.

Proposed Activities for the future include Cartooning workshops, chess workshops, pizza and games nights, library tours, computer workshops, Lego workshops, art workshops, judo, music workshops, GPAC tours and shows, Werribee zoo activities, Botanical gardens walks, buses to CHIP activities in Melbourne, tours of relevant work places, history workshops, astronomical society talks, author talks, cooking classes etc.

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**Dear CHIP family,**

You’re invited to attend our first family picnic!
**Sunday March 29**
Geelong Botanic Gardens - from 12 noon
Please bring a picnic lunch

Come along and enjoy a relaxing afternoon with fun activities for the whole family.
A great opportunity for children to interact with like minded peers & parents to meet and share stories.

**RSVP**
Please email kingsleys@optusnet.com.au prior to Wednesday March 25 if you’ll be joining us.

Wet weather venue Run’M Ragged, Pakington St, Newtown
This will be confirmed via email on Friday March 27 if necessary.
Please refer to the booking form which is an attachment with the emailed newsletter.

Elementary Lessons for Mom

Author: Amy Price

Each month a different member of the SENG team describes a personal passion in the realm of social and emotional needs of the gifted. This article, authored by SENG Executive Director Amy Price, appeared last month in Parenting for High Potential, and is reprinted with permission of the National Association for Gifted Children, copyright 2008 NAGC.

Elementary Lessons for Mom

Just before the start of the school year, my family relocated from a bustling suburb of New York City to a peaceful rural community in the Hudson Valley, a family-friendly haven where we were certain to enjoy raising our family. Both our sons were gifted and to enter new schools. The older one would be a seventh grader in the middle school, where he would also attend advanced math classes at the high school, and the younger son would enter third grade at the local elementary school.

While our new district did not offer a gifted elementary school class like the magnet gifted program that my youngest attended in the city, this new district was well-reputed and took pains to assure us that they were experienced in meeting the needs of gifted children via differentiated learning in the classroom. I provided the school with my son’s records and samples of his work.

No one was prepared for the challenges that we would face with my son over the next two years. I had no inkling, either, that I was about to learn my most pivotal parenting lessons through this elementary journey with my son.

Signs of Trouble

Problems quickly surfaced. Although he initially achieved perfect scores on daily timed addition and subtraction tests, my son’s scores quickly declined. Reed was not completing timed tests and was answering basic questions incorrectly. I knew that he had mastered multiplication and division. How could these simple problems provide such a great challenge? Even worse, this once-articulate child now seemed unable to organize his thoughts on paper. Simple tasks like using vocabulary words in sentences became hurdles. Reed was reduced
to tears in reporting that he was finding the physical process of writing exhausting and difficult. With the onset of class lessons in cursive writing, his misery increased. So, too, did the phone calls and notes from the school.

My son’s difficulties were not limited to the academic arena. He became the subject of a laundry list of behaviors reported by the school. He cried easily and often. The more the teacher tried to communicate with him, the louder and longer he cried. He moved a lot. He slid his feet in and out of his sneakers. He tapped his pencil on the desk. He often knelt on his seat, or even stood beside his chair, while concentrating on assignments. He resisted moving from one activity to the next. He hummed while working on tasks. When he was asked to stop, the humming would start up again.

With the tactless honesty of an eight year old, Reed informed the teacher, in front of the class, that she was doing the math problem wrong. “Why,” he asked, “would you take all those steps just to come up with an answer that was obvious?”

At home, the simplest homework assignments became explosive battles. Assignments that could normally be completed in minutes dragged out for tearful hours. Reed was despondent, unmotivated, withdrawn and angry in turns. He would be unable to settle to go to sleep at night, even as he was complaining that he was really tired. He woke with painful stomach aches in the morning.

My heart was broken. Where was the exuberant son I had always enjoyed, and who was this sad child in his place?

Great Dilemma

Reed had earned a reputation as a student with social and emotional behavior problems. His self-esteem was on the ground. He was not learning much, and he was miserable. Our entire family was impacted and walking on eggshells to avoid further meltdowns.

What did my son want at this point? Simply to be “normal.” One evening, he shared a brief diary entry: “I wish I were normal. Normal means you can run fast and catch a ball. I’m slow and not good at catching. Normal kids say their favorite subjects are gym and recess. Mine are science and math. They like sports. I like to read...” In truth, there were many times that I also wished we could trade “gifted” for just average and happy.

Everyone genuinely wanted to help this boy. We were dedicated parents who would communicate our son’s needs and support solutions. The educators were experienced teachers and caring people. Yet the parent perspective and the school perspective on how to help Reed were initially at great odds. We suggested that the lack of academic challenge, the resulting frustration and even fear of feeling different from his classmates, might be the cause of – or at least a contributing factor toward – the troubling behaviors. The school, however, required our son’s behavior to improve before it would consider providing more advanced work.

I did what I was certain that any good mother would do. I set out on a mission to get Reed’s needs recognized and met. The problem was that I did not yet have an effective set of tools. I harnessed my fear and directed my anger at the very people who were in the position to help my son. I demanded change. This was a battle for my son’s well-being, and I was in active combat mode. Accusations and sarcasm were my weapons. And I cried. I spent one awful meeting with a principal, where not a word was exchanged. To my horror, I cried, and he handed out tissues. Much later, I found comfort in the words of our superintendent, also a parent, who explained that a parent’s pain is understandable and that tears of distress are humanizing.

My husband and I realized that we were in a “Catch-22” situation that needed impartial and specialized expertise. We decided to pursue a complete psycho-educational evaluation for Reed. The school did not request this and would therefore not pay for it. We silently said goodbye to our hope of affording a
finished basement for the children, and made an appointment for several days of testing. We had no knowledge of any psychologists versed in testing gifted children, and we were relatively new to the neighborhood, as well as to the gifted children field, but we were lucky in our choice.

**Discovering the Right Tools**

The report and subsequent meeting with the psychologist were life-changing events. Three things stand out in my memory of that day.

First, Reed was not gifted, he was “beyond gifted.” The psychologist showed us articles on the subject, and she later told our son, “If everyone sees life through a lens, and some people’s lenses are clear and others are cloudy, yours is an electron microscope. You are seeing things that others might not see.” Like many parents of gifted children who have faced challenges, we began to scour the internet and read articles and books. Each one led to a greater understanding of giftedness and resources to help our son and our family. Some articles that we shared with the school were helpful to the teachers, as well.

Second, we were cautioned that our son’s perfectionism needed to be addressed, and that he needed to work with someone who could help him understand and accept his giftedness. The professional told us that Reed was at risk for anxiety, depression and even suicide in his teen years – unless we intervened and helped find appropriate support to help him understand his feelings. This was terrifying news. Who could we turn to? We began to contact organizations from the web. We received information through the NAGC, The ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) Clearinghouse, The Davidson Institute for Talent Development, and SENG. We reached out, and caring experts reached back. We had found supports, not only for our son, but for us and for the educators.

Finally, the psychologist told us that she suspected that Reed had a sensory issue. She had noticed during testing that he moved a lot, didn’t always sit, and played with an item he held in his hand. She mentioned his resistance to writing down his work, and advised us that he did all calculations in his head until she told him that by not writing out his work he was getting wrong answers. One of the most wonderful things that happened for our son this difficult year, is that he was referred for sensory testing, diagnosed with a sensory integration disorder, and began therapies with a physical therapist who was licensed in treating sensory disorders. For Reed, this was the “missing link.”

**Great Outcomes**

Finally, we began to address the problem, not blame the school or the child. By the end of third grade, Reed was receiving sensory therapy twice per week. It was so effective that we implemented what we were learning into our daily routine at home, and then later at school. There are many types of sensory diagnoses, so the strategies we employed may not be right for others. However, it is important to know how fun and how easy it is to become a sensory-friendly household.

For Reed, swinging and spinning helped with calming and organization. If these motions served him well at therapy, how about doing it every day? We installed a platform swing in our basement, and an inexpensive womb-like swing from IKEA in his bedroom. I made time in the schedule to include sensory activities before and after school. To keep it interesting, we varied the activities each day.

I sent Reed to school with chewy sour candies or salty snacks to enjoy at break. These tastes and sensations were also calming. I provided unobtrusive “fidgets” in Reed’s pocket and backpack to keep his hands involved and help him concentrate on assignments. I knew that sensory issues were just one facet of my son, and together we found a Saturday gifted program.
within driving distance. We visited museums, traveled, and read books that helped Reed to maintain and develop his interest in learning.

Fourth grade began, and the improvement was undeniable. The school reported no social or emotional problems. They saw a happy and engaged student. While still reluctant to add greater academic challenge, lest they upset the apple cart, Reed began to advocate for himself. He was now more physically comfortable, and emotionally ready to move ahead. While I insisted that he approach his teachers and principal with respect, I did also support him in his efforts to raise the level of his school work. I learned that using an articulate advocate to represent his needs at school, allowed the information to be shared unhampered by a mother’s emotions. Reed rejected assignments based on work that he had already mastered during pre-tests and he began to furnish his own vocabulary replacement words: grandiloquent, insouciant, and incontrovertible. When the teacher asked if he understood the meaning of these words, he used them in written sentences for her. I’ll never know what she thought when she read, “My mother is torpid on the couch every night.”

By fifth grade, school leaders were willing to try dual-enrollment in elementary and middle school. This had never before been allowed in our school district. To ease the discomfort of school officials, and to take any pressure off our son, we were very careful to present this opportunity to Reed and to the middle school as a trial arrangement. “Your teachers notice that you feel ready to study advanced math and earth science. Since these classes are not offered in elementary school, they are willing to let you attend classes at the middle school in the morning, and then spend the rest of the day at your elementary school. If these become your favorite classes, that’s great. If not, you can stay at the elementary school all day and we’ll try other solutions.”

We wanted to give this arrangement every chance to succeed. So, we turned down district busing and I drove Reed from the middle school to the elementary school in the middle of each morning. This gave Reed a chance to decompress, and gave me an opportunity to see how he was really feeling. The ten minute car ride was the key: A familiar face, a salty or sour snack, a break from the hubbub of the hallways, and even a chance to engage in a calming sensory activity. Then, we were off to the elementary school.

Dual enrollment was a success. Reed loved his advanced courses, and also enjoyed being with his same-age classmates back at the elementary school. By eighth grade, he was bused to the high school for math and science, with a relatively easy transition. I returned to the elementary school and donated “sensory baskets” for teachers to try in their classrooms. While not every child will be diagnosed with a sensory disorder, it seemed that everyone could benefit from an occasional sensory break. Small squishy balls and other fidgets, sensory friendly snacks, and information about sensory breaks that the class can enjoy seemed a small way to say thank you for understanding. I hoped that our experiences with one challenging child would serve to empower the school to help other children. No crisis needed.

Today, Reed is a full-time high school student enjoying both the academic and the social opportunities afforded to him. His friends span several grades. He has a well-developed understanding of what he needs to feel comfortable, and he is confident in his ability to communicate his needs to the school and to me.

Lessons Mastered

I’ve learned to attack a problem, not the teacher. One way of starting a positive conversation with the school is: “I know it’s not easy being my Reed’s teacher. It’s not easy being his mom either. But what I really want you to know is that it’s not easy being Reed. I know
that you want to help him to succeed. Let’s talk about how we can team together to make this a great learning year for him.”

I’ve learned that there is no one correct way to meet the needs of a gifted child. Flexibility allows the school, the parent and sometimes outside professionals, to try a number of ideas and find solutions that are far more wonderful than any that I would have asked for on my own.

I’ve learned that great opportunities are possible for gifted kids, whether they attend school in an area with mandated gifted education, one with voluntary gifted programs or a school that does not have any specified programs for gifted children.

The greatest lesson I have learned, and my greatest gift to both of my sons, is that I have changed my expectations of what a gifted child needs. My goal for both boys is for them to confidently explore opportunities and make choices that will bring them great joy.

**SCHOOL NEWS**

**Hamlyn Banks Primary School**

In striving to meet the needs of all students, the following strategies are undertaken to cater for high achievers at Hamlyn Banks PS:

- Differentiated curriculum- a comprehensive assessment schedule ensures teaching and learning occurs at the student’s point of need.

- Careful placements to ensure students have a “like” group to work with in their class.

- Annual CHIP screening of all year 4 students to identify those students who may be “flying under the radar”.

- All ‘special needs’ students discussed at initial beginning year staff meeting, including those identified as CHIP.

- Opportunities to participate in programs such as Debating, Geelong Challenge, Werribee Zoo Frog Program, Robotics, Chess, NSW University Competitions, Cross-age Tutoring.

- Philosophy Group facilitated by Principal, Ross Hayward.

- Extension software e.g. Math Trek 7,8,9

- On Demand testing program

- Student Support Group Meetings where needed.

- Inquiry Learning Approach

- Consultation with CHIP centre.

- Individual Learning Improvement Plans for extension

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**ALISON BROWN RIDING THE WAVES**

**PARENTS FORUM**

Living with bright and capable young children can be an absolute delight, as they quickly develop and become increasingly aware of the world around them. This awareness and rapid development, however, often brings with it a heightened intensity in social, emotional and physical issues. Encountering frustrations and perfectionism in a 2 year old, an intense sense of fairness and social justice in a 4 year old, and an insatiable thirst for knowledge in a 6 year old can leave parents wondering how best to meet the
needs of bright little children who seem to be “marching to the beat of a different drum”. “Riding the Waves” is a monthly forum for parents of emotionally intense and gifted children. With a range of topics and techniques presented each month, this forum provides an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with parents sharing similar experiences. Come along to the topics that interest you or whichever months you are free. As well as general discussion, these monthly meetings will cover topics as follows:

- Emotional Intensity (November 2008)
- Perfectionism (February 2009)
- Social interactions (March 2009)
- Thirst for knowledge (April 2009)
- Organisational skills (May 2009)
- Obsessive behaviours (June 2009)
- Extra curricular activities (July 2009)
- Modifying school and homework task

**DATE:** 4th Tuesday of each month  
**TIME:** 7.30 – 8.30pm  
**VENUE:** Melbourne University – Hawthorn Campus (Auburn Road - Mel Ref: 59E2)  
**COST:** $35.00 per session *(Rebates available through most private health funds or through Medicare with a GP referral)*

These forums will be held on Tuesday evenings in Hawthorn. Alison is considering providing these forums next year once a month during the morning in Croydon. Please contact Alison to register your interest.

Private Suite  
24 Robinson Street  
Malvern Vic 3144  
Phone: (03) 9824 6617  
Mobile: 0408 177982

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### Some Websites of Interest.

- Nanowrimo  
  [http://www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org)
- SEE Stanford Engineering Everywhere  
  [http://see.stanford.edu/default.aspx](http://see.stanford.edu/default.aspx)
- Online French course from University of Texas  
  [http://www.laits.utexas.edu/](http://www.laits.utexas.edu/)

- [http://www.giftedresources.org/web/newsletter.html](http://www.giftedresources.org/web/newsletter.html)
- [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)
- [http://www.helendowland.fasthit.net/What%20is%20a%20gifted%20child.htm](http://www.helendowland.fasthit.net/What%20is%20a%20gifted%20child.htm)
- [www.gerric@unsw.edu.au](http://www.gerric@unsw.edu.au)
- [http://www.resourceroom.net/gtld/index.asp](http://www.resourceroom.net/gtld/index.asp)

### Role of the CHIP Centre Geelong

The Chip Centre supports Children of High Intellectual Potential (CHIP), their families and schools through identification, counselling, cluster programs and parent information sessions. **We are also accredited service providers for the Department of Education and Childhood Development** in the areas of assessment and professional development.

### Holiday Programs

CHIP Holiday Programs Melbourne can be found at:

[www.chip.edu.au](http://www.chip.edu.au)


**Thank you to Kerrie Duan and Jo Freitag for your contributions to the CHIP Chat.**
To Develop Children of High Intellectual Potential

Dr Sandra Lea-Wood
Manager
CHIP Centre Geelong
Mobile 0407320043
slewood@bigpond.net.au

WORKSHOP BOOKING FORM

To ensure a place, please complete and post to:
Jo Foley - P O Box 109, Lara VIC 3212

CIRCUS SKILLS AND CLOWNING WORKSHOP
Venue: Highton Primary School - Sunday April 26, from 1:00 - 4:30 pm.

Payment for all workshops is required in advance - no refunds are offered for non-attendance.

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Terms:

- KEYP LEVEL RANGE
- CHIP Family Support Group Programs are designed to cater for primary and early secondary school level students.
- Generally all workshops are suitable for students in years Prep to 9, but this may vary depending on the activity and will be noted in the program description.
- LUNCH/SNACKS
- All children are expected to bring a packed afternoon tea. We may make additional refreshments available.
- WITHDRAWAL FEES
- Confirmation of bookings are not sent out. No refund is available for withdrawal from program once booked.
- CANCELLATION OF WORKSHOPS
- If there are insufficient numbers booked to attend a workshop two days before it is due to be run, it will be cancelled.
- If you pay for a session that is subsequently cancelled, you will be fully refunded for that session.
- It is rare for a session to be cancelled.
- PRESENTERS
- CHIP Family Support Group Inc. is proud to work with a team of fine presenters who are expert in their areas and passionate in one or more areas of knowledge and keen to pass on this expertise to children. The presenters enjoy working hard to devise interesting programs with stimulating content and activities. All our presenters have a current working with children card.

Office use only
amount paid:                  
date collected:  
cash | cheq | direct deposit | date banked:  

To Develop Children of High Intellectual Potential