

19 February 2007

**100 MYTIME GROUPS AROUND AUSTRALIA A LIFE-SAVER FOR FAMILIES WHO HAVE A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY**

The 100<sup>th</sup> MyTime peer support group around Australia and the first in the Australian Capital Territory launched today in Canberra, creating extra local support for parents and carers of children with a disability or a chronic medical condition in every state and territory across Australia.

The group was launched by The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services at Noah's Ark Resource Centre, Rivett.

"The Australian Government is very proud to fund the MyTime support groups," Mr Shorten said. "Families of young children with disability can feel isolated and under pressure, and these groups allow them to get support from people who know what they are going through. It's great the families in Canberra can now share that support through MyTime at Noah's Ark Resource Centre in Rivett."

Almost 600 families have joined MyTime since its launch in April 2007, with a third of families located in regional areas.

A parent from the recently launched Enfield group says, "MyTime is a great chance to talk with others in similar circumstances, to realise that you are not the only one struggling with medical, physical, and emotional issues. It is a wonderful support group which we all look forward to each week ... MyTime is a much needed support for families with special needs in our community."

A Hawkesbury parent says, "I have watched our daughter achieve things that I didn't think she would do for many years. I have learnt and gained so much throughout MyTime and have become very grateful for the time we share as I now know and can see that my daughter can do the things we were told she would never do, with the wonderful information and guidance of MyTime."

One Grovely carer says, "It's great to be in a group where our children's differences aren't something to be explained or questioned, but are what gives us something in common."

According to Christian Thompson, Director of Community Programs at the Parenting Research Centre, coordinating body for the initiative, "Parents and carers are reporting that MyTime is a place where they feel completely accepted, and that they are surprised by how much difference it makes having a completely supportive space where they can share experiences, catch up with others who understand what they are going through, in a space where their child's disability does not make them feel different."

"Parents and carers are finding that they have common issues regardless of their background or their child's disability or medical condition. Already we are seeing mini-communities spring up around MyTime, with families continuing friendships outside of group meetings."

## MyTime

- has a facilitator supporting parents with information, topics or activities of interest as identified by the parents
- has a play helper who can lead children in activities such as singing, drawing, playing with toys or blocks or sand, so parents spend time focusing on catching up with other parents
- will provide opportunities for parents to connect to their community
- is open to parents and carers who have a young child under school age with a disability or a chronic medical condition and who are eligible for the Carer Allowance (Child).
- is a \$9 million national initiative funded by Australian Government department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

The Parenting Research Centre is managing the Australia wide rollout of MyTime in partnership with over 60 local family and parenting services. By 2010, the Centre will rollout a total of 317 MyTime groups.

In the period February-April 2008, new MyTime groups will also be launched in Cook (ACT), Wollongong, Yass, Dapto, Glenbrook, Randwick and Liverpool (New South Wales), Hackham and Copper Coast (South Australia), Bendigo, Camberwell and Benalla (Victoria) and Rockingham (Western Australia), bringing totals to:

New South Wales	31 groups
Victoria	30 groups
Queensland	13 groups
Western Australia	11 groups
South Australia	10 groups
Tasmania	3 group
ACT	1 group
NT	1 group

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