

This piece was originally written for the Gifted Awareness Week blog in 2015 under the title "To the true heroes and heroines of Gifted Awareness Week". Its message remains true and relevant.

In praise of parents

I'd like to dedicate my post for Gifted Awareness Week to **parents** – to the countless Mums and Dads who struggle so hard on behalf of their little ones, who so often encounter disbelief and put-downs, and who are so rarely the focus of our attention and praise.



It's continuously fascinating but not an easy job, being the parent of a little mind and imagination running on supercharge. There's the endless search for knowledge ("Mummy, where does time come from?" "Um – I'll tell you tomorrow"), the unexpected forays into scientific investigation ("But *you* said Santa's reindeers stayed on the roof so I *just* climbed up to look for their hoof-prints"), and that biological mystery, the complete mismatch between parent and child sleeping requirements. And that's before they even start school, let alone hit adolescence....

But it's when parents encounter the rest of the world that life can become very hard. Other parents, neighbours, sometimes even one's own relatives, can find your parenting experience so far outside their own that they reject it as exaggerating, boastful, wishful thinking, believing yourself or your child to be "superior" to others, and so on. Such attitudes from others are deeply undermining to parent confidence. Add to that the hurt a parent feels for their child when that happy little person at home is the one always left standing alone on the fringe of the group. Not all parents

of gifted children experience this, but for those who do, it's daunting, to say the very least.

And then along comes school. Surely, parents think, teachers will understand. They'll welcome a child who can already read, has got maths concepts, loves to learn. There is much more likelihood today than there was even twenty years ago that that's exactly what *will* happen. But we are a long way from completely winning that battle yet – that's why we still need Gifted Awareness Week!

But here's the point. Parents never give up. Despite disparaging put-downs from other parents, despite the doubts raised about one's own parenting skills, despite the hurt felt on behalf of one's child, despite the indifference, sometimes even hostility, of some teachers, despite the lack of teacher training in this field, despite learning programmes and assessment systems which make no real provision for their children, *parents never give up*. Without parents, we would not have the New Zealand Association for Gifted Children and all that that body has done on behalf of this country's gifted children. It was a parent who first brought a Minister of the Crown to One Day School, and we got the first Ministry Advisory Group as a result. It was highly articulate parents who packed an election meeting at the George Parkyn Centre, and we got a Ministerial Working Party with many positive outcomes. Individually, sometimes very alone, and collectively, parents make a difference.

So in this Gifted Awareness Week for 2015, let us celebrate the work of those unsung heroes and heroines, the parents, who continue so courageously to support their own child and then the children of others as we strive for caring, understanding and equitable provision for our gifted children.

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