

SPED Strong Tribes Program

I. Proposal Summary

SPED Homeschool is seeking funding to underwrite the development and launch of the SPED Strong Tribes Program. The goal of this program is to create local support groups throughout the United States for families who homeschool special needs children. These groups would fill the current support deficits special education homeschooling families face, increasing the effectiveness of their homeschooling outcomes.

Through collaborative efforts with program directors already successfully implementing local support for special needs families and special needs homeschooling families, SPED Homeschool has initiated plans to create a reproducible program using unique elements from each of these program's proven support strategies. Community building, respite, inclusion activities, local resource networking, and personal growth are the five strategic components upon which the SPED Strong Tribes program will focus its support objectives.

The overall goal of the SPED Strong Tribes will be accomplished as local volunteers are equipped and trained using the program material, along with ongoing leadership support provided by SPED Homeschool, to create and maintain their own tribes. A budget of \$50,000 is needed to cover the costs of compiling the open-sourced materials into manuals, developing and producing leadership training videos, editing all documents and videos, upgrading website technology for secured storage of program materials, field testing, and marketing.

Overall success of the program will be measured by the number of tribes created, their long-term sustainability, family satisfaction surveys, the number of networking resources added to the Tribes database, and the financial sustainability of this program through yearly charter fees and group membership dues.

II. Proposal Justification

This grant proposal justification aims to show the growth rate of the homeschooling population over the past 20 years as well as the reasoning behind this growth, the advantages which attract parents towards homeschooling a child with special educational needs, and the support needed to maintain a healthy environment for home education.

Growth

Over 20 years ago, Leslie Dahm wrote, "More parents are continuing to withdraw their children, some of whom have special education concerns, from conventional schools to educate them at home (Dahm, 1996)." (1)

Citing studies from around this same time frame, Dr. Brian Ray from NHERI (National Home Education Research Institute) stated, "With the growing home school population, there are also tributes to its success in learner outcomes (Farris, 1997; Klicka, 1995; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999). Duvall, Ward, Delquadri, and Greenwood (1997) even suggested that learning disabled students who are educated at home experience greater academic success than their counterparts in a public school setting." (2)

Soon after, in 1999, HSLDA (Home School Legal Defence Association) reviewed membership applications of families with special needs children and found "the cumulative percentage of families is 9.8." But they went on to add, "there is no indication of how many special needs children each family might have. If one child, 9.8 % seems to approximate the incidence of special education students within the conventional school setting (10-12%.) If the number of children per family matches the 1.4 mean as seen later in this study, then that overall percentage could be 13.7." (2)

Looking at the above numbers in light of the National Center for Educational Statistics' 13.3 percentage rate reported for IDEA services in the United States (2000-2001) it is very probable the calculation of 13.7 percent made by Ray in relation to HSLDA's data comes close to quantifying the special education homeschooling population. (3)

Next, considering recent homeschooling statistics which state there are "about 2.3 million home-educated students in the United States (as of spring 2016)" and "the homeschool population is continuing to grow (at an estimated 2% to 8% per annum over the past few years) (4) then interpreting the updated NCES rate of 2016 of 13 percent (3), there were an estimated 300,000 special education students being homeschooled in 2016, and with a 5% growth rate (averaged from estimated growth rates from above) then the rate of increase to the special education homeschooling population is 15,000 per year.

Parental Intervention

The general movement towards the increase in home education over the past 20 years has been associated with how "citizens begin to experience 'some public sector institutions as controlling rather than enabling, as limiting options rather than expanding them, as wasting rather than making the best use of resources' (Martin, 1993, p. 8)." (5)

Concurring evidence points specifically at parental dissatisfaction with public school special education programs and their limited ability to help teach to the needs of their children. In one study, "(98%) said they [homeschooled] because they believed their children could achieve a higher level of academic achievement at home than in the public school, (Abell, 2002)." (5) Another study reported, "The majority of survey parents (62%) turned to home schooling when dissatisfied with conventional schooling." (2)

Special Education Homeschool Advantage

Differentiated instruction is one advantage of homeschooling a student with special educational needs, which Ray extrapolated from this study. "Meighan (1995) cites several advantages to homeschooling: education that is multi-dimensional and flexible, learning that focuses on and is directed by the student...The informal environment that homeschooling provides allows "differentiated instruction," not a one-size-fits-all version that is typical in public schools where teachers must meet the varied needs of twenty or more students in the classroom. The personal approach of schooling at home provides a natural environment to customize the curriculum for learning disabled and academically gifted children alike (Ray, 2002)." (6)

Active learning and a less restrictive environment are also advantages of homeschooling, especially for boys, whose "energetic natures and tendency to physical expression can more easily be accommodated in home-based education. Many are concerned that a highly disproportionate number of public school special-education students are boys and that boys are 2.5 times as likely as girls in public schools to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder." (ADHD). (4)

One-on-one instruction, Ray cites, is probably the greatest advantage homeschooling offers in relation public school special education instruction as "the majority of the formal school time was spent in direct, one-on-one instruction by the mother. The child not receiving direct instruction was engaged in a variety of activities: independent study, reading, playing educational computer games, family chores, video watching, and playing." (2) In a comparison study done by Dr. Duvall, Chris Klicka of HSLDA points out the following about the difference between public school and homeschool special education instruction and achievement:

"His results show that the homeschooled, special needs students were academically engaged about two-and-one-half times as often as public school special needs students! He found the children in the public school special education classrooms spent 74.9 percent of their time with no academic responses, while the homeschool children only spent 40.7 percent of their time with no academic responses. He also found that homeschools have children and teachers sitting side-by-side or face-to-face 43 percent of the time, while public education classrooms had such an arrangement for special needs children only 6 percent of the time. This was a tremendous advantage for the homeschoolers." (7)

Klicka also added the studies findings showed "homeschool students averaged six months' gain in reading compared to only a one-half month gain by the special public school students. Furthermore, the homeschool special needs students during the year gained eight months in written language skills compared to the public school counterparts who gained only two-and-one-half months."(7)

To wrap up his point in how helpful homeschooling can be for special needs students, Klicka stated, "Dr. Duvall summarized, 'These results clearly indicate that parents, even though they are not certified teachers, can create instructional environments at home that assist students with

learning disabilities to improve their academic skills. This study clearly shows that home schooling is beneficial for special needs students.” (7)

Special Needs Homeschooling Support Needs

In general, homeschooling brings additional stresses into a home. Ray cites that much of the literature focused on homeschooling moms “reveal the strains, stresses, and tensions clearly believed to be, and accepted as, inherent in the home schooling process.” In Ray’s concluding statements in this research-based article, he states, “In this review of the pertinent literature on home schooling, family role research, and family stress research, one consistent and unifying element has appeared and reappeared time and again - the element of stress.” (8)

Parental stress also coincides directly with the number of hours a parent dedicates to care for the needs of an atypical child. Nauert cites research gathered from 82 parents of children with various disabilities saying, “Daily cortisol patterns of parents of children with disabilities showed chronic strain that was much higher than normal on days when the parents spent time with their children.” (9) Stressors which another study quantifies by stating, “Between the amplified stress in their lives and feelings of estrangement from a world of ‘typical children,’ parents of children with special needs frequently report feelings of anxiety, depression, loss, loneliness, and hopelessness.” (10)

And although families can seek therapy and counseling to work through these issues, research shows the more effective way to meet the needs of these parents is through support communities where “parents gain feelings of normalcy, tips on how to manage their day-to-day challenges, security in having available support, and the benefits of helping others” (11) This study further states that “some parents reveal fundamental personal changes that occur after connecting” which included “enhanced feelings of empowerment, reduced isolation and a general sense of personal well-being.” (11)

Additionally, Mandell’s study looking at the efficacy of increasing community support over increasing professional therapy supports for families stated “Respite care and home- and community-based aides may considerably reduce stress on families.” But he also points out in the concluding remarks in his research that “The present study offers evidence in support of the need to expand these community-based service options” although “respite is not universally available.” (12)

Lack of respite and community support within the special needs homeschooling community was recently (October 2018) quantified in a survey conducted within the SPED Homeschool Facebook Support Group which currently supports over 1.5k members. In our group poll we asked members if their families had access to a reliable support. Only 5% responded positively. The other 95% mostly stated they lacked all support (60%) and the other 35% said support was only occasional or partial-family support.

Conclusion

The special education homeschooling population is continuing to grow as parents recognize how homeschooling can help their children learn beyond the limitations of public special education programs. But the unique nature of parenting as well as homeschooling a child with special needs adds greater stressors on these families due to the combined demands of homeschooling, providing longer hours of care for their special needs children, and being isolated from community support. Local support groups which would facilitate relationships between parents, respite care for their children, opportunities to integrate into “normal” activities, and networking of ideas and resources will strengthen these families through these successful research-based supports and thus smooth the way towards healthier home environments for these families to home educate their special needs children.

III. Grant Facilitator History and Background

SPED Homeschool incorporated in September of 2017 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to serve the resource, support, and training needs of the special education homeschooling community. Before the founding of SPED Homeschool, Peggy Ployhar, SPED Homeschool’s Founder and CEO, and the members of the SPED Homeschool board of directors, each worked independently for the past 10 to 20 years influencing the special education homeschooling community through their speaking, books, training materials, advocacy, and service to national and state homeschooling organizations. SPED Homeschool is a product of the collaborative efforts of these individuals, as well as a growing team of uniquely trained special education homeschooling parents and many other organizations who support special education homeschooling families with the goal of establishing a trusted organization parents can turn to for references to reliable resources, training, and advice in homeschooling their student with special educational needs.

Peggy Ployhar has also held many leadership positions in both the Christian and homeschooling communities, including directing growth and leadership training for 2,000+ local support groups for MOPS International as an Area Coordinator over the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. SPED Homeschool is not a religiously focused nonprofit, but the bylaws of SPED Homeschool require the CEO, board of directors, and all team members agree with, and base their work on, the SPED Homeschool Ministry Mission Agreement statement, which is as follows:

"All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Website and Online Support Statistics (September 1, 2017 *launch* - November 15, 2018 *current-date*): SPED Homeschool’s website, www.spedhomeschool.com, has received 167,785 visits and monthly visits currently average around 10,000. We also support over 1.5k families on the SPED Homeschool Support group where one parent shared the following feedback with us. “I remember how thankful I was to find the SPED group, this was my community. I was recently venting to a friend about homeschool and how difficult it can be and I was told to ‘find my tribe.’ What tribe? There is no tribe for special needs children and we don’t fit into the ‘homeschool’ tribe. My tribe is this community. I can’t wait to have a local tribe.”

IV.501(c)(3) Ruling Letter - Attached

IV.Proposal Budget and Timeline

The proposed budget is as follows:

Team hours (\$15/hr) and payroll expense	\$36,000 (2,000 hours)
Website & Secured Data Storage	\$3,000
Field Testing	\$4,000
Project Modification after Field Testing	\$3,000
Advertising	\$3,000
Graphic Design	\$1,000
Total	\$50,000

The SPED Strong tribes project development will begin either on January 1, 2019 or upon securing at least \$40,000 in project funding. The development of program materials is anticipated to take 6 months, field testing will take 3 months, and project modification another month before launch.

References

- (1) Education at home, with help from school. *Educational Leadership*, (Dahm 1996)
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ534022>
- (2) Home Schooling Children With Special Needs: A Descriptive Study (Ray 2002)
<https://www.nheri.org/2002/04/10/home-school-researcher-home-schooling-children-with-special-needs-a-descriptive-study/>
- (3) National Center for Education Statistics <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64>
- (4) RESEARCH FACTS ON HOMESCHOOLING (Ray 2018)
<https://www.nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/>
- (5) Explaining the Change in Homeschooling, 1970-2010 (Ray 2013)
<https://www.nheri.org/explaining-the-change-in-homeschooling-1970-2010/>
- (6) An Exploratory Study of U. S. Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs About Homeschooling Outcomes (Ray 2012)
<https://www.nheri.org/an-exploratory-study-of-u-s-pre-service-teachers-beliefs-about-homeschooling-outcomes/>
- (7) Homeschooling and Special Needs Children (Klicka 2009) https://hslida.org/strugglinglearner/sn_Klicka.asp
- (8) The Perceived Impact of Home Schooling on the Family in General and the Mother-Teacher in Particular (Ray 1999)
<https://www.nheri.org/home-school-researcher-the-perceived-impact-of-home-schooling-on-the-family-in-general-and-the-mother-teacher-in-particular-2/>
- (9) Parental Stress with Special Needs (Nauert 2015)
<https://psychcentral.com/news/2009/02/19/parental-stress-with-special-needs-children/4219.html>
- (10) Parent-to-Parent Links: Building Networks for Parents of Hospitalized Children (Winch & Christof 2010)
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15326888chc1702_6
- (11) A Qualitative Study of Parent to Parent Support for Parents of Children with Special Needs (1998)
<https://academic.oup.com/jpepsy/article/23/2/99/914647>
- (12) The Interplay of Outpatient Services and Psychiatric Hospitalization Among Medicaid-Enrolled Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders (Mandell 2012)
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/1107676>