

Weekend Residential Camps for Gifted children and their parents.

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“If gifted and talented students are to achieve their potential, they require expanded educational opportunities beyond the scope of the regular school program. The students need to explore different career options, crafts, ideas and skills that challenge their abilities. Our children need personal attention, adult commitment, role models they can admire and talk to” (Hegeman, 1987, p123).

This statement has been at the forefront of our minds as we have developed and run our weekend residential camps around Australia for the past 27 years. Initially run through NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc., once they no longer offered them, Australian Gifted Support Centre took over the role.

The Aims for providing the camps have been to create an environment offering

- Understanding
- Challenge
- A sense of belonging and acceptance for children and parents
- Room to risk take and make mistakes
- Opportunity to find like - minded peers and develop friendships

The specific goals are to assist the children to

- Develop social skills
- Establish friendships
- Be enriched through experiential activities
- Learn through open ended creative activities
- Engage in passions / interests with like- minded peers
- Learn through play and minimal technology

And for parents and children to experience the program together

Activities include

- Intellectual – enrichment and extension, not acceleration
- Creative & imaginative. - there are plenty of opportunities for the children to share their ideas and create their own products within each workshop
- Physical - both organized games and free play in a wonderful natural setting exploring the bush
- Hands on, with very little paper and pen activities, unless the children choose to do these
- Open ended tasks and problem-solving challenges
- Group and individual approaches - the children have the choice as to how they might approach most activities
- Board games and other opportunities for social interaction with both children and adults
- Free time

Some things that children report that they enjoy about camp include

- I made a friend
- Everyone was nice
- Choices – activities, games and food
- I learned lots of new things
- People listened to my ideas
- Some of the work was really hard
- This is my safe place
- Really nice teachers
- Interesting and challenging activities
- Blending in – being one of the crowd
- Freedom and flexibility
- Playing chess with one of the other kids' dad, and beating him sometimes
- I can be myself
- Free time was the best – just playing with my friends and going exploring
- The craft table was great because we could just make things all weekend
- Performing in the concert

Parents also report that the strengths of the camp for them include

- Watching my child fit into a group for the first time ever
- Meeting other parents who understand
- Attending the parent workshops to learn and share
- Learning alongside my child
- The chance to spend some quality time with my child/ren away from day to day demands
- Realising there are other children like mine
- Spending time with other interesting children
- Gaining ideas and confidence to continue to advocate for my child
- Watching the amazing talent of the children in the impromptu concert
- The program has benefited my whole family, and I have seen that it has benefited other families as well.

This year's Melbourne camp at Gilwell Park in Gembrook is a Harry Potter theme which provides so many opportunities for all those attending to get 'lost' in the world of Hogwarts. The children will have the opportunity to share their knowledge of the books and movies, to participate in classes run by the Professors and to dress as one of their favourite characters. Parents are also very welcome to join in all the activities (including the dress up), and also assist with the food preparation. Children only need a minimal knowledge of Harry Potter to enjoy the weekend. Many families have reported their children leave camp keen to know more – often reading the series shortly after.

We encourage all parents to attend as this is often an experience that families can reflect on, for weeks/months after. The children love to have mum or dad's attention without the distractions of our busy daily lives, and mum and/or dad often find they see their children in a different light after watching them at camp.