

# snapshot



## Camp Quality and Redkite parent groups evaluation

### background

In 2011, Camp Quality commissioned an extensive Family Research Project to explore the unmet psychosocial needs of children (0-13 years) with cancer and their families.

Many parents participating in the project mentioned the need for assistance in processing their experiences throughout the cancer journey.

The four key psychosocial needs identified by parents were<sup>i</sup>:

- the opportunity to talk with other parents about childhood cancer and its impact
- help to deal with stress on the family and relationship with spouse
- help to cope with feelings of sadness, guilt, anxiety and stress
- access to information, counselling and support groups.

### parent groups

In response to the findings, Camp Quality and Redkite formed a unique partnership to create and pilot free psychosocial support groups for parents. The groups were facilitated by experienced Redkite Social Workers and took place within the relaxed, safe and supportive environment of a Camp Quality Family Camp. This built on the existing support services and unique areas of expertise of each organisation.

The aim of the groups was to provide participants with an opportunity to:

- overcome barriers identified in the research (such as time, awareness or

“pride”) to accessing psychosocial support

- share experiences about childhood cancer and its impacts with other parents in a safe, professionally facilitated environment
- learn and share techniques to help maintain and strengthen resilience and manage the challenges they face
- offer and accept support in the group
- explore options for ongoing formal and informal support
- gain a better understanding about services such as continued counselling that are available to them
- form new connections with other parents.

The content and structure of the groups were informed by further research conducted by Redkite and Camp Quality, which included a literature review and focus groups with parents.

### pilot evaluation

Between November 2012 and June 2013, 120 parents attended a group (of 159 parents who attended the ten family camps in the pilot). An evaluation of the pilot groups was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the groups in meeting the program aims, to evaluate the collaboration between Camp Quality and Redkite, and to determine the feasibility of expanding the Parent Groups nationally<sup>ii</sup>.

The evaluation was underpinned by a theoretical framework based on effective group practice and adult learning theory<sup>iii</sup>, which involved collecting participant views about:

group  
experience

relevance,  
learning &  
engagement

behaviour  
change

Data collection included:

- parent surveys (117 participants) and follow up interviews (34 participants)
- interviews with camp volunteer leaders (10 participants) and group facilitators (6 participants)
- a survey of senior Camp Quality and Redkite staff (4 from each organisation).

### **group experience**

Results from the evaluation demonstrated that the groups provided a safe, professionally facilitated environment in which parents felt comfortable to share their stories and experiences with other parents.

Survey responses and follow-up interviews with participants indicated that, in general, parents:

- found it **easy and comfortable to talk** in the group environment
- **shared their stories and listened** to those of other parents
- **felt 'heard' and understood** each other
- expressed their emotions and **opened up**

- **96% agreed they felt 'heard' in the group setting**
- **85% agreed they felt comfortable to participate and share their ideas**

Source: Post group survey, all respondents, n=117. Only 'agree' responses are included, not 'tend to agree'

***"My husband for the first time ever took part. The group environment made him happy to share... He's never opened up before so I was really surprised and so was he."***

Source: Four week follow up interviews

### **relevance, learning and engagement**

The majority of parents found the group relevant and left with immediate learning and/or benefits contributing to their emotional wellbeing. Parents often left feeling:

- **less alone** and less isolated
- that their feelings and experiences were **'normal'**

- a sense of **relief**
- more **hopeful**

They often left with:

- a new sense of **perspective**
- new **tips and techniques** to help them manage day to day
- more **awareness of support available**

- **67% agreed they felt 'less alone' in the cancer journey**
- **56% agreed they felt more optimistic**

Source: Post group survey, all respondents, n=117. Only 'agree' responses are included, not 'tend to agree'

***"I feel now a lot more like I am not alone so much. There's other people that are going through similar experiences and it's ok to feel the way that I feel."***

Source: Four week follow up interviews

### **parent behaviour**

Parents often found it difficult to identify specific things they had done differently as a result of attending the group. However, they commonly spoke of:

- there being more connection and sense of **community** after the group and for the rest of the camp
- making **connections with other parents** that continued after the camp
- accessing or being more open to **accessing further support**
- more actively **volunteering or supporting charities** like Camp Quality and Redkite.

- **Around a third (37%) agreed they were more likely to access further support for themselves as a result of participating**

Source: Post group survey, all respondents, n=117. Only 'agree' responses included, not 'tend to agree'

***"It brought us all closer and made us more of a community."***

***"I ordinarily would not participate in a pilot or support group. This has changed my mindset."***

Source: Four week follow up interviews

## overall

Results from the pilot evaluation demonstrated that the groups were beneficial for the vast majority of participants. In terms of intended benefits, all of the stated aims of the pilot were met, although the degree to which they occurred varied.

The evaluation also provided evidence that the collaboration between the two organisations had been successful.

As a result of the findings, the decision was made to roll out the parent groups nationally.

- 85% agreed they will recommend the group to other parents

Source: Post group survey, all respondents, n=117. Only 'agree' responses are included, not 'tend to agree'

## parent groups 2014

In 2014, nine parent groups were delivered across Australia, with a total of 108 participants (of 139 possible camp attendees). The groups were run in all states and territories, including some regional areas.

The groups were evaluated to ensure outcomes were in line with those found throughout the pilot. The findings confirmed the ongoing success of the collaboration, demonstrating that the groups continued to be of value and benefit to family members.

## ongoing delivery of parent groups

Redkite and Camp Quality are continuing this unique and effective collaboration, expecting to deliver 10 groups at family camps throughout 2015. The groups will continue to be monitored, with input sought from participating families and Redkite and Camp Quality staff and volunteers.

## more information

For more information about this study, please contact the Redkite Research and Evaluation team by calling **1800 733 548** or emailing [re@redkite.org.au](mailto:re@redkite.org.au)



Redkite is a national charity providing essential support to children and young people with cancer (0-24 years) and their families and support networks.

**1800 REDKITE** (1800 733 548)  
[www.redkite.org.au](http://www.redkite.org.au)



Camp Quality delivers national programs that build resilience and optimistic behaviours for children (0-13 years) living with cancer in Australia.

**02 9876 0500**  
[www.campquality.org.au](http://www.campquality.org.au)

<sup>i</sup> Camp Quality (2011). *Understanding the needs of families living with cancer in Australia*. Camp Quality Family Research Project, ARTD Consultants

<sup>ii</sup> Woodroffe, K., & Tweedie, R. (2013). *Camp Quality and Redkite Parent Groups Pilot: Final Evaluation*. Sydney, Australia: Redkite.

<sup>iii</sup> Incorporating: Brookfield, S. D. (1991). The development of critical reflection in adulthood. *New Education*. 13 (1): 39-48.; Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1998). *Evaluating training Programs: the four levels*. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.; and Yalom, I, D. (2005). *Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. Basic Books