

BusyFeet expanding special kids' horizons

SPECIAL kids benefit from getting out of the house and having safe fun – and the kids' hard-pressed parents and carers deserve a well-earned rest. The BusyFeet dance and movement program, forged by the Rotary Club of Chadstone-East Malvern, Vic, meets both needs.

BusyFeet's tailored program allows kids with disabilities, including Downs Syndrome, autism, deafness and palsy, aged from six to 16, to dance with free expression at their own pace in a safe and secure environment. The children can experiment with costumes and props, while learning new songs and choreography. Not only do the children have fun and make friends, they also practise concentrating and learning to follow instructions and group etiquette.

Often, kids who were initially apprehensive and dragging their heels

to the first session, are soon running through the hall door to get their nametags, even if they were unwell during that day at school. Sessions run during the school year, typically with one weekday afternoon session and another Saturday morning.

Many parents have expressed delight at how well their children have responded, especially after previously struggling with other mainstream activity programs.

One mother wrote in, "My girl is non-verbal and autistic. The only expectation I had with BusyFeet was to see her happy. Well, two years later, after weekly sessions at two groups, we have sure got enjoyment and a lot more."

Parents and carers also comment how they have personally benefitted through connecting with other adults in similar situations. "We can network while the class is on and take a step

back and chat. It's a lifeline," wrote one carer. "We've opened up a new world, discovering specialists and local carer and disability programs."

Other Rotary clubs have now used the template developed by the Rotary Club of Chadstone-East Malvern to start up additional groups based on the pilot in Stonnington. The Rotary Club of Altona City runs the Hobsons Bay BusyFeet cluster, the Rotary clubs of Canterbury and Camberwell run BusyFeet Booroondara and the Rotary Club of North Brighton operates BusyFeet Bayside.

The Rotary Club of Chadstone-East Malvern is keen to expand assistance to disabled children and their families and is happy to assist any clubs wishing to start up a BusyFeet group in their area.

BusyFeet kids are now looking forward to performing at the Zone 7B and 8 Conference at Hobart in September, after being invited by Director Noel Trevaskis. Clubs and individuals are beginning fundraising to cover travel costs.

To find out more about BusyFeet, contact Lin Hughes via linhughes@aol.com.au or visit busyfeet.org.au.

