

Networking Now

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Back in the 80's, a buzzword emerged: Networking. Today, its general meaning is widely understood, but its practical application often evades homeschoolers. How does one create a network of homeschoolers to begin a support group? What are other support groups doing to deal with the challenges that arise? What networks exist in other states and how can a similar one be built in one's own state? What can be done to draw homeschoolers together to address legislative issues? Where are these homeschoolers and how can they be reached?

Until recently, networking among homeschoolers was, at best, hit-or-miss. Word of mouth, newsletters, local meetings, conferences, and blind telephone leads were the best anyone could do. The great thing is that it worked as well as could be expected. Despite heroic efforts around the world to build viable networks, homeschoolers' connections outside of their support groups have historically been held together by tenuous threads.

Then came the Internet. Networks that were formerly confined to local areas suddenly spanned the globe. Information that had been sequestered within a state's borders spilled out and was disseminated among homeschoolers as fast as they could point and click.

And the available information continues to grow, and grow, and grow. Today there are more venues for online support and resources for information than any homeschooler can humanly access. This poses a brand new set of challenges: How to wade through this information ocean to find the right resources? How to find someone knowledgeable to help you? How can what's available online help the homeschooling community offline?

Networking.

That brings us to NHEN, doesn't it? It's no coincidence that the word "network" is built into NHEN's name. The whole point of NHEN is to improve networking among homeschoolers. By bringing together people knowledgeable about available resources and connecting them with homeschoolers in need of direction, NHEN works to build bridges, strengthen support groups, and empower homeschoolers.

This networking ability enables NHEN to help:

- Ø New homeschoolers looking for a support group
- Ø Homeschoolers looking for a different type of support group
- Ø Homeschoolers searching for a support group on the other side of the country
- Ø Homeschoolers looking for an online special interest group to meet a particular need
- Ø Support group leaders looking for ideas, support, and encouragement from others
- Ø Homeschoolers looking for legislative information
- Ø Those seeking to gather a group to address an issue that impacts homeschooling

NHEN's Support Committee is comprised of a great group of folks scattered about the nation. Unfortunately, a question concerning a state we know nothing about leaves us wide-eyed and

slack-jawed. So, the State Support Liaison (SSL) was born.

NHEN is working to find a homeschooler in each of the fifty states who is knowledgeable about available support groups in their state. We have a big chunk of the country covered by SSLs poised and ready to help field support group queries and help homeschoolers find the support they need.

While we may receive several requests for help from some states, and perhaps none at all from others, an incredible networking resource has been created out of the sheer desire to be of service! This resource is but one example of the national networking available to homeschoolers today.

Queries such as these are common:

Do you know where I can find a group of homeschool webmasters?

Is there a bilingual support group for homeschoolers?

Is there anyone experienced in starting a support group that can answer some questions for me?

Do you know where I can find ideas to get support groups in my area to work together?

Where can I go for field trip ideas for our group?

I'm having a problem setting up a network for my state-what suggestions can you offer me?

I'm moving across the country; what support groups are available in my new community?

How can we promote our regional conference?

How have other groups created positive relations with the press?

In the limitless maze of information on the Internet, the above questions can easily meet with repeated dead ends. But with a working network built of, by, and for thousands of homeschoolers across the continent, those seeking can find the information they need and, in turn, make themselves available to help others. There is strength and power in unity. NHEN works to build such unity by connecting homeschoolers, both online and offline, so they can help each other.