

shared stories, concerns, ideas and plans for the future. The atmosphere of this first meeting was one of caring and sharing; it was both exciting and rejuvenating.

After everyone left that evening, and as I sat alone in my living room, I was filled with a new, warm, safe feeling. I wasn't alone at all. I knew then that everything was going to be alright. It was a wonderful feeling to finally share and discuss how I felt — my frustrations, worries, thoughts and actions — with other people who understood. It lifted the weight off my shoulders.

The group was immediately active, following the burning issue of integration, and keeping up-to-date on progress, especially in the school system. We prepared and mailed documents to the school district, informing them of the formation of our parent group. In our letter, we spoke of our support for their endeavours to integrate children with exceptional needs into the regular school system.

A formal presentation to the school board was the next item on our agenda. As the designated leader of the parent support group I was responsible for the presentation: the first one I'd ever given! Despite my nervousness, the response was tremendous; our report of our expectations drew the attention of many school board members and the media. We continued to attend school board meetings and were called upon to discuss and comment on other school policies.

The years were both positive and rewarding, not only for our family but for our community. The parent group continued, becoming a united voice, a resource to other parents and to the community, and a source of strength for one another. Because we stood together we saw many significant and exciting changes in our schools and our community.

The most important outcome of our efforts was that Mandy was permanently integrated into the regular school system in Oromocto, New Brunswick. Integration meant that she became a part of one school system that exists for *all* children. It provided the opportunity for her to learn, to participate and to