

# Support group on move

AVITAL service for parents, who need support looking after their children, has set up its headquarters in Ringwood. After a decade based in Kew, the Parent Support Network Region had moved east of provide better access for the 900 families that rely on its services.

Network chairwoman Jenny Newman said the service was there to help parents of children with special needs. She said many parents didn't know where to turn to when faced with family problems, but that trend was slowly changing with more families contacting the network.

And Ms Newman has first-hand experience of how traumatic life with a little one can be. Six years ago, Ms Newman got custody of her autistic grandson, Chris, 8, who has not spoken since his 18 month old sister, Beanca, died after the pair was hog-tied by their mother and her boyfriend in July 2001.

Chris and Beanca's mother, Rebecca Haliday, and her partner, Daniel Green, were sentenced to 6 years' jail in 2003 for manslaughter.

Haliday was released from jail in April 2005.

"There's a grieving process you go through when a child is diagnosed with a disability," Ms Newman said.

"You just want to hibernate because no-body understands your situation and it's easy to lose all support networks. All milestones for children aren't the same; they don't form friendships like other children do, so families need support to deal with this."

The network runs art therapy classes, social functions, support groups, a dads' group and has a library of DVDs and books.

The group is still taking books for its pamper day on Thursday, August 16.

Details 9259 4312 or drop into 97 Bedford Road, Ringwood East.