

KATS aims to ease families' pain

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Dr. Michael H. Henrichs remembers discovering what he perceived as a glaring omission among the many support groups available in the United States.

"When I was doing doctoral research at the University of Tennessee (in the early 1970s), we would talk to cancer patients and their spouses. But nobody talked to their kids," said Henrichs, a clinical psychologist. "And there was no literature on group intervention for those children."

Although it took more than 10 years, Henrichs finally filled that void in 1985 when he launched Kids Adjusting Through Support (KATS). Since its inception, the non-profit organization — which Henrichs said is still the only one of its kind — has helped more than 1,750 children and their families throughout Monroe County and western New York.

The support group's original intent was to provide support for children ages 3-18 as well as for family members of a parent with a serious illness. Henrichs has also begun a bereavement program for families of parents who have died from an illness or accident, as well as a foster-child program which lends support to children and parents in foster families.

"It's very, very scary for youngsters

whose parents have cancer or AIDS," said Henrichs. "KATS lets the kids know they're not alone in this."

KATS meetings are usually held for 90 minutes on Monday evenings. Since groups can often swell to as many as 150 participants, meetings are often conducted at schools.

Henrichs groups children by age before the youths take part in discussion and recreation sessions, while parents meet in separate support groups.

Discussions are led by trained volunteer leaders. Henrichs estimated that nearly 600 volunteers have taken part in KATS over the years.

"I had a good time. We did all kinds of things," said Carl Lore, 8, of Greece, whose father died in an accident last year. "And the teachers knew what we were feeling."

"I like to be able to talk to people your own age, who know what you're going through," said Megan Yoos, 12, of Brighton, whose father died of lung cancer last December.

Even though Molly Jackson of Pittsford is only 4, the program has also helped her, according to her mother.

"It made a big impression on her," said Sarah Jackson, who attended the KATS program with her daughter last fall after her husband died of a heart attack.

Each KATS program runs for 10 weeks. No charge is asked of participants, who are free to re-register for

another 10 weeks if desired. KATS also offers continued support through referrals to community and professional organizations, newsletters, and social activities for former participants.

Henrichs noted that although he does not promote KATS extensively, families have learned of his organization through "word of mouth, and referrals from hospitals and professional agencies." The group is also beginning to gain national recognition. KATS, for example, was mentioned in *Family Circle* magazine's Oct. 16, 1990, issue.

Although Henrichs continues to conduct his own private practice out of his office at 600 East Ave., he emphasizes that KATS is a separate entity.

"It's a support program, not treatment per se," he said.

Charitable gifts and volunteer support have enabled KATS to maintain its service to the community. "We've pretty much tried to meet the needs of all those who call," said Henrichs.

Yet Henrichs noted that further monetary support would enable him to expand KATS' usefulness.

"If we had more donations, we'd be able to do a better job," said Henrichs, a Brighton resident and Our Lady of Lourdes Church parishioner who operates KATS with the help of his wife, Ginger. They have no paid staff.

Although he admitted that dealing with such emotional issues can be draining at times, KATS is basically a



Andy Collins is among the more than 1,750 children and families KATS has helped.

"wonderful and exhilarating experience" for all involved, Henrichs said.

"There are tremendously sad times. But what continues to amaze me is how much the parents give to one another, and how much the kids give to one another," Henrichs concluded. "I think it's important to realize that we get so much out of this. It's true that we get so much when we give."

EDITORS' NOTE: Those who wish to contribute to KATS may contact the United Way of Greater Rochester, through which KATS is a donor-option agency. To join a group, refer a family, volunteer, lend building space or make a contribution, call KATS at 716/232-5287.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Dr. Michael H. Henrichs (third from left) founded Kids Adjusting Through Support in 1985. The non-profit support group for children ages 3-18 addresses such issues as illness, death and foster care. Some of the children who participated in a recent program are (from left) Andy Collins, Casey Goff, Carl Lore, and Molly Jackson.

Clarification

The Aug. 6 youth article, "Palmyra teen discovers reality of political life," reported that Katie Baynes' attendance at the Empire Girls' State was sponsored by the James R. Hickey Post #120 of the American Legion. She was, in fact, sponsored by the James R. Hickey Unit #120 of the American Legion Auxiliary.

The legion auxiliary operates Girls' State as a citizenship-training program for girls in their junior year of high school. The program is accredited as a college-equivalent course through the New York State Board of Regents.

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