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The Special Needs Acceptance Project **For Schools and Community Youth Groups**

The **Grandparent Autism Network** (GAN), a nonprofit organization, was founded to meet the unique needs of grandparents who have grandchildren with autism. GAN informs grandparents about autism and the issues that affect their families, enabling them to improve the quality of life for their children and grandchildren.

The Special Needs Acceptance Project is sponsored by GAN to increase awareness and peer support for *all* children with special needs.

Why is *The Special Needs Acceptance Project* important?

The largest minority population in America today is the population of people with special needs. Children live in a world full of people who are different from each other in all sorts of ways. Helping them to better understand differences in their peers, their family members, and even in themselves, will create greater acceptance and respect for others. Bullying has become a national dilemma and raising awareness and empathy for others at the K-6 grade levels may help to prevent intolerant behaviors toward others as the children mature.

What is the purpose of this project?

The Special Needs Acceptance Project is based upon **The Special Needs Acceptance book** by Ellen Sabin. It helps children to better understand people who have special needs. It has interactive, educational and character building activities that introduce children to the challenges faced by those with disabilities, while also raising their awareness that all people are different. The exercises invite children to “walk in someone else’s shoes” as they learn to treat others the same way they would like to be treated themselves.

The book covers a wide range of disabilities and conditions including autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, asthma, blindness, deafness, emotional and behavioral challenges and learning disabilities like dyslexia and ADHD. It provides insight to help children understand their friends’ challenges, while also teaching them that we are all more alike than we are different.

A **Teacher's Guide** is available for grades K-6. The suggested lesson plans and activities are compliant with numerous National and State Content Standards. The standards referenced are drawn from the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning National Standards as well as National Character Education Standards (which can be viewed at www.character.org).

Each lesson plan provides creative ideas for using *The Special Needs Acceptance Book* in classrooms and other group settings. Although the book is geared towards children aged 6-13, some of the lessons are more advanced, and others are for a younger population. The activities can be easily adapted or modified as needed based on student age, ability and goals. The lesson plan ideas encourage and empower educators to invite children to learn more about their peers with special needs or other special challenges, while learning academic lessons in language arts, science, history, and character education. The activities encourage everyone to show respect, kindness, and acceptance for people who are different from themselves and to treat others with respect, tolerance, and kindness.

Who can use this project effectively?

The project is intended to be introduced by educators, youth group leaders, volunteers, parents and others as an inclusion tool to help children with special needs to be better accepted by their peers. **The Special Needs Acceptance Project** will increase understanding and encourage a more tolerant environment. *It emphasizes that that we are all different, we are all special and we all deserve to be understood and accepted.*

How do the children benefit?

The Special Needs Acceptance Project:

- Helps them understand everyone is different and that every individual has unique talents and challenges.
- Encourages them to make the effort to understand and respect others.
- Teaches them to practice empathy and compassion.
- Increases understanding of special needs and how people with various disabilities may move, look, or act differently.
- Broadens their experiences by showing them that all friendships are different and can be rewarding in many ways.
- Improves self-esteem by helping them accept their own challenges and appreciate their own unique qualities.

Where can you get this book and teaching guide?

The book is available at www.amazon.com and other booksellers. The **Teachers Guide** for school classrooms, a **Jewish Teaching Guide**, and a **Guide for Teachers in Christian Settings** are all available at no cost for downloading at www.wateringcanpress.com

**For more information, please contact:
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