

Flagship funding for kids with disabilities in Gippsland

Australia and our Gippsland region have again been successful in winning Flagship Funding from our parent company International Power (IPR).

IPR will be announcing that the Grace Berglund Centre in Warragul – a centre that works with disabled children from across Gippsland – is the major beneficiary of IPR's Flagship funding for 2006.

Driving the development of the proposal has been the Power Station's Paul Bur who explained what the funding will be used for. "There are several parts. One is to refurbish the reception area where people wait to see the visiting specialists. Another part of the funding will be to develop and 'all-ability' playground."

The proposal also includes the purchase of a special vehicle.

Paul and his wife Jenny have two daughters, Natalie and Tamsin. Natalie, 11 years old, is disabled and requires assistance from specialists in pediatrics and orthotics. Natalie sees Dr Dinah Reddiough, who travels down from the Royal Children's Hospital to see patients at the centre, and David Phillips, an orthotics specialist.

"Parents travel such great distances to come to the centre to see the specialists. It saves us a lot of time and stress not having to drive into Melbourne," Paul said.

"Having them at the centre is an extremely valuable part of the service. Because of Dr Reddiough's association with the Royal Children's, it makes it much less expensive when we need to see another specialist or have an operation at that hospital.

"In addition, David Phillips is very experienced. All he does is work with disabled children. He's exceptional."

Natalie attends Traralgon Special Development School everyday



but comes to the Warragul centre for respite care once a month during the school terms and a couple of times during each school holiday.

"It's an important part of their social development. Kids with disabilities don't interact in the same way as other children," Paul said.

In addition to these important respite visits, Natalie visits the centre about six times a year to see the specialists.

Paul, Jenny and Natalie, have had a long history with the centre. Natalie first went there for pre-school kindergarten, where she was helped with speech and occupational therapy.

The centre also has a psychologist who works with the parents. "When you have a two or three year old child with a disability, it helps to be able to talk to a psychologist and to other parents; it helps to realise that you're not the only one in this situation."

The Grace Berglund Centre was named for the woman who started services of the Spastic Society in Warragul 30 years ago. Currently, the centre works with about 120 children between Berwick and Orbost.

The centre also provides assistance for Gippsland's schools, providing people to work with teacher's aides and help them improve the quality of assistance they provide for children of various abilities.

Another service provided is assistance in renovating homes or building new homes for the families of disabled children.

"After Natalie was born, we found that our old house was inadequate. We built a new house with wider doorways and better designed bathrooms," Paul said.

Natalie is coming up to her five-year assessment for state funding support and the workers at the centre play an important part in helping parents get through the red tape.

"Thank God those ladies are there to assist us. It would be impossible for us to get along without them," Paul said.

The workers at the centre are excited about the funding support from International Power. Paul is too. "I'm really blown away by the funding assistance by IPR. At the same time, I'm really humbled that I've had a chance to be able to help these children."

Paul is pictured above outside the Grace Berglund Centre with his daughter Natalie.

