

Seattle Homeschool Group FAQ

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Please note: Opinions expressed in answer to the above questions are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of everyone in Seattle Homeschool Group.

1. What resources are available to homeschoolers in Seattle?

The state of Washington has a high number of homeschoolers, many of whom live in Seattle, so if you decide to homeschool here you would certainly not be alone. According to *The Seattle Times School Guide*, 19,554 students were registered with the state as homeschoolers in 2002-03. This is nearly as many as were enrolled in the entire Edmonds School District, one of the largest in the state.

To find out about the laws governing homeschooling in the state of Washington, see “Helpful Links—Homeschool Law in Washington State” on the SHG website www.seattlehsg.org.

Homeschooling Organizations

There are over 30 homeschooling organizations in the Seattle area. For a list and short description of the many available, see home-school.com/groups/WA.html.

When looking into a homeschool group for your family, you may wish to consider,

Where is the homeschooling group active?

Seattle Homeschool Group is based in the greater Seattle area, with the greatest concentration of participants in North Seattle.

Do you want a group that is faith-based or affiliated with a particular religion?

SHG is nonsectarian.

Classes for Homeschoolers

Homeschoolers in Seattle can take advantage of a huge array of private classes all over the city in anything from circus arts to metal work.

In SHG, many families are involved in the Homeschool Enrichment Program at Magnuson Community Center; see cityofseattle.net/parks/centers/Magnuson.htm.

Here are a few other sites you may find useful if you're looking for a class to appeal to your child. Several of these organizations offer daytime classes specifically for homeschoolers.

all-that-dance.com (dance)
astort.com/sanca (circus arts)
creativedance.org (dance)
drawingschool.com (art)
highlandice.com (ice skating)
lynnwoodicecenter.com (ice skating)
mcnw.org (music)
sct.org (drama)
seattlegymnastics.com (gymnastics)
seattle.gov/parks/aquatics/madisonpool.htm (swimming)
snsswim.com (swimming)
wildernessawareness.org (environmental education)

Homeschool Cooperatives

Some homeschooling families in the Seattle area have joined together to form cooperatives as a way to share resources for classes in a more formal setting that is still outside the public school system. The below are four examples.

The Attic Learning Community

The Attic is a child-centered, learning community in Woodinville with a homeschool philosophy. It is for children age 5-18 and meets 3 days a week.

Visit <http://www.the-attic.org/site.aspx> for more information.

East Shore Unitarian Homeschool Cooperative

This co-op meets at the East Shore Unitarian Church in Bellevue. Parents, members of the church and volunteers provide classes "that are presented from a world view that is diverse, rich and complex".

Visit uuhomeschool@hotmail.com for more information.

Homeschool Connections

This is a homeschool co-op based at 2 churches in Bothell. There are around a hundred classes for children age 7 and over, offered 2 days a

week from September to May. Board members must sign a “statement of faith.”

Visit <http://www.homeschool-connections.com/> for more information.

Legacy Homeschool Center

This is a homeschool center based in Redmond for parents who wish to educate their children with a “Christian world view”. Participating in the co-op involves signing a “statement of faith”.

Visit <http://www.legacyhc.org/> for more information.

Homeschool Classes Offered by Public School Districts

Classes for homeschoolers are offered at various centers in the Seattle area e.g. the "Homeschool Resource Center" in Seattle, the "Edmonds Homeschool Resource Center" in Edmonds, "Home Education Exchange" in Shoreline and the "Family Learning Center" in Kirkland. Taking more than a certain number of classes at these centers usually means enrolling your child as a public school student. Many parents find these centers offer useful resources. For more information, check the website for the homeschool center in your public school district.

Field Trips

Seattle has no shortage of field trip destinations for your homeschooled child(ren). Many of the below destinations offer group discounts for homeschoolers and host special homeschooler days.

Here are a just few ideas:

Boeing Plant, Burke Museum, Cougar Mountain Zoo, Chittenden Locks, Emerald Downs, Everett/Olympia /Seattle/Tacoma children's museums, Gold Rush Museum, Hydroplane & Raceboat Museum in Kent, Kids' Discovery Museum, KING 5, Museum on History and Industry, Museum of Glass, Museum of Flight, Nordic Heritage Museum, Odyssey Maritime Discovery Center, Pacific Science Center, Point Defiance Zoo, Rosalie Whyel Museum of Doll Art, Safeco Field, Seattle Downtown Underground Tour, Seattle Times, Seattle Tilth Children's Garden, Serpentarium, Snoqualmie Falls, Tillicum Village, Washington History Museum . . .

Other Resources

Try gocitykids.com to find a wealth of classes, museums, children's stores, and more in Seattle.

Also, check out SHG's Helpful Links page on the SHG website.

2. I'm not sure if homeschooling is right for us. How can I meet homeschooling families and ask questions?

If you would like to meet families in SHG, the first thing to do is to e-mail hello@seattlehsg.org with your request.

You will receive some information about SHG and have the option of receiving a complimentary issue of the newsletter. This will list all events scheduled for the month. Your family could come to a Tuesday park day and meet other homeschooling families there. You could also try going to that month's Mom's Night Out to talk to other parents without the distraction of looking after children.

There is no obligation. We always try to be friendly and open to newcomers.

If you would like to participate further in SHG activities, then you may wish to subscribe to the newsletter and the Yahoo e-group.

3. What is the experience of a family who withdraws their child from school in order to homeschool?

by Maggie K.

Some families homeschool their children from the very beginning and never look back, and some find homeschooling only after their children have spent some time in a formal school setting. I had witnessed what public school had done for (or to) my stepson, from kindergarten through high school. I could tell you eleven years' worth of stories about bullying, teachers calling him an idiot in front of his peers, guns and drugs, merciless amounts of homework, or teachers who, ripe for retirement, spent their class time catching up on lost sleep. When it came time for my own son, Henry, to go to school, I knew I wanted something different. Before we decided to homeschool, he spent seven

years immersed in Waldorf education. They were good years, but it took me a while to realize that homeschooling was the very best way to educate my child.

You see, Henry is an intellectual renegade. He didn't get in trouble for the typical student misbehaviors. No, I was always getting called in for meetings with his teacher for his precocious predisposition. For example, in the 3rd grade, his teacher had concerns that he had been looking at some inappropriate material in a "Gen-X" magazine. As it turned out, what he had been speaking to his classmates about in whispered tones was a book about *genetics* that he had read at his homeschooled friend's house. Still, his teacher was not relieved to hear this news. After all, Henry attended a Waldorf school, where it was considered unhealthy and spiritually damaging for children to indulge in intellectual pursuits above their years.

He got in more trouble when he was caught with an algebra book in his backpack in the fourth grade. I had to convince his teacher that the book, in fact, belonged to his older brother. Over summer break he was enrolled in a day camp. He spent his days with a new friend devising a plan to travel through black holes in space and constantly begged the counselors to teach him about exponents and square roots. When he returned to school in fall, he got busted for writing graffiti on the board. It was higher math. His teacher, and the entire educational philosophy to which we subscribed, frowned upon such antics. I found myself in a constant state of putting the brakes on my son's interests and passions.

After two years of his asking if we could homeschool, we finally took the plunge. It's been the best choice we ever could have made. Don't get me wrong—I'm not anti-school or anti-teacher. I've been an educator for twenty-two years. I've taught in public schools, private schools, and yes, I was even a Waldorf teacher for a while. Now I'm a homeschool mom with a part-time business doing tutoring, test prep, and homeschool assessments. It's a major lifestyle change, but it's so worth it. Ironically, on the social front, Henry's more active and involved than we ever had time for when he was enrolled in school. He's engaged in the community, taking music classes, participating in sports, doing volunteer work, and having fun with Seattle Homeschool Group.

Of course, I make sure he gets time to deepen his basic skills of reading, writing, and math. (I can't quite shake the teacher impulses.) But now, if he wants to study nanotechnology, I don't stand in his way. A few months ago, he decided he wanted to learn about filmmaking. In the process, he discovered that in order to make a good film, you need to start with a good screenplay, so he took it upon himself to learn how to write one. He has ownership of his education. And really, what is more important than helping your children fulfill their interests, their passions, their education, and their destiny?

4. How might a family homeschool with both parents employed?

by Laura G.

Our family's solution was to hire a part-time nanny. She takes the children on outings and to the park, reads to them, and generally is a fun friend they can look forward to seeing several days a week. She also helps with the dishes, laundry, and straightening up. I am able to get my work done without much distraction, plus exercise and do a few other things for myself. Because my personal needs are being met I've been able to remain cheerful when my partner needs to put in extra hours. And I am grateful that my kids have a wonderful time with their nanny. It took some looking (and some luck) to find a good match for our family, but the situation has worked out very well for us.

In my personal opinion, it is very difficult to homeschool in a two-income household without some kind of help. You and your partner may be able to arrange your schedules so that the children are with one of you all the time, but it can be a big strain to have no time to oneself outside of work, or time to get the housework done, or time to be alone as a couple away from the house. While I accepted this arrangement when my children were little and found time away from me miserable, sustaining it until the kids were old enough to be left alone in the house was more than I was willing to handle. I know several moms who don't work but want their kids in school so that they can have some time alone and pursue their own interests.

Making the decision to homeschool and work means less time to yourself. Most of the time you are away from your kids you will be working. When you are at home, you will be trying to fix meals, clean up, and facilitate learning. You won't be relaxing much. You have to be honest with yourself about how you feel about giving up your "me" time so that you can homeschool your kids.

Your expectations from homeschooling will also influence how you balance employment and homeschooling. In our family, we don't try to follow a specific curriculum or meet particular learning objectives. We provide a lot of books and playtime with friends, go with the children's interests, limit screen time, feed them nutritious food, and make sure they get plenty of sleep and exercise. Then we trust that they will learn and grow well according to their individual needs. We accept that we have limited energy and tight schedules and may not be able to avail ourselves of every opportunity or take every class or go on every field trip. We feel confident in our homeschooling choice. We believe that our children are healthier and happier being at home, even if they don't have all the stimulation one might find in school.

One advantage to employment is that you get enough opportunity to express yourself as an active adult that you relish the simple pleasures of home and family. I really look forward to a day with my kids with nothing to do and nowhere to be. If you feel inclined

to homeschool and think you can't because you and your partner are employed, I encourage you to go for it. It is possible and even delightful to work for money while schooling your children at home.

5. What is it like for a single parent to homeschool?

by Kathy C.

Passion and living in the present guide me in homeschooling as a solo parent. The saying "one day at a time" has helped me greatly as, after four years, we are still here homeschooling and loving every minute.

I find the biggest struggle for me is in the childcare area. I imagine there might be some ease if one is able to work while the other parent cares for the children. I have shared childcare with other homeschooling families but mostly we hire our own care providers. I try to stay open and creative with finding childcare solutions that are a good fit for us. And I continue to network with other families and to be open to new visions of how to fulfill my passion for homeschooling.

We live simply and focus on low-cost or free activities to enable me to work as few hours as possible in these years. We take advantage of free museum days or free activities in the community. We belong to SHG and get together for fun activities that we or others plan. We have so much fun I can not imagine another way.

I have also recognized some fears I hold. Do I have the time to provide what my child really needs to learn? Am I doing this right? These fears ease some when I witness one of those magic math or reading connections, or when I find my child is teaching me things that I either forgot or that are brand new to me. When I feel truly connected and am listening to both of us, it feels like we are right where we need to be.

If you are a solo parent and have discovered that homeschooling seems to be the right path for your family, I would encourage you to examine all your options before giving up that dream. Is it hard and challenging? Yes, sometimes. Do I have much free time for myself and get to go to Mom's Night Out? No, but I take advantage of the moments when my child is engaged in some activity and do my thinking and not thinking. I have also found freedom in letting go of thinking that I "should" be able to do

this or that, or “if only things were different.” By holding the passion for my son and for homeschooling in my heart, I have become more free and open to accepting our lives being exactly where they are right now.

6. Some parents choose to homeschool their children because of medical reasons. What are the advantages?

by Jennifer T.

Homeschooling is a great option for children with medical issues that require constant supervision or timely administration of medication. Many parents whose children suffer from diabetes, severe food allergies, immune-related disorders, or other conditions that require vigilance find it difficult to choose schools where a full-time nurse is not available. Moreover, teachers can often feel burdened with taking over the duties that were once dealt with by medical staff. There is often a fine line between wanting to empower your child to meet any challenge and the stress of having them deal with a medical issue during school.

We first decided to homeschool our daughter, now 8, due to her severe food allergies. Our family is much less nervous about my daughter's allergies since we can easily monitor her activities and surroundings. She also does not feel as keenly anxious in social settings as she has been in a classroom setting. I feel that homeschooling has a positive impact on my daughter and how she deals with her condition.

7. What is the history of Seattle Homeschool Group?

SHG's longest-term participants recall that Seattle Homeschool Group has existed since the 1980s, when it offered a monthly newsletter and monthly parent meetings with discussion topics or guest speakers.

In 1990, the Rainbow Way Playgroup was formed by a group of Seattle-area parents who were strongly influenced by such models as attachment parenting and unschooling. The group brought together like-minded families who wished to homeschool but whose reasons were not primarily religious. Around 1998, SHG and Rainbow Way merged, using the same group of volunteer parents to manage both.

Around the same time, some of the group's parents who wanted a more structured learning environment for their children started the Log Cabin Cooperative. It operated successfully for about a year as an independent cooperative in a local log cabin building. Parents developed ideas for classes and hired independent teachers or lead the classes themselves. The tuition charged by the cooperative covered rent, class supplies, and teacher fees.

After its first year, Log Cabin arranged to use space in the Edmonds School District Cyber School building, the district's resource center for homeschooling families. In other respects Log Cabin continued operating as before, using its own teachers or parents to lead classes. Several Log Cabin kids were also beginning to use Cyber School, making the arrangement convenient for many families. By 2001 the cooperative dissolved as students either became absorbed by Cyber School or went their own homeschooling ways.

That fall, SHG parents arranged for free weekly use of a large room at Green Lake Community Center. Families organized morning activity sessions for younger children and afternoon activities for older kids. City budget crunches forced the community center to begin charging for room use in 2003. At this point, SHG parents evaluated committing to a rental agreement and mandatory rotation of activity planning among participants. Instead, they chose to support weekly park days and a flexible and voluntary activity schedule.

Seattle Homeschool Group is now a thriving community of around 200 families at the time of writing. We meet regularly for park days, field trips, potlucks, and special events such as the Valentine's Party, Summer Picnic, Not-Back-to-School Celebration and Harvest Party. There are also subgroups within SHG, such as the Small Folk group established by parents of children age six and under and the Teen Group.

Please refer to the home page of this website for our mission statement.

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8. What ages of children are involved with SHG?

SHG kids range in age from newborn to teens. If you would like an idea of how many other SHG children are close in age to your child, just check the list below for the year your child was born. If your child was born in 2001, for example, you will see there are at least 89 children of similar age, born either in the same year or in the previous or subsequent years.

These totals come from SHG newsletter subscribers (not all participants subscribe) who provided family information as of April 2008.

2008	2
2007	6
2006	11
2005	16
2004	18
2003	28
2002	27
2001	30
2000	32
1999	11
1998	27
1997	19
1996	17
1995	9
1994	11
1993	11
1992	6
1991	2

9. My child is still a baby or toddler. Would it be appropriate for me to participate in SHG?

by Shannon M.

Whether you're still considering homeschooling as an option or you're already committed to the idea, it's worthwhile getting involved with SHG. I started participating when my son was about 18 months old and there have been two main advantages for me: meeting other parents with children my son's age, and benefiting from all the information and activities available through SHG.

We attend the playgroup for the "small folk" of SHG, where the kids range from a few months old to about age 4. Knowing I wanted to homeschool, it was important to me to start connecting with other homeschooling parents and for my son to meet other kids with whom he could form lasting relationships. Although he knew other kids his age, they were all eventually going to end up in daycare, preschool, and school, and then he wouldn't see them very often.

The playgroup has worked well for us. It's held in an indoor space, like a library meeting room or community center, so that parents have time to chat without having to run around after our children like we would if we were at an outdoor playground. Everyone brings a few toys to share and we spend an hour or two playing and talking. My son and I both enjoy it.

Although my son is too young for some of the activities SHGers arrange, we have taken advantage of a few. I love the fact that anyone can plan an event and invite others to join in. The range of options is astonishing, from a visit to a pumpkin patch to a tour of a firehouse to an afternoon of making mud pies in someone's backyard. And if I want to plan something specifically for toddlers, I can always do that and be assured that lots of other people will join us!

And last, but not least, I read the SHG Yahoo group e-mails everyday to see what new information and activities are posted. I have learned a tremendous amount about what it's like to homeschool in Seattle, what resources are available, and what the politics are. I've visited many websites SHGers have recommended that I probably never would have found on my own, everything from Google Earth to a math game site to how-to sites for kid projects. And I can post any questions I have and get lots of answers from other homeschooling parents.

Now that my son and I have made friends with other homeschoolers and I've learned a lot about homeschooling from people who are already doing it, I feel like I'll be completely prepared and confident filing that first "intent to homeschool" form when the time comes! So don't be shy, join us. We love to see new small folks!

10. Are younger siblings welcome at SHG events and activities for older children?

by S. F.

Younger siblings are welcome at most of SHG's events and activities. Whether at park day, or any other gathering, you will often see babies in slings, napping toddlers, and nursing little ones. As the older children learn to nurture the younger ones and be good role models, the younger ones in turn gain so much from being around older children and observing what they do. Having younger children need not stop you from enabling your older children to participate in events and activities. Even if your children are very young, it is worth bringing them to park day for instance. It is so delightful to see older children pushing little friends on the swings and playing with them.

Many of us know, however, that it can sometimes be a challenge to accommodate the needs of older children and younger siblings at the same time. When it comes to activities, there are often ways to overcome these issues. For example, when we first started participating in SHG, we attended park days for the benefit of my older child; however, we always had to leave early so that my nursing toddler could take a nap. This made my older child very unhappy as she would have preferred to spend the entire afternoon at the park. I got around the problem by arranging with other families in a similar situation to meet at an earlier time. This allowed for more hours at the park and an older child a little less reluctant to leave at the agreed time.

In the case of field trips that are limited to children over a certain age, the age restrictions specified by the organizer must be observed. There have been times when I have not wanted my older child to miss out on a field trip she would enjoy just because my younger child could not attend. Among the many possible solutions, here are a few I have tried successfully:

- Arranged with another homeschool family in a similar situation to meet at the field trip site and played somewhere nearby with the younger children while the older children go in with the other family.
- Dropped off my older child at the field trip with another parent in charge.
- Dropped my younger child off at a play date while I take my older child.

In the case of Teen Group activities, younger siblings are also welcome to attend. They are asked, however, to stay with their parents or other younger children who may be there. This is to allow teens the opportunity to talk about any subjects or issues that concern them, which they may not wish younger siblings to overhear. The gatherings are an opportunity for the teens to be able to focus on one another away from younger children and their privacy should be respected. Parents with younger children can check in with one another to find out whether their younger ones will have friends to play with and also bring activities to occupy them.

Being able to include younger siblings in almost everything we do is one of the joys of homeschooling. Unlike school, where children are segregated by age, homeschooling provides more opportunity to interact with children of all ages and, as there are always so many parents around, with adults too. Our children are arguably better “socialized” than many school children who find it difficult to converse with anybody other than a same-age peer. In a homeschool group people can make friends as families, adults and all ages of children included.

11. Are there any special activities for older children or teenagers in SHG?

Within SHG there is a Teen Group for families with children age 13 and up. These families have their own Yahoo e-group, which has grown from 20 to 60 subscribers in the two years leading up to March 2008. The teens themselves also have an e-group.

At the time of writing, the oldest teen in the group is 17 and there are also a few 16 year olds. If you would like an idea of the age range of children in SHG as a whole, please refer to Question 8. “What ages of children are involved with SHG?”

Teen gatherings can take the form of an open house at a family home, a field trip or park day. Please refer to Question 14. “What kinds of activities and events do SHG participants organize?” for examples of outings and activities the teens have enjoyed in the past.

For more information on the Teen Group, please contact Michelle at butterflyrain@verizon.net to request the Teen Group FAQ and details on upcoming gatherings.

12. I'm new to SHG. How can I get to know people and feel more involved?

When families come to Seattle Homeschool Group, they're usually looking for the company and support of other homeschooling families. If you're new to SHG, you may be wondering, "How can we find that?"

First, know that as a new family **you are not alone**. In the last year at least 80 families came to their first SHG event and subscribed to the e-group. That means SHG is brimming with new families looking for community and ready to get to know you!

Second, understand that SHG is a 100% volunteer organization. People pitch in according to their abilities and take personal initiative to form relationships. While it has no official Welcome Wagon, SHG boasts the efforts of many families to nurture an active, thriving community. These efforts give you several options for connecting with other homeschoolers.

Where can newcomers start?

SHG's activity schedule works like a potluck: Families serve up their specialties and favorites in whatever amounts they can prepare. These range from one-time events to monthly clubs and annual parties. There may be an afternoon of card games in the living room with a guest list of six, or a come-one-come-all road trip to Canada. Because so many families share activities with the group, there's always a chance for your family to meet others. SHG has weekly park days, too!

To take advantage of all this community-building potential, former SHG newcomers suggest the following:

Go to everything. Subscribe to the SHG Newsletter, check out the monthly schedule inside, and plan to attend as many events as possible. Also, watch the Yahoo e-group for spontaneous activities throughout the month. Even if you don't have long conversations with other field trip or park day attendees at first, simply showing your face over and over creates familiarity. You'll also figure out which activities you like most and spot other families with the same interests.

Get your name out there. Build name recognition with regular posts to the Yahoo group. You could share a favorite homeschooling resource, or thank another family for scheduling an activity you enjoyed. The more often people run across your name, the more easily they'll remember it when they see you. Plus they'll already know a little about you from your messages.

Make the first move. If you show up at a group function and no one asks your name, it may be because everyone else is new and waiting for introductions. A regular park day attendee says, "I appreciate it when newcomers take the initiative and say 'Hi, I'm

new.’ Sometimes I'm not sure whether an unfamiliar parent at park day is a homeschooler or not.”

A tactic that worked for one new mom was to carry around a notebook and write down the names of parents and children she met, the neighborhoods they lived in, and their common interests. She kept that notebook handy for making conversation at every group event.

Include quality time. One mother says, “Mom's Night Out really broke the ice because I could get to know people much faster without having to answer my son's questions every other sentence!” Also, certain family activities—camping trips, train rides, game nights—can offer everyone more time to hang out and talk than guided tours or park days do.

For some new kids, it’s tricky to show up at park day where unfamiliar children are scattered in all directions. Many young SHGers use playground time to celebrate friendships they’ve made through hobby clubs or homeschool classes at Magnuson Community Center (www.cityofseattle.net/parks/centers/magnuson.htm).

You might help your child build relationships by attending smaller or more structured functions at first. If you notice that your child has made a new friend or two, call them up before heading to the park so everyone has a familiar face to greet!

Try initiating activities. One SHGer notes, “When I first joined the group, I was too shy and insecure to even think about scheduling a group activity. I thought that because I was ‘new’ no one would want to come to anything I scheduled. It took me nine long months to get up the courage to coordinate something. The response was overwhelmingly positive and I felt extremely rewarded for my efforts. The group has a whole new feel for me now— I feel vested in the community.”

Think about what you and your children want most: Friends to play with at home? People who share a love of candle making? Other families who support the performing arts? Schedule an open house for dress-up, offer a wax workshop, or reserve a block of tickets to a musical. Advertise your event in the SHG Newsletter and give it extra publicity on the Yahoo e-group (see the FAQ for more information on these). If your first idea doesn’t get enough takers, try not to get discouraged. Listen around to learn what needs are filled in people’s lives and what holes remain as friendship-building opportunities.

Join forces. Reach out to other newcomers and make yourselves at home together! Host an open house targeting new families with kids the ages of your own. Set up a Mom’s or Dad’s Night Out especially for parents of new families. You’re in good company!

Give community-building six months to a year. It takes time to get to know each other between travel schedules, rained-out park days, and conversations interrupted by trips to the potty. Stick it out and show up often, and one day you’ll realize you feel right at home.

As one SHG parent says, “Don't be afraid. I'm naturally shy and I hate the feeling of forcing myself on others, but I made a huge effort to get to know the group. I felt I had to for the sake of my children, but really I have benefited just as much as they have from having made the effort. It's well worth it, in other words. I love SHG and am so thankful that we found it!

13. I'm homeschooling a child with special needs. Is SHG a good place for us?

SHG families who are homeschooling a child with special needs may sign up for a supportive e-mail discussion group and attend occasional parent meetings to share resources and ideas on how to participate meaningfully in the greater SHG community. See the volunteer section of the SHG newsletter to find out how to subscribe to the Special Needs Yahoo group, and check the schedule page for upcoming meetings.

Special needs families in SHG have been most successful when they are selective about which events and activities they attend. Larger events, such as potlucks and park days, may be overwhelming for some children. A better choice for a sensitive child may be one of SHG's many small get-togethers. And since everyone is strongly encouraged to host activities, you can offer something tailor-made for your child with special needs, created specifically with his or her interests, abilities, and comfort level in mind.

If your child has behavioral issues, you will need to supervise him or her closely so that all of the children can be safe and enjoy the activity.

14. Are there any bilingual or bicultural homeschoolers in SHG?

by Corey H.

Quite a few families in SHG are raising their children multilingually and multiculturally. In fact, homeschooling is an ideal way to strengthen and support the bonds a family has with its second language and culture.

Often bilingual or bicultural homeschooling families, especially those with young children, are worried that their children will not receive enough exposure to the English language and American culture. This usually need not be a concern since our surrounding community has a very powerful influence over our children. However, to help ensure adequate exposure, families can participate in SHG activities and events. As children get older and form friendships, they will spend individual time with other children, which will strengthen their language abilities in English and help them learn the American habits and customs of their peers.

Some families are also concerned that their homeschooled children won't receive enough exposure to families of other backgrounds. However, with the array of nationalities, ethnicities, and languages in SHG, families are continually learning about language, culture, and diversity from one another.

A group of SHG parents started the Seattle Bilingual Homeschool Group for families who are homeschooling in a second language and culture. Most of the families are SHG families, but the group is also open to other bilingual or bicultural homeschooling families in the community who are not part of SHG. Some parents in the Seattle Bilingual Homeschool Group are not homeschooling their children full-time. Instead they are providing second language homeschooling with their children after school and on weekends. If you are interested in joining the Seattle BHG, please check out our Yahoo group at groups.yahoo.com/group/SeattleBHG/.

Even if your family doesn't speak a second language at home, there are many opportunities for learning a second language and keeping it alive with other SHG families. With the diversity of language and culture in SHG, you are bound to find others who are interested getting together to learn with you.

15. What kinds of activities and events do SHG participants organize?

Recurring Events

Park Day

There are certain events which take place regularly. Perhaps most important is our weekly Tuesday park day, often held at one of the following parks:

Meridian Park http://www.seattle.gov/parks/park_detail.asp?ID=1104

Powell Barnett Park http://www.seattle.gov/parks/park_detail.asp?ID=345

Volunteer Park http://www.seattle.gov/parks/park_detail.asp?ID=399

Wallingford Park http://www.seattle.gov/parks/park_detail.asp?id=449

We meet at around noon and the children play while the parents talk. When the weather is warm, we lay out our blankets and picnic. When the weather is too wet or cold, we sometimes schedule indoor activities such as swimming, skating, or a field trip.

There are also separate park days held by the SHG Teen Group and for families living in Seattle's Southend.

Clubs

Some regularly meeting clubs from the past few years include the following:

- Aeromodeling Club
- Book Club (for beginning & emergent readers)
- Book Club (for older kids)
- Baseball/T-ball (for all ages)
- Building Day
- Chess Club
- Culture Club
- Geography Club
- Math Club
- Physics Club
- Science Club
- Small Folk Playgroup
- Sketch Club
- Soccer (for older kids)
- Soccer (for younger kids)
- Spanish Club
- Teen Knitting group
- Writers Club

Such clubs are organized by parents who want their children to be able to share interests with homeschooling friends. The meetings usually take place in someone's home or in a library meeting room.

For the Parents

Each month usually offers a Mom's Night and there have been in some months a Dad's Night, or Couple's Night Out. We meet most often at restaurants, although some families have generously hosted Mom's Night in their own homes, and dads have gathered to play poker, see a baseball game, or play pool.

SHG's Smallfolk Group has a monthly Primary Caregiver's Night Out in addition to the above.

There is an SHG Homeschool Parent Circle with a different topic of discussion each month.

There is a book club for SHG parents.

Other Events

Following is a list of events and activities that took place between January 2007 and March 2008 in addition to the regular events above. The list includes only activities that were advertised in our newsletter; many more have been posted on our Yahoo e-group. Some events take place annually, such as the harvest party, the summer picnic and the Not-Back-to-School Celebration. The list may give you ideas for events that your family could join or even host. One of the reasons SHG is successful is because so many families volunteer to organize activities and field trips

March 2008

Moore Theater tour, Library Explorers, teen day at Family Fun Center, Soundbridge class, teen rock climbing, teen Boeing Everett tour, "The Miser" at Seattle Shakespeare Co., Portland train trip, Seattle Tilth garden tour (age 3-6), Seattle Men's Women's Chorus Children's Chorus, teen volunteer day at NW Harvest

February 2008

Moms' retreat to Port Townsend, smallfolks craft day, Seattle NOAA tour, teen group meeting, Children's Film Fest, Library Explorers, film showing of SHG kids' "HMS Pinafore" performance, Parrot Lady, Valentine's Day skating and card exchange, smallfolks game day, Soundbridge class, living history encampment at MOHAI, teen Valentine party, Frye Museum tour, "Peter and the Wolf" at Olympic Ballet Theater, Seattle Women's Hockey fundraiser games, teen ice skating

January 2008

Smallfolks craft day, Southenders meet at Pacific Science Center, teen game day and planning meeting, teen sledding, bowling, teen movie day, Moore Theater tour, teen bowling, "Homeschooling Highschool" seminar with Janice Hedin

December 2007

Teen trip to Seattle Aquarium, Homeschool Day at Burke Museum, "Black Nativity" at Intiman Theater, smallfolks learn about Hanukkah, PNB Nutcracker, smallfolks craft day, holiday walking tour downtown, "Miracle on 34th St" at Meydenbaur Center (starring several SHG kids and parents), ice skating, smallfolks game day, SHG kids perform "HMS Pinafore", Olympic Ballet Nutcracker, teen volunteer day at NW Harvest, teen group meeting

November 2007

Paramount Theater tour, teen bowling day, "Jack and the Beanstalk" at Thistle Theater, "Fantastic Fall" at Everett Imagine Children's Museum, teen baking day, Wastewater Treatment Plant tour, field trip to 826 Seattle, smallfolk salmon walk, SHG game night, teen scavenger hunt, "Info Organs" at Everett Imagine Children's Museum, teen ice skating day

October 2007

Medicinal Herb Garden tour, smallfolk craft day, teen rope challenge, Skagit Festival of Family Farms, 826 Seattle (age 7-9), fall pumpkin farm tour (age 2-7), Wastewater Treatment Plant tour, teen volunteer day at NW Harvest, game day (age 5 and under), Safeco Field tour, "Magnificent Masks" at Everett Imagine Children's Museum, pony riding, "Stories of West Africa" at NW Puppet Theater, 7th annual SHG harvest party, teen group meeting

September 2007

3rd annual Not-Back-to-School Celebration, Teen NBTS, Ringling Brothers Circus, Franz Family Bakeries tour, teen kayaking day, smallfolk craft day, climbing at Stone Gardens, "Financial Literacy" (age 8-12) at Children's Museum, teen hiking day, Bainbridge Museum tour, teen softball day

August 2007

Renaissance faire, teen beach day, Fireboat tour, smallfolk craft day, Voyages of Discovery field trip, teen water slide day, West Seattle food drive, 3rd annual La Wis Wis camping trip, Bradner Gardens food drive

July 2007

Teen kayaking day, teen blueberry picking and ice cream making, moms' heart to heart meeting, King 5 station tour, teen hiking, smallfolk craft day, teen boating day, teen park day

June 2007

3rd Annual summer picnic, Center for Wooden Boats (smallfolk), Children's Activity tent at Colombia City Farmers' Market, smallfolk hike, teen softball day, Northend smallfolk book club, teen yurt camping trip, smallfolk craft day, teen movie making

May 2007

"Grossology" Pacific Science Center, smallfolk field trip to Creation Station, smallfolk ferry ride and park day, teen Seattle Underground Tour, tour of Jubilee Farm, volunteer ay at Cherry Street Food Bank, SHG game night, Seattle International Children's Festival shows, teen baseball day, South 47 Farm tour (age 3-7), fairy princess picnic (age 3-6), Center for Wooden Boats field trips, teen volunteer day at NW Harvest, train trip to Portland, Seattle 826 writing field

trip, NW Railway Museum tour, bikes and trikes day, Fossil Workshop Learning Center field trip

April 2007

Teen planning day, Pump-it-up, sign making day for Step it up, Step it up Rally and march smallfolk kite day, NW Harvest volunteer day, teen challenge day, smallfolk playgroup, teen day at Green Lake, making shadow boxes, Harbor Boat Tour and Museum field trip, moms' knit and tea

March 2007

Smallfolk pea planting, teen planning and game day, NW Harvest volunteer day, teen ice skating day, Pier 69 tour, teen movie theater outing, moms' retreat to Vancouver BC, teen challenge day, Amtrak trip to Portland

February 2007

NW Harvest volunteer day, smallfolk craft day, PAWS class and tour, teen planning and baking day, Pacific Science Center, NW Film Fest, "Journey Through Dance" by PNB, SHG Sweetheart Skate and Valentine Exchange, animals in art workshop, Bodies Exhibit, NW Harvest volunteer day, REI PEAK presentation

January 2007

Great Harvest Bakery tour, teen planning day, wings and wand making, teen challenge day, Family Drama workshop, UW World Series Youth Matinee, teen sledding day, PAWS tour

If you feel inspired after reading this list and would like to organize your own activity, see under Question 15. "How can I organize an SHG event or activity?"

16. How can I organize an SHG event or group activity?

It's easy! Organizing or hosting an activity is a great way to let children share an interest or passion with a group of friends. It's also a great way of getting to know people.

Field Trips

Here are a few tips from SHG pros on organizing a field trip:

- When you first contact a place you are interested in, find out as much relevant information as possible. Remember to ask about the maximum and minimum number

per group, suitable age range and whether younger siblings are welcome, cost per person, expected length of visit, what people need to bring (e.g. lunch, rain gear), whether activities are hands-on, etc.

- Gauge interest to see if other people would be interested in the field trip. You could do this through the Yahoo group, at one of the bi-monthly planning meetings held during Tuesday park days, or just by asking any SHG families you know.
- When you are ready to pick a date, contact the schedule coordinator (see the volunteer section in the newsletter) to make sure the date you are considering does not conflict with another SHG event.
- Advertise your field trip by writing up a blurb to post on the Yahoo group and publish in the newsletter. If you like, you can also go to SHG's website and list your activity in the wiki calendar, which is available to SHG Yahoo group subscribers. (Go to the Current Events section of the wiki, click on the date of your activity, type in your information, and hit Save Page.)
 - Include any information which might help people decide if they want to participate: duration of time kids may need to sit still or listen quietly, potential scare or excitement factors that may be challenging for more sensitive children, a website where people can find more details, etc.
 - Provide your e-mail address or telephone number so people can ask questions before signing up.
 - In the case of a paid event, collect money beforehand and tell people whether you need payment in cash or check, to whom checks should be written, and by what date payment must be received. If you try to collect money on the day of the event, you may personally end up having to cover the cost of people who don't show up.
 - Give people deadlines—a date by which to express an interest, and, in the case of paid events, a date by which to pay and a date after which refunds will not be available.
- Keep lists! Track people who have paid and have a secured place on the tour and people who have expressed an interest but not yet paid, and keep a waiting list of people you can contact if others drop out or don't pay in time.
- Post a reminder. People have busy lives and tend to forget what they have signed up for, so it's always a good idea to put out a reminder e-mail a few days before your event. Repeat the date, time, location, directions, meeting place, and any other relevant information.

- Post a meeting time that allows time for latecomers. No matter how much you beg people to be on time, there are ALWAYS latecomers.
- Decide on a specific meeting place—“in the lobby next to the cloakroom” rather than a vague “in front of the museum” (which entrance?)—so that even people who have never met you before will be able to find you. Or say you’ll be wearing a silly hat and then remember to put it on!
- Don’t stress out too much and enjoy the field trip!

Open House

If the idea of organizing a field trip is too daunting, try hosting an activity or open house in your home. You could limit it to a certain number of families if you feel space is an issue. How about hosting a fairy picnic or messy play day in the backyard, shooting a video, or conducting a science experiment? When you organize an event, it’s up to you to organize it however you want. If your child has allergies, for example, specify it as an allergen-free event (SHGers have had cooking days that were dairy/gluten/nut/egg free). Just pick a date and time that suits you, check with the schedule coordinator to make sure it doesn’t clash with another event, and advertise it through the newsletter or Yahoo group.

Club

If your child has a hobby or interest he or she would like to share with friends on a regular basis, you can always start a club. Ask around, post on the Yahoo group to see if there’s interest, and then just do it! It can be as simple as, “My kids enjoy building sand castles, so we’re going to meet every Wednesday afternoon at 2 p.m. by the stream at Golden Gardens,” or, “My child is a budding chef and would like to prepare and eat a meal with friends every Friday afternoon.” You don’t have to host a club in your home; Seattle and King County library meeting rooms can be reserved free of charge.

Large Event

If you have an idea for something bigger and want to rent a space or hire entertainers for a celebration or potluck, then check with the treasurer (see the volunteer section in the newsletter) what SHG funds can cover. Big parties are a great way to bring everyone in the SHG community together. These events can be a lot of work, so it’s nice to organize one with the help of a friend or two.

For more ideas of activities you could host, see under Question 14. “What kinds of activities and events do SHG participants organize?”

17. How can I participate in an SHG activity or event?

by Melinda T. and Cathy T.

Seattle Homeschool Group is a loose community of homeschooling families. When you see an announcement about an activity, it is important to remember that you are receiving an invitation from an individual in SHG to join in on some fun. It is important to be considerate of anyone who comes forward to volunteer their time and effort and try not to make more work for them. Based on the thoughts and experiences of previous organizers, we would like to offer this Q&A or "Field Trip Etiquette 101" for your consideration.

I just saw the announcement on the Yahoo e-group for the tour of the nuclear waste facility and we can't wait to come! What do I do now?

Read and follow the instructions for signing up. Sounds pretty obvious, but each activity has different procedures so be sure to include all of the requested information. Sending follow-up emails to get the requested information can be very time consuming for the organizer, and she'd much rather be eating cheese crunchies and watching her latest Netflix DVD! Be specific about how many people in your family plan on coming and include ages if requested. Don't leave the coordinator hanging with an "I might be able to make it" response - commit to coming or let someone else have your space.

It says "age 5 and up." Can I bring my mature 4 year old? It's not like anyone will be checking birth certificates, right?

Please respect the age restrictions, which are often set by the site based on liability, safety or funding issues. If you ask to bring "a very responsible and mature younger child," you put the organizer in the awkward position of having to (1) knowingly violate the requested age restrictions; (2) be the arbiter of which younger children are "mature" enough to be allowed in; or (3) feel defensive and uncomfortable for telling you "no." Also consider how families who respect the age restrictions feel when they see others bringing their youngsters when they dutifully left their youngsters at home. Wait until your child is old enough, then be a hero and organize the same activity for the next round of kids! Note to organizers: It will save you time if you are clear up front about age restrictions; for example, indicate whether "age 5 and up" is a recommended guideline or is non-negotiable and state whether younger siblings are allowed and if they need to pay any admission fees.

The trip filled up before I could respond. Can't you squeeze in my family? We're very small.

Please respect the group size restrictions. Generally sites request (or insist) that the group be kept to a certain size. Sometimes, a host only desires to coordinate a particular size group. Please don't ask the organizer to add more people, and never contact the facility asking to increase the group size. If the activity is full, ask to be put on the

waiting list if there is one or (even better!) ask the organizer for the contact information and see about setting up another visit.

Did I sign up for that? Do I owe you money? Have you seen my brain?

When you sign up for something, write it down immediately on your calendar so you don't forget. It's very frustrating to have someone no-show and then later say "Did I sign up? Are you sure?" or "I totally forgot I'd signed up!" Those looking to simplify their lives, even print directions and phone numbers and attach them to their calendar.

Pay promptly without having to be reminded. Sure you're busy. Trust us; the event organizer is at least as busy as you are. Even if the deadline isn't for 3 weeks, why not grab your checkbook and be done with it? And no, we haven't seen your brain, but we promise to keep an eye out for it.

I changed my mind and don't plan on coming after all. What do I do now?

Inform the organizer as soon as you know you aren't coming and determine if any admission costs are refundable or still due. Oftentimes, there are others on a wait list that will be happy to take your place and pay your fee. Notifying your host also keeps the group from waiting around for someone who never shows up. Please do not give your space to another family without checking with the organizer of the activity first because there if there is a waiting list and she will want to let those people get first chance at any spaces. Note to organizers: it is okay not to keep a waiting list if you'd rather not have to track one more thing!

That date and time doesn't work for me. Can you change it so we can come?

I'm sorry, did you say something?

I'm running late! What do I do?

First, a note about the importance of arriving on time: You can literally leave your fellow SHGers standing out in the cold waiting for you if you are late. Your group may miss out on the better seats at a performance because they have to wait for everyone to arrive before being seated and you aren't there yet. If you have an emergency and know you are going to be late, try to reach the organizer and see how she would like to handle it. This is when it comes in handy to have the organizer's cell phone, written on your directions, attached to your calendar! Redeem yourself with offerings of premium dark chocolate and vows to allow plenty of extra time to arrive at all future activities. If you do not make it for an activity, check with the organizer to see if you need to pay any admission costs.

Is it okay for my kids to act like wild animals?

Remember that we are representing SHG and homeschoolers in general. We want the community to have a positive image of our group and the homeschooling community, so supervise your kids. Do not drop off your kids unless you have made prior arrangements with another parent to be responsible for your child(ren).

Do I need to reciprocate, or can I just take advantage of everyone else's efforts until my kids leave for college?

SHG works because so many families organize one or two activities every year. As the group gets larger, there is an increased need for more activities because everything fills up so quickly. Organizing an activity for the group is extremely rewarding; you will feel more vested in the group and it is a great way to get to know people (and for them to know you!) If you would rather die a thousand deaths than organize a field trip, find another way to contribute. Offer to write a thank you to field trip site on behalf of the group or submit an article and photos about the trip to the newsletter. Additionally there are a over a dozen non-field trip related ways to contribute to SHG: help with the SHG wiki site or the newsletter mailing, organize the annual picnic, clean up after a big event, host a mom's night out, organize a club, etc. etc. If this isn't the season to contribute, there's always next season.

I have a special request. Can you (fill in the blank) for me?

It may seem like a small request you are making, but if you multiply it by the number of people participating, the extra work can be daunting. There are certainly times when special requests are indicated (particularly if it is a health issue) but please think twice before making them and if you do, please be clear that you understand if your request can not be honored (and then be understanding!) The goal is to NOT make extra work for the organizer so that he/she will enjoy the experience and want to do plan more stuff!

I signed up for an ongoing activity. Do I have to show up every time?

When you sign up for something, you are committing to being there. Not showing up impacts the others who do show up. If the activity no longer works for you, let the organizer know so another family can take your space.

I have a question about the activity. Do I contact the SHG organizer or do I contact the field trip site directly?

For questions about directions, parking and bus routes, visit the agency Web site. As mentioned above, do not call an agency asking to change the specifics for a trip arranged by another person. For most other questions, it is best to go through the person coordinating the activity.

I didn't enjoy the activity. Who handles complaints?

Funny thing, no one has volunteered for that job. Not every activity is going to be a home-run for your family. Please remember that the organizer generously sets up the activity and invites others to join in, but does not guarantee that a good time will be had by all. You will need to take responsibility for that, and the best way to go about it is to bring your curiosity, patience and flexibility with you. If things go wrong, consider it a great opportunity to show your kids how to handle life's little foibles with grace and good humor.

All these recommendations and guidelines give me the hives. I don't think I'll ever go on another field trip!

Whoops, that wasn't the intention! This is simply a compilation of a dozen folks' experiences and suggestions to make field trip hosting fun and easy for all to do. Go on a field trip, have fun and thank your host!

18. Is any fee required to participate in SHG?

There is no membership fee.

If you wish to subscribe to the SHG newsletter, annual subscriptions are \$25 and scholarships are available.

SHG does have a “fun fund” for group activities. To raise money for this, some participants sell PCC scrip or Chinook Books, or provide a donation box at SHG events to help cover the cost of facility rental, entertainment, and incidentals.

19. How can I subscribe to the SHG newsletter?

Once you have received your complimentary issue, just complete the form on the back page and send it in with your check to subscribe. For \$25, you will receive 12 issues, plus an annual directory of members and a mid-year update. Scholarships are available.

20. How can I subscribe to the SHG Yahoo e-group?

There are actually several e-mail groups associated with SHG.

- SHG General is the main group with the most traffic.
- SHG Small Folk is for parents of children under 6.
- SHG South Seattle is for families based in the South Seattle area
- SHG Special Needs supports families homeschooling children with special needs.
- SHG Teen Group is for parents of older children.
- SHG West Seattle is for families based in the West Seattle area
- SHG Working Parents supports parents balancing homeschooling with breadwinning.

If you would like to subscribe to the SHG General Yahoo group, please contact seattlehomeschoolgroup@gmail.com. You will receive information about SHG along with a request for your home mailing address. After providing your mailing address, you will receive a complimentary copy of the monthly newsletter, which contains all the events scheduled for the month. As soon as you have attended at least one SHG activity in person, you are eligible to subscribe to SHG General. You can then contact us again and request an invitation to subscribe to SHG General.

If you already know someone in SHG who is willing to affirm that you are indeed a homeschooling parent (vs. a spammer, serial killer, or chimpanzee who can type), then you need not attend an activity in order to subscribe.

To join the other e-mail groups, look in your newsletter for the list of SHG money and media volunteers. Find the contact e-mail address for the group you are interested in, and send an e-mail asking to be added to the group.
