

My Favorite Home School Support System -- Mug Up! I started our home education journey in the fall of 2005. I knew if I was going to have any success in this venture, I would need to be

in touch with other homeschoolers for support. I was blessed to find online support with yahoo groups. It was great to be able chat with others who were also educating their kids outside the cultural norm. But I knew I needed more. I wanted to be able to meet up with others weekly. My kids were used to being with other kids for their whole life; as preschoolers, I ran a day home and then they went on to public school. So, to now go without kid interaction, they wouldn't want to be home-educated for long. So one day, the idea of Mug Up was born.

I was chatting with my homeschool mom friends and asked if they would be interested in a weekly gathering, so we could get to know each other and for the kids to socialize (because we all know that is the #1 problem with homeschooling, right? *grin*). I proposed that we could have one day week where we had an open house style gathering, come and go as needed. To make it easy on the host, each family would bring a brown bag lunch and a mug (thus the name "Mug Up"... you bring your own mug). The host would provide coffee and a place to gather.

For the first year or so, I hosted Mug Up weekly in our home. Eventually I was able to encourage other families to host as well. With other families hosting, it gave opportunity for more families to participate. Our support group is spread out, covering Sundre in the west to Wimborne in the east, and north to Sylvan Lake and Red Deer. So having various hosts in all these locations allows more people to take in Mug Up and get to know one another.

If you ask anyone who has been a part of Mug Up for any length of time, they will tell you it is one of their favorite days of the week, for both themselves and their kids. It is more than just a play day for the kids to socialize. It is a support group for parents, a play time for kids, a professional development day for home school 'teachers' to discuss learning methods and curriculum options. It is a chance for those new to home education to meet with those who are more experienced and share stories of being scared and feeling like you are drowning and see steady eyes telling you, "been there, done that... you are going to be all right."

When I asked for input about what Mug Up is from those who have participated, one mom responded:

"For me it's a place where I can laugh, cry, discuss, share, be inspired, celebrate and encourage and be encouraged. Also for me it always encourages me to see all the different ways people homeschool and that it works in so many different ways

My Favorite Homeschool Support System:



by Pamela Schrock

– it always amazes me and makes me realize that there is more than one way to educate a child. It's one of those things that you don't know you need it until you experience it and then when

you aren't able to make it you know you are missing something special."

Another mom told me:

"For my son, Mug-up was his subject this year. Each week, he was served up varying social settings, each with their different 'house rules', and shifting batches of kids, and he had to navigate his way through it all. At first, I was right beside him each step of the way--coaching, prodding, initiating. But as time went on, he took charge of his own socialization. I saw his breakthrough back in Jan/Feb when he was cutting loose with his light sabre with fifteen other kids at the Innisfail church--taking cues, switching partners, looking like he'd been doing it all his life. And the windup party on June 2, he was again mixing it up with the rest--throwing rocks side by side with the others, biking with the group, running with the pack. Last year, I was on my knees, praying for what I saw yesterday. Mug-ups have helped save my little lost boy."

Our children and teens love Mug Up as well. Kids are encouraged to know that their family is not the only one who doesn't go to public school. One day each week, for a few hours, they get a recess, a day to play with their friends of all ages and to just hang out. I find that many homeschool families participate in an organized activity, such as hockey or swimming, but spending time in an organized activity is not the same as just being with your friends with the freedom to choose what to do and how to spend your time together. One the most heartwarming things you get to see at Mug Up is kids of all ages playing together. Teens playing with preschoolers and everything in between. Many of the younger kids have older kids they look up to as 'big brothers or sisters', and look forward to seeing their buddy each week.

Mug Up is such a simple thing but has enormous benefits for those who choose to make it a part of their home school journey. I know mine would not have been the same without it. My kids have made friends of all ages because of Mug Up. Their friendships go beyond their time there and they have never asked to go back to public school for the sake of friendships and I am pretty sure Mug Up is the big contributing factor for this. It has not only been a support group, but our Mug Up friends have become family. In the five years since it was started, it is now a staple in our homeschool support groups weekly routine. I encourage home school communities to start something similar. It has been the best homeschool support system for us.

About Pamela - Wife to Wes, Mom to two teens, Home educator since 2005, living rural adventures on a cattle ranch in the Alberta foothills. Feel free to email for more information - pwschrock@xplornet.com