

Aunties & Uncles Queensland Volunteer Mentor Information



This kit contains information on how to become a volunteer Auntie or Uncle.

For more information please contact us:

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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the Aunties and Uncles Program. This information kit will provide you with general information about the program and how to apply to be an auntie and/or uncle.

The first step in becoming a volunteer auntie/uncle is to attend an Information Session which will provide you with a better understanding of the program and allow you the opportunity to ask questions. Information Sessions are held monthly in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. Full details on Information Session venues are provided on page 4 of this information kit.

The next step is to submit an application form, including 3 referees we can contact in relation to your application. One written reference can be provided with the application, though this is not necessary. Referees will be contacted by the office and asked to return a referee questionnaire. Applications can be submitted directly to Coordinators at the Information Sessions should you be sure you wish to proceed.

On completion of all referee checks, we will contact you to arrange a home visit time to further discuss your becoming an auntie and/or uncle. Your patience during this time would be greatly appreciated as the assessment and linking process can be lengthy at times. At the home visit, a social assessment will take place, as well as a safety audit of your home. You will be asked to complete a Blue Card application and sign a Code of Conduct form which will be provided to you as part of your induction.

Following confirmation from all parties that it is appropriate to proceed, applicants are provided with information to complete their National Criminal History check at a cost of \$29.

If you have any further questions regarding the Aunties and Uncles Program or would like to RSVP for an Information Session, please do not hesitate to give us a call.

We look forward to meeting with you.

Regards,

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Coordinator, Gold Coast
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The benefits of the program:-

As the **auntie or uncle**, you gain:-

- ✓ a special friend and all the joy and love a child can bring, plus an extension to your family;
- ✓ the satisfaction of knowing you may be helping to break the welfare cycle, prevent child abuse and keep families together; and
- ✓ the chance to meet other aunties and uncles through our Mentor Support Group meetings and other families at functions, such as our picnics.

As the **child**, they gain:-

- ✓ a special friend and mentor who spends one on one time with them and who shows life coping skills and a positive way of handling different situations;
- ✓ a friend who listens and cares;
- ✓ a change of environment; and
- ✓ a parent who is less stressed after a little break from parenting.

As the **parent**, they gain:-

- ✓ a chance to have a break from the stresses of parenting, even if only to catch up on the ironing, or have a bath in peace; and
- ✓ an additional support person in your child's life who can listen to your concerns and care about your child, which aims to relieve tension and the feeling of total responsibility.

Who becomes an Auntie or Uncle?

Aunties and uncles can be anyone over the age of 18 years and come from all walks of life. They need to have time and love to share with a child.

Who are the children in the program?

Paul (9) lives with his mother and his brother Peter (4). He sees his father irregularly. Paul's mother suffers from depression and finds it difficult to cope with the children. She is in a relationship with Peter's father. This relationship is chaotic and there have been several separations, including three years when he was in jail. Peter's father is an alcoholic. Paul has witnessed verbal arguments and abuse. Paul and Peter spent two weeks in shared family care, due to their mother's depression.

Paul has been linked with a family for over 18 months and all report the link has been positive. Paul has become increasingly self confident, is able to separate from his mother and has built a relationship with the family, in particular the uncle of whom he was initially wary.

Sophie (7) lives with her mum and two sisters Ellie (9) and Tara (5). The family recently moved to Brisbane and has no family support. Mum works part-time and seems to be constantly 'busy and tired' looking after and caring for her three children. She knows that she would be a better parent if she had a little respite from time to time. Linking the children with volunteer aunties and uncles will provide that opportunity as well as allowing the girls quality time with adults in a mentoring role.

Commitment

Becoming an auntie or uncle means making a commitment to build a relationship with a child through the parent(s) and to take that child into your home for approximately two days or one weekend per month for a minimum period of at least 12 months. Some families in Brisbane have been linked for over 12 years.

All three parties - the auntie and/or uncle, parent(s) and child, will need to agree with the linked relationship and want to make it work. All parties are asked to be open and honest with their communication.

We ask that you consider this commitment very carefully as many of the children have already experienced rejection in their young lives. A broken link after a short time can add to this sense of rejection.



The History of Aunties and Uncles

The concept was pioneered in 1974 by the founder of the New South Wales Aunties and Uncles Program – Rose White. Her vision was to build a better life for children. Aunties and Uncles Queensland was founded by Ann Thew in 1992. Ann had been a volunteer auntie in Sydney before moving to Brisbane in 1990.

In the 1990's, the program was funded by way of philanthropic grants and non-recurrent funding from the State Government. This provided for the employment of a full-time social worker and an executive officer to undertake the administration aspects of the program. However, as a result of a change of government priorities, the program closed for a short time from November 2002. At that time, the program had 95 children actively linked and well over 100 children waiting to be linked.

In October 2003, Aunties and Uncles Queensland reformed under the umbrella of a special concept Lions Club. The program operated under the Lions Club through to September 2012 and grew from strength to strength during that time. In November 2010, the program expanded to also include the Gold Coast area.

The program is totally self-funded through the fundraising efforts of its members and through grants and donations from corporate partners, organisations and individuals.

Screening

Applicants are asked to provide the names and contact details of three referees who have the capacity to make valid comments in relation to their suitability to provide mentorship to children and young people. One of these referees can be a family member. Others may include friends, neighbours or work colleagues, where appropriate. If you are new to Brisbane, we are happy to contact referees in other states or countries.

Referees are asked to complete a short, structured questionnaire which aims to identify how well suited each applicant might be to the program and what support needs they may have, if approved.

Applicants are then interviewed and assessed by a Coordinator. While our screening process is not intended to be overly intrusive it is the welfare of the children that is our first concern and priority.

A Suitability Check through the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian is required for everyone over 18 when working and/or volunteering with children in Queensland (Blue Card).

Applicants are also required to undergo a National Criminal History Check at a personal cost of \$29 to ensure that we are engaging suitable volunteers.

Checklist

- Are you over 18 years of age? (No upper age limit exists)
- Are you able to commit a minimum of two days per month to your 'niece' or 'nephew' for at least one year?
- Are you prepared to attend an information session to find out more about becoming an auntie or uncle?
- Are you eligible and willing to undergo a Blue Card Suitability Check and National Criminal History Check?
- Are you willing to provide three referees that could comment on your suitability as a mentor to children and young people?
- Are you willing to receive a visit from our Coordinator and be interviewed?

Information Sessions

Information sessions for prospective aunts and uncles are held monthly at the following venues:-

Brisbane North: 7pm, The Exchange—Community Qld, Shop 1, 42 Blamey Street, Kelvin Grove Urban Village (next to Troppo Chill). Undercover parking is available via Ramsgate Street.

Brisbane South: 6pm, St Bartholomew's Church Hall, Cnr Logan Rd and Mountain St, Mt Gravatt. There is plenty of off street and street parking available. The hall is to the left of the driveway – access to the meeting room is left of the front door.

Gold Coast: 6pm at The Early Years Centre, 40 Martin Street, Nerang (Corner of Martin Street and White Street). There is plenty of parking available. Simply follow the signs to the meeting room.

Visit www.auntiesandunclesqld.org.au for a full list of dates for each session. RSVPs are essential.

Indemnity and insurance

Parents are asked to sign an agreement which indemnifies Aunties and Uncles (Queensland) Limited, its representatives, agents and participating parents against any claim arising from injury to persons or damage to property belonging to someone else.

We strongly encourage aunts and uncles to ensure their household insurance policy includes personal and public liability cover, and that their policy is renewed each year.

Ways you can help

Regardless of whether you become an auntie or uncle, you may wish to assist us in other ways ...

- ☺ Donate some of your time, money or goods. Every cent helps in a small organisation like this. A one off or a monthly donation would also be appreciated.
- ☺ Volunteer to help at one of our events.
- ☺ Organise a fundraising activity or event through your workplace, local club or school.
- ☺ Join us in promoting the program and raising funds. Please email us if you are interested - enquiries@aandu.com.au or find us on Facebook!

Things to consider before becoming an auntie or uncle

Try not to be possessive

Aunties and uncles are not the child's parents and we must be careful not to undermine the position of the natural parents or guardians. If you would like to have a child for a lengthy period you may prefer fostering a child who will live in your home. Our job is to support a family, not create a situation where a child may come to think their auntie and/or uncle are "better" than his or her own parents. It is important to remember that most of our families are doing the best they can in often difficult financial and social circumstances.

Try not to lavish gifts on kids

We want you to be ordinary aunties and uncles operating within ordinary budgets. Films, outings, clothes etc. should only be given carefully, in a limited way, as the relationship develops.

It is more important to listen to the child and spend one on one time with them. If you are unsure about an outing or buying the child something, respect the parent by asking them if that is OK.



The child needs your commitment

We ask that prospective aunties and uncles be prepared to make a commitment for a minimum period of one year, to have the child spend two days a month and perhaps a few days during the school holidays.

In addition, if there is a crisis in the child's home, the child may be able to go to the auntie and uncle as an alternative to foster care.

Hopefully, the relationship will last forever. We ask that you consider this commitment very carefully as many of the children have already had too much rejection in their lives. Please feel free to contact a Coordinator about any queries you may have.

You are asked to listen to what the parent(s)/guardian(s) have to say about their child and how he/she is raised. All parties are asked to be open and honest with their communication. Your link is with the child and you may or may not become friends with the parents.

The child needs your acceptance

It may not seem as if a child has changed in any way since you came into their life. You can be sure, however, that the time they spend with you and the experiences you share together are creating positive childhood memories for them.

We may never see the results of what we do which is why it is so important for aunties and uncles to be sure of why they are doing this. Aunties and uncles may be disappointed if they expect to reform or to redeem. However, they will never be disappointed if they are willing to be a reliable friend.