

Extended Families Australia

Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services –Stage Two

Extended Families Australia is a community organisation providing disability services that operates throughout the metropolitan region and in the Mornington Peninsula. The organisation aims to provide friendship, mentoring and community inclusion for children and young people with a disability by matching them with a volunteer who has had training and undergone a comprehensive assessment process. The service is provided for the most part in the community or in the family home. In the few instances where the support is provided in the volunteer's home there are additional screening requirements to best ensure the safety of the child/young person.

Extended Families is highly committed to the safety of the children and young people. To this end we undertake a very rigorous process of volunteer selection, which is outlined below, and have systems in place for ongoing volunteer support, supervision and review. In addition, we value our partnership with parents and carers as it is important to us to have an environment where families will contact us if they have any concerns about a volunteer that is matched with a child. As many of the children and young people we match with a volunteer are either non-verbal or have limited communication it is essential to us that the families, who know their children so well, will alert us if there are any signs in the child's presentation or behaviour that indicates there could be concerns.

We are particularly concerned to highlight the importance of the assessment and screening processes of **volunteer selection**. Volunteers can make such a significant contribution to children and young people with a disability by providing important support in accessing community and participating in their chosen pursuits, and provide genuine inclusion. As such, they are potentially pivotal to the child/young person having the opportunity to maximise their potential. However, the recruitment messages, assessment and screening is of paramount importance in order to keep children safe.

In addition, we follow clear practices of staff recruitment and selection as outlined below. The organisation values reflective practice and staff supervision which enables a culture of open discussion of concerns and issues and promotes an action plan should there be concerns or "red flags" regarding a potential volunteer's application.

At Extended Families, our current practice of volunteer selection has been developed based on the Child Wise program for Child Safe organisations.

Volunteer selection process

The process of volunteer selection involves a number of processes. These are:

- Recruitment messages that highlight the commitment to child safety through the following phrase on all volunteer recruitment materials – “Extended Families is an agency committed to child safety”.
- A telephone discussion with the potential volunteer that serves as an initial screening process.
- A face to face contact, usually in the form of a group information session, prior to inviting the prospective volunteer to a training session.
- A four hour mandatory training session.
- A written application from the volunteer which includes a message of the organisations commitment to child safety. One or more assessment interviews. This covers motivation, background information, capacity and skills for the role, key selection criteria addressed and future support needs identified. A particular focus of the assessment interview is on boundaries that encourages the volunteer to perform their role within the boundaries and guidelines set down.
- Part of the volunteer induction training and interview process is discussing various case scenarios and looking at issues and possible strategies. This very practical component of our preparation of volunteers is invaluable in their development of understanding the potential issues in working with families
- Police check, Working With Children Check, two referees (one professional/employment), medical history information and contact with health practitioner if required.
- A written assessment report is written with support of and reviewed by a senior manager and is considered by the CEO of Extended Families who is responsible for the formal approval of the volunteer. **Attachment One**
- A Child Protection Code of Conduct and a Volunteer Agreement must be signed by the volunteer prior to a match taking place. **Attachments Two & Three**
- All volunteers receive a Volunteer Handbook which includes reference to child safety and freedom from abuse.

Volunteer support, supervision and ongoing monitoring

- Each match has a worker assigned who provides support and supervision to the volunteer.
- Ongoing support, supervision and reviews are all extensions of the assessment process and Extended Families views these functions as essential to child safety.
- Match reviews and volunteer reviews are undertaken annually. Match reviews involve the family, including the child/young person where appropriate, the volunteer and the Extended Families worker who is supporting the match. Volunteer reviews are done between the volunteer and the worker and are a supportive appraisal of the volunteer’s role with the child and family as well as an opportunity to ascertain future training needs for the volunteer.

Staff selection and supervision

Staff are recruited through an interview process involving at least two people and two referees are always followed up. Staff are also required to have a National Police Check, Working with Children Check and to sign the Child Protection Code prior to commencing in the role. Police checks are re-done every three years. Staff have an allocated supervisor and regular supervisory meetings and have access to all relevant training. A three month probationary meeting is scheduled as well as annual performance appraisals. Staff development on child protection is conducted regularly.

Partnership with Families

As mentioned above the partnership that the organisation develops with the families of the child/young person is a critical factor in keeping the child safe.

Children and young people are matched with a volunteer and in most cases will spend time independently with their volunteer in the community. The volunteer develops a close relationship with the child and the agency worker relies on the family to give feedback as to the progress of the match, including any behavioural and emotional changes that have arisen, and their assessment that the child feels safe with the volunteer.

Issues –NDIS

Extended Families have identified some considerations in regard to the implementation of the NDIS.

- Efficiencies, being a substantial driver, may compromise rigorous volunteer assessment processes and the time allowed for contact with families after a match has been made. Whilst it is still unclear where volunteer provided services will fit under NDIS, we urge that work be done to ensure adequate funding models and expectations that recognise the importance of safe volunteer selection and support. This needs to be addressed in the interests of preventing abuse and that the future expectations of service delivery do not compromise these important processes for those organisations that are based on a volunteer model.
- The expectation of an increased casual staffing model and the issues this poses in relation to monitoring and supervision of staff which is most effective when there is an ongoing relationship
- Staff –supervisor ratios in the NDIS costing model. The supervision of staff and volunteers is a critical factor in keeping children and young people with a disability safe from abuse. Supervision and monitoring is identified in child safe literature as of utmost importance; “experience shows that child abuse is more prevalent in organisations that lack regular, formal supervision and performance monitoring” (Twelve Steps to Building a Child Safe Organisation –Child Wise). It is of the utmost

concern to us that child safety may be compromised with the considerably reduced supervisory and monitoring capacity that appears to be factored into the NDIS model.

We would also like to make the following observations regarding the proposed Quality and Safeguarding Framework for the NDIS:

- The Framework states that *"Providers of supports have a responsibility to ensure their support provision is safe"*. Training and formal background checks are cited but there is no mention of the very important process of supervision which has been highlighted above. Moreover the Framework refers to the likely competition for support workers which is an alert that there should be clear and steadfast commitment to ensure that the possible shortfall of workers does not compromise the cohort who are arguably the most vulnerable in the community.
- In addition, the Framework states that *"For those providers of supports that are a higher risk to participants due to increased personal contact (such as personal care support, respite or accommodation support), a requirement to vet their staff could be a condition for registration with the NDIA. Employee vetting could require staff to undergo police and referee checks, be subject to working with vulnerable people checks that assess their broader history or be checked against a list of persons barred from working in the sector."* This should read **should** not could!

Attachments

- **Attachment One: Volunteer Accreditation Report**
- **Attachment Two: Child Protection Code of Conduct**
- **Attachment Three: Volunteer Agreement**

VOLUNTEER ACCREDITATION REPORT

Date:			
Coordinator:			
Region Represented:		LGA:	

1. VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Name:					
Preferred Name:					
D.O.B:		Age:		Gender:	

Contact details

Address	
Home telephone number	
Mobile number	
Email address	
Emergency Contact: name and number	

Extended Families contact dates

Contact	Date(s)
Information session	
Training	
Application form received	
Accreditation interviews	
Applicant feedback to draft report	

Drivers Licence

Licence:	Yes/No	Access to Car:	Yes/No
Licence Number:		Expiry Date:	

2. SCREENING INFORMATION

National Police Check	Date:	Outcome:	Number:
International Police Check			
Working With Children Check	Number of card:	Expiry Date:	

Health Information

Report in file:		Medical Professional contacted	
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Referees

Date Contacted:		Date Contacted:	
Report in File:		Report in File:	

3. ASSESSMENT

3.1 Introduction/Current Situation (including brief description of applicant; motivation to volunteer with Extended Families and type of experience they are looking for; work, study and living arrangements; supports; recreational interests; lifestyle and time commitments)

3.2 Background (including formative experiences, cultural background, values from family of origin, parenting styles, significant relationships)

3.3 Relevant Experience (including experience with children, disability and volunteering)

3.4 Key Selection Criteria

- **The ability to relate to families in an empathic manner that is sensitive to diverse lifestyles and belief systems.** (Could include personality qualities and communication style, life experiences of diversity, intrinsic values around difference and diversity, understanding of boundaries, impact of training)
- **An understanding of the key concept of confidentiality and a commitment to respecting the confidentiality of the child and the child's family.** (Could include professional experience of confidentiality, learning from training, appropriate responses to scenarios, impact of a confidentiality breach in their own life)
- **The ability to develop a relationship with and to provide a safe and stimulating experience for a child with a disability.** (Could include experiences of children and disability to date, communication style, behaviour management experiences and philosophies)
- **A belief in and ability to promote community participation and inclusion for a child/young person with a disability.** (Could include aspects of the applicants motivation, their own family experiences and experience in the disability field, values and beliefs, understanding of social skills and their applicability to children with a disability)
- **An ability to perform the role of volunteer at Extended Families and the ability to work as part of a team.** (Includes communication style and relationship skills, how manage stress and conflict, screening outcomes, understanding of boundaries and ability to work within organisational processes and guidelines.)
- **A commitment to the role of volunteer and an understanding of the importance of this commitment to the children/young people and families in the program.** (Could include personality and values, motivational aspects, referee confirmation, background or current demonstrations of commitment in other aspects of their life)

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary (brief summary of main elements of above as well as any key assessment observations)

4.2 Matching issues (including age or gender preferred by the applicant and any other issues identified that would impact on the matching process)

4.3 Strengths (that the applicant brings to the role of volunteer at Extended Families)

4.4 Areas for support in the role (including any training needs identified)

Recommendation: It is recommended that **(name)** be approved as a volunteer with Extended Families to provide a core family match/LYCP match taking into account the matching considerations outlined above.

Signature Coordinator

Coordinator:	
Signature:	Date:

Accreditation Approved

CEO: Julie Langdon	
Signature:	Date:

EXTENDED FAMILIES AUSTRALIA

CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT

Extended Families Australia is committed to creating and maintaining an environment that promotes and protects the rights and dignity of children and young people with a disability and aims to prevent all forms of abuse and exploitation. This code of conduct provides a clear guide as to what is required of volunteers and staff at Extended Families Australia in relation to working with the children and young people in our programs.

DO

- Communicate in a way which demonstrates and models respect for the rights, dignity, individuality and well being of the child/young person.
- Use appropriate language and ensure your communication with the child/young person in your care is not offensive, inappropriate or abusive.
- Respect the personal space and privacy of the child/young person.
- Treat children and young people with respect and dignity regardless of ethnic origin, religion, ability, sexuality, language and culture.
- Report any disclosures or suspicions of child abuse and /or neglect and follow Extended Families policy and guidelines regarding the safety of children and young people.
- Offer appropriate comfort when required, ensure safety and meet the child's personal care needs as outlined in the Match Agreement.
- Conduct self in a manner consistent with being a positive role model to children and young people.
- Listen to children and young people and allow them to have a say in decisions which affect them.
- Ensure any photographs taken of the child portray the child in a respectful and dignified manner.

DO NOT

- Expose the child/young person to any violent or pornographic images and materials.
- Make sexually provocative comments to the child or young person or to another person in their presence.
- Allow the child/young person to engage in sexually inappropriate conversations or activities with yourself or other children in your network
- Leave the child /young person unsupervised or in another person's care.
- Inflict any kind of physical punishment or discipline on the child/young person.
- Use language or exhibit behaviour that is abusive, sexually suggestive, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
- Use illicit drugs whilst in the company of the child/young person.
- Do things of a personal nature for a child that the child can do for themselves and that are not identified in the Match Agreement.
- Circulate photographs of the child/young person without express consent.

I have read the Child Protection Code of Conduct and agree to adhere to the guidelines as contained in this document.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

EXTENDED FAMILIES AUSTRALIA VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT



This document sets out the general agreement between Extended Families and volunteers. It is not intended as a legal binding document or to replace the specific Match Agreement that is developed for each volunteer match.

Name:

Address:

Approval: (Name) was accredited as a volunteer with Extended Families Australia on (Date).

I, (Name), agree to:

- Accept the duties and tasks as set out in the volunteer role description.
- Perform my role as a volunteer with Extended Families in such a way that supports the values and ethos of the organisation. In particular, I will demonstrate respect for service users and promote the social inclusion of the child/young person to whom I am matched.
- Comply with the policies and procedures of the organisation as outlined in the Volunteer Handbook and as otherwise made available.
- Accept support and supervision from the Coordinator responsible for the volunteer match.
- Maintain the confidentiality of all personal information pertaining to the child and young person and their family.
- Work toward the goals of the match as outlined in the Match Agreement.
- Negotiate with the Coordinator any proposed significant changes to the arrangements of my match that are not reflected in the Family and Volunteer Match Agreement.
- Abide by the Code of Conduct in relation to Child Protection.
- Report to Extended Families any disclosure of child abuse I receive or any suspicion of child abuse I may have in relation to the child/young person I am matched with.
- Perform the role of volunteer in a manner that is safe for both myself and the child/young person I am matched with.
- Report any critical incidents that occur during my time with a child or their family as soon as is practical to the Coordinator or to the Extended Families After Hours pager number.
- Keep Extended Families informed of any personal issues that arise that may impact on my role as volunteer e.g. serious illness.
- Inform Extended Families should there be any change to my driver's licence status.
- Participate in ongoing training as negotiated with the Coordinator.

- Participate in an annual volunteer review and Match Agreement review which will occur annually or as otherwise needed.
- Inform the Coordinator, prior to talking to the family, should I have major concerns regarding the progress of the match or if I wish to withdraw from the match agreement.

Extended Families agree to:

- Provide you with ongoing support and supervision.
- Provide information about a child and family, to the best of our ability that enables you to make a decision about potential matches.
- Develop a Match Agreement that provides the information necessary to care for the child/young person as well as outlines the goals, activities and tasks of the match as well as the responsibilities of all the parties.
- Provide you with a small financial contribution toward the costs of volunteering as per the current rates.
- Provide ongoing training, resources and peer support opportunities, to help you perform your role of volunteer.
- Provide regular communication, including e-newsletters and other forms of information and communication.
- Provide you with information regarding any new Extended Families policies and procedures and legislative changes that are relevant to the role.
- Respect your skills and experience and to provide you with feedback and encouragement in the role of volunteer.
- Insure you against any injury suffered as a result of the volunteer role or any negligence claim that is made against you.
- Assist you to create a safe environment for the child/young person and yourself.
- Liaise between you and the child's family should issues arise in the match, and attempt to facilitate a resolution to these issues.
- Listen to your feedback regarding the match and the organisation.
- Apply equal opportunity and non discrimination principles to all our dealings with you.
- Attempt to resolve any difficulties or issues that arise between yourself and the organisation in a fair and just manner.

Signatures

Volunteer:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

CEO Extended Families

Name: Julie Langdon

Signature:

Date: