



How much do you value friendship?

Friendship is a powerful force. Successful communities are built on the mutual understanding, respect and appreciation of friendly relations. And at a personal level, friendship provides us all with intellectual stimulation and emotional support.

Best Buddies Australia (BBA) is an exciting new not-for-profit that seeks to harness the power of friendship to transform the lives of people challenged by intellectual disabilities. We want to create a community where these people are connected, included, respected and valued; through friendship.

Best Buddies matches people who have, and those who don't have intellectual disabilities, in one to one friendships. Then the volunteer and their Buddy get involved with everyday activities together, like a trip to the movies or a meal and a chat. Or a walk, or an afternoon at the footie. Simple social pleasures that many of us take for granted.

These friendships can have profound and positive effects on the Buddies. And are often deeply rewarding for the Best Buddies volunteers.

The organisation behind these inspiring relationships was founded in 1989 in the USA by Anthony K Shriver. Since then, Best Buddies has spread to 40 countries ranging from Great Britain and Germany, to Tanzania, Finland, Chile and Australia.

How Best Buddies works

We generally buddy-up with people who have mild to moderate intellectual disability, and are 15 years of age and above.

Best Buddies focuses on the development of a friendship relationship rather than a mentoring one. This provides mutual benefits by shifting both parties' understanding of disability and social inclusion.

The framework requires volunteers to commit to a 12 month program, during which time volunteers (we call them Peer Buddies) and those who have an intellectual disability (Buddies) are matched according to age, location, sex and interests. Each participant is individually assessed.

Transforming lives, making friends, building communities.

Buddy pairs are trained and given guidance about the social expectations of friendships. And they are required to meet twice a month and to have some other form of contact every week (by text, phone or email).

They are supported by Program Managers who facilitate the matches, support the relationship, provide training and monitor adherence to the framework. And those involved with the High Schools program create Chapters in each school to assist with support and organising group events; with each Chapter encouraged to hold four community events per year to increase awareness and build mutual support.

For many of our Buddies, this is the first friend of similar age they've ever had, who hasn't also got a disability. Some have never had a friend at all.

Good for the Buddies. Good for the community.

The Best Buddies framework sets the foundation for genuine social inclusion of those with an intellectual disability.

The development of social skills helps Buddies to realise their full potential, increasing their capacity to manage new environments. Their newfound negotiation and social communication skills enhance everyday life be that at school, at home or in the work place.

20 years of operation in the USA has clearly demonstrated that misconceptions about intellectual disability can be effectively shifted by these programs, while quality of life is improved for all involved; including the Buddies, their peers and the communities they live in.

In Australia, BBA has already made a significant impact on the lives of young people. These improvements include greater inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities in the everyday activities of their schools.

Making a difference now, and into the future

During 2008, BBA will work with 6 Sydney High Schools and 4 High Schools in Melbourne. This will generate more than 100 buddy pairs, equating to more than 5000 hours of time spent in the community doing fun things. And we're already running a Citizens (Adult) program in Melbourne with over 35 Buddy pairs. It's widely accepted as being one of the best in the world.

Next year, we plan to expand our programs even more, aiming for full national coverage within 5 years.

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Please help with this important and rewarding work

We understand that getting involved with a not-for-profit organisation is similar to developing a friendship; it takes time, patience, understanding and a little bit of effort. But in common with our Buddy relationships, a corporate or personal partnership with BBA will reap many mutual rewards.

There are number of ways that you can partner with Best Buddies Australia:

Individual – By volunteering with BBA you commit on an individual basis for 12 months with our core programs. You will be matched in a one to one friendship and required to see your Buddy twice a month and contact them once a week. While we currently do not have a Citizens program in Sydney, this is on the horizon for 2009. Please note that this level of involvement is a more personal relationship with the organisation. It will involve a detailed assessment and matching process.

Great Mates Program (Sponsor a Chapter) – All High School Chapters are required to hold 4 community events each year. This can be as simple as going to dinner together, visiting the gallery, going to the zoo or having a movie night. By becoming a 'Great Mate' you commit to engaging with these young people at these events, by simply 'going along'. As a sponsor, we ask that you contribute to the ongoing costs of supporting a Chapter. However the most important donation is your time and involvement.

Best Buddies is happy to provide some training for you and/or your staff with regards to what to expect. This will help demystify some of the myths about Intellectual Disability, and provide you with some general rules that should be adopted.

General Support – As Best Buddies is a new organisation, we have many general needs that you may be able to assist with. These range from requiring assistance with our internal review process to helping with a major event later in the year. Currently we are looking to review all of our internal business processes with a view to getting better at what we do. If this interests you, please feel free to contact BBA to discuss further.

Payroll Giving – As you'll be aware, providing a service like Best Buddies involves some costs. A small donation each pay goes a long way to covering the costs for providing training and support to our volunteers, engaging with schools and expanding the program. Please visit www.cafaustralia.org.au for more information.

Major corporate supporter – There are no major corporate sponsors of intellectual disability services in Australia. This presents a unique opportunity for an organisation to venture into, and ally itself to, exciting new territory, by supporting a new not-for-profit organisation. We intend to grow, and invite Corporate Australia to grow with us.

For more information please contact:

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