

A program coordinator recruits, assesses and trains adult volunteers ('Aunties' and 'Uncles') and puts them in touch with a child or family in need. The program gives children – many from single-parent families – the opportunity to experience the stability and other benefits of a caring, extended family. The Aunty or Uncle acts as mentor and friend to help children with problems at school and home, and with any other issues. The young people spend one weekend a month with their surrogate family and can contact them at any time if they have any problems.

Steven and Michelle's two youngest children visited their Aunty and Uncle on a weekly basis, giving their parents a chance to do housekeeping and have some time on their own while their other four children were at school. The two children are still linked to their volunteer family but don't visit as often; however, the bond between them will be there for life.

"The program was extremely helpful for us at a very hectic time in our lives," Michelle says. "We don't know how we would have managed without Elaine and her family. We knew the children were safe, loved and well looked after when they were with their 'Aunty' Elaine and 'Uncle' Geoff."

Adds Steven: "The support we received from them has helped us throughout the years. We know that if we ever need them they are there, and will always be there for our children. When you don't have a family nearby that can help, you feel very isolated. It is good to know that there are people who will open their home and give their love freely."

Thanks to the St.George Foundation, Aunties and Uncles has received the funding to support and link a further 16 young people from the Illawarra area.

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Stability

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