



Classlist

Family Buddy programme

A Guide for International Schools



“I had an email from someone from my country and from the grades my children were in before we even left our previous home. I cried! I was overwhelmed with all the packing: The PRE-welcome is SO important. “

International School Parent

Family Buddy Programme User Guide

Welcome to the quick start guide on how to develop and manage a successful Family Buddy Programme at your international school. This guide aims to support new families moving to a new country, easing their transition and helping them feel welcomed and connected to the school community. Based on insights from case studies and success stories, we present a step-by-step guide and address common challenges to ensure your programme runs smoothly.

Introduction

Moving to a new country can be a daunting experience for families. A Family Buddy Programme is designed to match new families with existing ones, offering them a friend and guide as they settle into their new environment. This initiative not only helps new families adjust but also fosters a sense of community within the school.





Step-by-Step Process

Step 1: Programme Launch

Announce the programme through school newsletters, Classlist announcements, and during enrolment to garner interest from both new and existing families.

Step 2: Recruitment

Use Classlist to collect volunteer applications from existing families. Include details such as nationality, residential area, children's ages, and interests.

Promote the programme at school events, especially Welcome Back socials, to recruit more volunteers.

Step 3: Data Collection from New Families

During the enrolment process, ask new families to fill out a similar form, specifying their child's grade, interests, and priority for matching (e.g., location, children's ages).

Step 4: Matchmaking

Form a dedicated team (three members recommended) to match families based on the criteria collected. This process is fun but can become challenging with specific requests. Aim to complete most matches by the end of the term in June.

Consider different categories of Buddies (Superbuddy, regular Buddy, and seasonal Buddy) to accommodate varying levels of commitment and capability among volunteers.

Step 5: Pre-Welcome Connection

Ensure that each new family is connected with their Buddy family before any welcome events to facilitate immediate personal connections.

Step 6: Follow-up

Establish a follow-up routine asking Buddies to reconnect with their matched families if no interaction occurs within a month.

Use Classlist to redirect contact to remind existing Buddies to check-in on their new families periodically (e.g., after the first week, first half-term).

Common Challenges and Solutions

- **Identifying New Families:** Work closely with the Admissions Office to automatically enrol new families into the programme.
- **Encouraging Volunteer Participation:** Highlight the rewarding aspects of being a Buddy through testimonials and success stories in school communication channels.
- **Ensuring Successful Matches:** Be flexible with the matching criteria and prepared to adjust pairings based on feedback or if initial matches are not successful.
- **Maintaining Engagement:** Regularly share updates, tips, or questions on Classlist to keep both new and existing families engaged with the programme.





Case Studies and Success Stories



Stockholm International School

Stockholm International School (SIS) implemented a structured Buddy system with a special Welcome Back Buddy Boat event, improving the connection between new and existing families through shared experiences and pre-meeting before the event. Farrah Gillani, PTA Chair of SIS Parent Association gives the lowdown.



Farrah Gillani

Background

The main thing we aim for with new parents is to get everyone on Classlist. Once they're on Classlist, they can sort themselves out and join the existing interest groups, for example the choir or whatever they're interested in.

When I started there was a very ad-hoc Buddy system which didn't work well - for example if an existing family was acting as Buddy and moved on, there was no follow-up.



Welcome Back Event/ Buddy Boat

Each year the PTA organises a Buddy Boat (Sweden has a lot of water).

This comprises a 3-hour boat trip, with food and drink. The aim is for new families to get to know their Buddies and 'mingle'.

We also have a speaker - for example this year a new parent has written a book about being a 3rd culture person and what its like living in Sweden.

A very important tip: We make sure each parent meets their buddy BEFORE this event so parents and children can connect. This ensures a high turn out rate.

Steps to set up a Buddy programme

Step 1 - find volunteers & new families

April: We have two Google Forms running. The first is for existing parents, asking their nationality, where they live, children etc. The second form is very similar but for new families. We ask what their priority is - their child's grade or an interest (e.g. photography) or meeting families close to where they live.

It is possible to opt out.

Step 2 - Matchmaking (team of 3).

Fun at first, quite hard at the end. Especially if very specific requests come in. The biggest challenge is finding local parents willing to become Buddies. We have lots of virtual matchmaking going on throughout the summer.





United World College South East Asia

UWCSEA revamped its Buddy Programme with a more rigorous system, including comprehensive buddy categories and follow-up processes, significantly enhancing support and satisfaction for both new and existing parents. Rachel Blewitt, Head of the PTA shares her insights.



Rachel Blewitt

Classlist New Families Group

At the start of the year, there are a lot of school information sessions going on. So the PTA tries to complement what they're doing.

We have a "New families" group on Classlist. This is the busiest group: lots of information coming at them from different places. Having a place to go to and ask questions helps them to copy and not get overwhelmed.

Welcome back BBQ

At the beginning of the new academic year we host a BBQ to welcome back new and existing parents. This is well attended.

The Buddy Programme

The Buddy system was started seven years ago and initially wasn't that robust. Four years ago it got a makeover following feedback and talking to previous Buddies and new arrangements were implemented. It now works well.

Each year over 300 new parents want Buddies. With such big numbers we kick off with a coffee morning. Recently we had more than 200 people attend which was a real highlight after so many Covid restrictions in previous years.

It works well because we don't just match and forget it. We make the system pretty rigorous, give them more instructions and guidance on what to do. We ask Buddies to follow up with their matched Buddy if they don't hear back after a month.



Recruitment & Matching Process

I recruit Buddies May/June, before the end of term in June. Most matches are made before the end of term, but I continue matching throughout the summer.

We have different categories of Buddy:

- Super Buddy: takes on 10 new parents and can handle it (sometimes it's easier to have 5-10 in one group to chat to each other).
- Regular Buddy: takes on 1 parent, but might be persuaded to have 2.
- Seasonal Buddy: just has 1 but will hopefully be open to helping throughout the year

By the end of the first week of August everything is closed - although a lot of people sign up right at the last moment then.

There has been so much positive feedback from buddies and new parents. They like helping, they learn a lot. They usually do it again.

Monitoring progress

The PTA also monitors interactions and helps with follow up after a month.

The PTA also sends reminders to the existing Buddies every now and then.

- Did you hear how the first week went
- Did you hear how the first half-term went?

Many Buddies do this already, but this helps remind some, and avoid people slipping through the gaps.

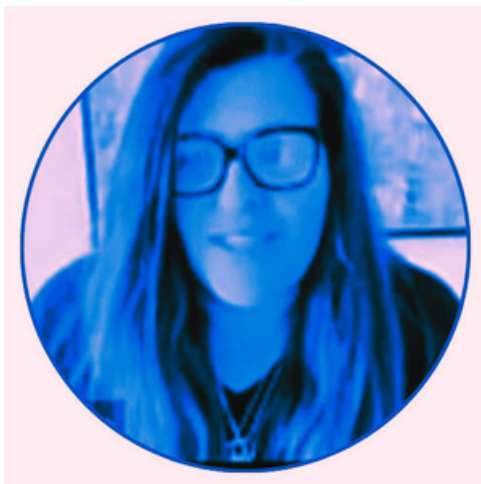
Buddy volunteers now feel more supported. Before they didn't really know what to do. Most of them love it and sign up again; which is exactly what the school needs!



Copenhagen International School



Copenhagen International School reviewed its Buddy family programme to ease the pressure of 1:1 relationships, directing new families towards Classlist language and class groups for broader support systems. Nikki Moffatt, PTA Chair shares her top tips.



Nikki Moffatt

Background

We asked parents in a questionnaire whether it's the first time they've been an expat.

Set up a new family support group

This is because we find new families have a lot of the same questions, so by having all the new people together in a group (on Classlist) means they can support each other. It also removes the noise for existing parents who tire from the same questions

Buddy Programme

We also found that having 1:1 buddy relationships was creating too much pressure on host buddies. So we now direct new families more to their Classlist language groups and their Classlist class groups and reps.

Country reps are also useful backups if they haven't met their buddy yet. Can often be the first 'touch point' with the school community.

Other Initiatives

- The beginning of the year is also a great opportunity to recruit more volunteers. Especially at the **Welcome Back social**. We always use name tags that include name and class so parents can easily find each other.
- **Local tours** help people adapt to things such as explanation of recycling
- **Supermarket tours** are the BEST thing ever! Its always hard to find what you like in a new country



Template letter

Here is a tried and tested letter you can use to kick start your Family Buddy programme.

The School/PTA is pleased to launch the Family Buddy programme.

This, along with the Buddy Mentoring Programme for pupils will make our school an even more welcoming and friendly experience.

Would you and your family like to connect with and support a new family?

Many families arrive not knowing anyone or anything about the city and need local information as well as facts about the school. It is also very important that new students feel connected and welcomed right from the beginning.

If you would like to sponsor a new family please send a private message via Classlist to 'Family Buddy Programme' giving your nationality, where you live, and your children's ages.

We will try to match families with kids that are of similar ages and live near each other.

Share a warm smile, a welcoming hand, vital school info and even where to find the best food or a great tennis coach and all the interesting things to see and do in our wonderful city.

If you are a new family you can sign up for the program when you register with the Admissions Office or send a private message via Classlist to 'Family Buddy Programme'.

We are committed to welcoming and connecting new families

The School/PTA is pleased to launch the Family Buddy programme.

This, along with the Buddy Mentoring Programme for pupils will make our school an even more welcoming and friendly experience.

Would you and your family like to connect with and support a new family?

Many families arrive not knowing anyone or anything about the city and need local information as well as facts about the school. It is also very important that new students feel connected and welcomed right from the beginning.



If you would like to sponsor a new family please send a private message via Classlist to 'Family Buddy Programme' giving your nationality, where you live, and your children's ages.

We will try to match families with kids that are of similar ages and live near each other.

Share a warm smile, a welcoming hand, vital school info and even where to find the best food or a great tennis coach and all the interesting things to see and do in our wonderful city.

If you are a new family you can sign up for the program when you register with the Admissions Office or send a private message via Classlist to 'Family Buddy Programme'.

We are committed to welcoming and connecting new families



Conclusion

A Family Buddy Programme can play a crucial role in welcoming and integrating new families into your school community. By following this guide and learning from the provided case studies, you can ensure a successful and impactful programme that fosters a supportive and engaging environment for all families.

For further guides and information why not subscribe to our [blog and newsletter](#)

