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## **What Is Uncle?**

Uncle is an organisation dedicated to helping young boys who for whatever reason have no or limited active men in their lives and very little interaction with men due to various circumstances. We do this in two ways. Firstly by organising activities where groups of men and boys can get together and interact, and secondly by facilitating and monitoring one-on-one mentoring relationships. The objective is to provide these boys with the positive male role models their lives are lacking.

Young boys being raised without sufficient male influence, face a number of challenges. Most simply put they do not have anyone to set an example for them as they grow into men. Communication studies have shown that boys learn many important lessons that are necessary to this process simply by being in the company of men. They learn about respect, responsibility and appropriate behaviour by observing how good men relate to each other. Not spending time in the company of men means that they must learn these lessons elsewhere, and they often do not get them right. Making the wrong choices at this age can have serious long-term effects.

The men involved in Uncle are not superheroes. We make no claim to moral superiority. We are regular people who are concerned about the prospect of young boys growing up without a positive male role model. Author, poet and men's movement champion Robert Bly talks about every man providing a map of one way to be a man and this is a philosophy we strongly believe in. A boy doesn't need to follow this map exactly, but he does need to be able to refer to it from time to time. A man doesn't have to be perfect to be a good role model, he just has to be there with honest and good intent. This is our focus at Uncle: we make an effort to be there.

We target boys between the ages of 6 and 12 because, according to Steve Biddulph, author of *Manhood*, it is at this stage in their development that boys learn significantly from their father figure. Prior to age 6 they are still very close to their mothers and after age 12 they begin to look to their peers as their primary socialising influence. The best option for your boy is for a man who is already known to him, a relative or close friend, to make a commitment to take on the role of Uncle. When a man and boy join our program together these are often our most successful and long-lasting relationships.

The bottom line is, being involved with Uncle is fun. We get to do things that many boys and men would otherwise not get a chance to do, whether it's flying in ultra-light planes, sailing on tall ships or overnight camps in the bush. At the same time we are helping boys become men, we are helping men to reconnect with what it means to be a good man. The outcome is that the boys who are active in our program emerge with a stronger foundation, better equipped to deal with the challenges that life will inevitably present.

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