

## Letter writing tips

Writing letters not only strengthens your relationship with your sponsored child and their family, but also keeps you in closer touch with their progress. It is useful to do some research before writing your first letter – read about your child and their community in your Child Information Folder and search our website for facts about their country.

Please don't send anything bigger than a standard-size envelope as often customs duties are high and sometimes mail goes missing. ChildFund Australia cannot guarantee letters will reach your sponsored child as postal systems in developing countries are not as fast or reliable as in Australia. However once your mail arrives at the ChildFund national office it will be delivered to your sponsored child.

### Language

Please write in English and keep your letter short, simple and clear. Typed letters are preferred, as this makes it easier to translate into your child's language and for your child to understand and appreciate. Your child will receive your original letter and the translation – likewise when you receive mail.

### Photographs

They are likely to become prized possessions! Send photos of your family, your friends and your life - general situations rather than material wealth. Postcards are also a treat for children.

### What to write about

- yourself and your family
- your pets and hobbies
- sport
- where you work
- where you live
- ask your child about their life, for example where they live
- ask who, what, where, when and how questions ('why' questions are difficult for a child to answer)

### What not to write about

Please bear in mind your child's social, economic and cultural background differs dramatically to yours. It may be damaging to write about possessions and money, or other material differences between your situation and your child's.

When writing or sending photographs, please remember that: some communities do not celebrate birthdays, and your child's religious holidays may differ to yours. In addition, your sponsored child's religious beliefs may be different from yours.

### When?

Please wait for eight weeks before writing your first letter, as it takes this long for your child to become aware you are their sponsor. A birthday card and a Christmas card - if culturally appropriate - should be sent two months prior to the occasion. Two or three letters a year on top of this is ideal.

### **Can more than one person write?**

To avoid confusing your sponsored child and to keep translation costs down, all letters should come from one designated letter-writer. Combined letters are welcome, however the same person should always sign and take responsibility for sending and receiving letters. The name of the group and that of the correspondent should also appear at the end of each letter.

### **Addressing and sending the letter**

Send your correspondence directly to your sponsored child via the national office - the address is in your Child Information Folder. Please write the address in capital letters. Please include your child's identification number and your ChildFund A00 Reference Number (provided on your Sponsor Registration Form) at the top of the letter.

*Please do not include your personal address in your letter or on the envelope.* It is easy for your address to be used by 'professional beggars' asking you for money. All letters and postcards should be sent in an envelope and by airmail. Ask your post office to frank the letter as unusual stamps may go astray if they are regarded as valuable.

### **Will my child write back?**

Yes! Children who are too young to write get help from their family or a program staff member who will identify themselves in the letter. You will receive the child's original letter and a translation.

### **How long does it take to get a reply?**

You should allow 16-20 weeks, occasionally longer, for a complete exchange of letters. This allows for translation and transportation to or from the project, which may be in an extremely remote area. Please be patient. Remember your child may never have written or received a letter before. If you haven't heard anything in six months from the time you write, please contact ChildFund Australia and we will investigate.

### **Gifts**

Gifts are entirely optional, and customs duty and theft prevents many parcels from reaching the children they are intended for.

A more reliable and efficient way of sending a gift is to contribute extra money through ChildFund Australia. The full amount will be forwarded and our staff in the national office will buy your sponsored child a gift according to your instructions. Please do not send cash, cheques or money orders to your child as they will be returned to ChildFund Australia for processing.

Please bear in mind that in keeping with culture, monetary gifts for children in Papua New Guinea and Vietnam are pooled for the benefit of the entire community. Every child is able to receive a gift, regardless of whether they are sponsored.

It is best to send or organise a gift at least two months prior to a special occasion to ensure your child receives it in time.