

# MAKING CONNECTIONS



Settling down and making new friends takes effort but it's all worth it...

**M**oving to the other side of the world and leaving your friends and family behind is scary. You step off that plane without a support network, and you need to build a new one. Fast.

Australia is a friendly country. As soon as we landed we ended up chatting to people – at the airport, in the parks, in the shops, on the street... Making connections wasn't difficult, but turning them into something meaningful took more effort.

### MEETING OTHER EXPATS

Moving abroad reminded me of having twins. When I found out I was expecting twins six years ago, the best advice I was given was to join a 'twin club' where I could pick the brains of other twin mums that had been through it before me. The same goes for emigrating.

While it's incredible, and essential, to hang out with locals in your new country, I've found such amazing support from the expats I've met here. They know exactly



Expats Pat and Bob have been really supportive

what we've been going through. Having people around that 'get it' is priceless.

Through the PomsInOz forum, we've been introduced to a wonderful group of expats that meet for support and a barbeque every three months in North Lakes, Brisbane.

The group was set up in 2013 by expats Pat and Bob as they realised there was a lack of emotional and physical support for

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Karen's kids Lincoln and Reuben have settled in well

new migrants. After hearing about some families that were homesick over the Christmas period, the final straw came when Bob (a handyman) met a couple while doing some work on their rental.

“They'd arrived from Yorkshire a couple of days earlier and were still waiting for their container goods and had nothing. We had to do something to help! We'd done it 33 years previously – pre-computer, Google Earth, Facebook and knew how painful it could be,” said Pat.



Karen and Matt (left) with their friends in Brisbane who helped them move house

Pat and Bob are awesome – they help out fresh expats whenever they can, and are a fountain of knowledge. A closed Facebook group allows us to sort out regular mini-meet ups, ask each other if we need help and generally share the things we're learning about our new lives with one another. (If you're planning a move to Brisbane and want to contact Pat and Bob, please email me and I'll put you in touch [Karen@talesofatwinmum.com](mailto:Karen@talesofatwinmum.com).)

Similar groups like this will operate elsewhere, and if they don't, you can easily set one up.

### GETTING SETTLED AT SCHOOL

Our first big step towards joining the local community was getting our kids settled in school. It gave me a chance to chat to other parents and organise play dates, which has helped all of us settle in.

School comes with the opportunity to volunteer for things like the tuck shop, school trips and special events – schools over here are very much a community effort and it's a great way to feel part of things.

I'm also lucky that our school runs toddler groups, which means I get to drop my boys off and then take my daughter to a coffee morning with other mums (homemade cake, hot coffee and making new friends at the same time – win, win).

Now that we're settling in, we're getting the kids into activities like swimming lessons, so I get to meet other parents by the poolside. I'm sure it won't be long before we're hanging out at the soccer pitch and in the dance studio too. Inviting other parents for coffee afterwards is an easy way to start a friendship.

The Meetups website ([www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)) is a great resource, as it lists get-togethers for all interests. I'm also enjoying being part of the local Facebook groups for mums. Most suburbs have one and they provide virtual support and face-to-face meet ups (just type your suburb into a Facebook search and see what groups pop up).

My job as a freelance writer can be solitary, so I've found great support in the local online business networks. Having somebody to bounce work ideas around with is so useful and it helps me feel connected. I'm also excited to be attending my first ProBlogger conference in August – this is going to be a great way

to meet more Australian bloggers and feel part of the local blogger community.

### FRIENDS BECOME FAMILY

Friendships in your new home will be different to the ones you left behind; they become more like family because that's what they have to be for you.

I was worried about leaving our lives behind in the UK, but I needn't have been. So many amazing people have helped us settle in – from lending us a house full of furniture while our container was delayed, through to babysitting our kids and helping us to move house.

They haven't replaced our old friends but instead they've added something new to our lives. I know that if we have an emergency, we have a host of people to call on. And I love that we can be there for them whenever they have a problem.

I can't believe how far we've come in just 10 months. We stepped off the plane knowing one family in Brisbane. Now we have a whole new network. 🇦🇺



■ Karen is a freelance travel writer and blogger. You can read about her migration journey on her family, travel and lifestyle blog at [www.talesofatwinmum.com](http://www.talesofatwinmum.com) or on Twitter @TalesofaTwinMum.