



Thanks to NORTHSTAR Rotary Youth Exchange for providing this document

Guide to Recruiting HOST Families

The Basics

- Please go into this with the attitude that there are three wonderful families for each student that you host. Don't let that positive thought escape. Every year is a new year and every family is a new opportunity.
 - Use **positive language**, you will feel better and your invitations to host will go farther
 - Use **opportunity to host** instead of must host.
 - Use **only 3.5 months** to host, so that we get to share the opportunity to host with others, instead of saying "burden" or similar language.

- **Host families must be personally asked.** Announcements plant ideas, but a personal ask produces the YES. Nearly every one of our host families was personally asked....after hearing or thinking they might be interested; they were personally asked. Seldom do folks jump into the boat without an invitation.
 - "I heard you might be interested in hosting an exchange student, I think you would be wonderful, your family would get so much out of the experience and the student would be so lucky to live with you."
 - "We have a club youth exchange committee to give you the needed support to host. You are not doing this alone."
 - "Have you ever thought of hosting a student? It is for a short 3.5 months and you will likely develop a special relationship that will last for a lifetime. It is so easy to become very attached to these students."
 - If they have a child thinking about Rotary youth exchange in their future...."Hosting a student is a great way to have a deeper understanding of what it is like to be an exchange student. Why don't you become a host family?"

- **This is an *opportunity***, make sure host families know the rewards as well as the possible challenges. Make sure they know they have a strong support system to help them through their short 3.5 months of hosting.
 - They share the student with two other families...create a "team" and it becomes more fun and less daunting
 - The student has a Rotary counselor; in case the student needs some guidance...takes some of less-than-fun stuff away from the host family.

- The host family has the YEO as a local resource.
 - Tell the stories of families that have been forever connected and how their lives have been changed. Tell them that the children in the house can become more outgoing, more helpful, more interested. How they become curious about the world. This should be seen as an opportunity to host not an obligation or a burden.
 - The host family is not having “company” for three months, they are having another family member for three months (and longer). From the moment the student comes into the house they are treated as one of the family....complete with chores and responsibilities.
 - Host families don’t have to be “perfect”...have a perfectly clean house, serve perfect meals, perfect everything. You get to continue to be yourself. If you are tired and don’t want to make dinner...pizza is ok.
 - Host families are not expected to take their students on trips or indulge them in any way other than providing a safe and loving home. If another student gets to go to travel with a family, that was never expected, that was just a lucky student.
- **Explain the benefits/challenges of the host family order.** It can be a real selling point!
For example:
 - **First Host Family:** Sets the student up for American life; gets a lot of "firsts;" sees a huge amount of growth in the student; can be a lot of guidance and hand-holding; culture shock is real; a tight bond can form. Can be a part of the student's life in a special way all year. A great hosting position for a tight-knit or active family, one with other teenagers or one that has time to really guide the student.
 - **Second Host Family:** The student is hitting his/her stride in terms of language, friends and understanding how we tick; is excited to experience winter and the holidays; can also have holiday homesickness or the winter blues. A slightly hesitant family can be a great fit, as they can get to know the student before he/she moves in.
 - **Third Host Family:** The student is off to the races and needs little guidance for everyday things; Language and cultural understanding will be at its best as is the students' adaptability; students revel in being competent and confident; students will be increasingly active as exchange draws to a close; could possibly treat this family as a hotel. A great position for someone who is nervous about hosting or has less experience in a parenting role.
 - Recruiting host families is a **year-round task**. Keep a running list of:
 - Families that think their child might be an outbound in the future
 - Friends of a current inbound student
 - Families with no children, families with young children, families that are empty nesters

Who can be a host family?

- **Any family can be a host family**
 - Families with small children
 - Families with no children
 - Single parents
 - Same-sex couples
 - Young people
 - Retirees
 - People who have never been parents
- Actively discourage myths about who "shouldn't" be a host family
- Families that want to host often rule themselves out because of A, B or C. Tell them that **the most important quality of a host family is a sincere desire to welcome a young person into their family.** The rest boils down to the mysteries of chemistry.
- Here are some example:
 - **Concern** -- "The student would have to share a room/the guest room is small"
 - **Response** -- "As long as the student feels welcome, wanted and included, he will not care if he's in a refrigerator box in the garage." (Don't put the student in a refrigerator box in the garage.)
 - **Concern** -- "We're empty nesters"
 - **Response** -- "The word is out among students that empty nesters are the best because of the attention they receive."
 - **Concern** -- "We have little kids; the student will want teenagers in the house."
 - **Response** -- "Teenagers don't necessarily get along and competition for the bathroom will be lower."
 - **Concern** -- "I want to do this but my husband/kid/dog does not."
 - **Response** -- "That can be an issue. For an experience that's fair to all concerned, everyone (including the dog) needs to be on board with this. I'd be happy to talk to this person to figure out if there are ways to address the concerns." (in some cases, they can be and others cannot. In that case, try to find a different role for that person. Emergency family? Do a day-trip with the student? Have the kids extend kindness at school?)
 - **Concern** -- "I've never been a parent."
 - **Response** -- "That's OK, it's why we work together as a team. If we set you up as second or third host family, the student is already aware of how parents work in the US, and you can use the template for curfew, etc. from the other families. If any issue pops up that is above your paygrade, we're here to be a team. We're all in this together."

- **Concern** -- “We're a non-traditional family (same-sex couple; don't speak English in the home; divorced with kids moving back and forth; non-White ethnicity...)
- **Response** – “All families are weird, which is one of the points of the three-host-family model. It is my job to find a safe, welcoming family for this student, not if you fit into a particular mold. Let's talk about how Rotary and the student could handle these differences and how we best approach them.”

How to get started

- Don't do it alone. You and your youth exchange committee should always be on the lookout for potential host families.
 - Recruit other eyes and ears (your club members) to help locate the families
 - Announce to the club that you are looking for host families; they can help be on the watch, but you shouldn't count on your Rotary club members to be host families.
 - Recruiting non-Rotary members is best, as they are the potential future Rotarians to bring new growth and energy to your club.
- Develop relationships with the following:
 - High School staff: High school world language teachers, social studies teachers, school counselors, and administrators are all sources for host families as well as outbound students.
 - Elementary school staff, especially for language immersion program schools, as families might have interest in hosting while their child learns a language.
 - Church leaders, staff and youth leaders can be a source with their knowledge of families in the congregation
- Follow up with club youth exchange connections, past and present
 - Who has sent a student out in the past? Even if it was a year or two ago, maybe they are ready to host.
 - Who is sending or thinking of sending a student? They can get to know the program by hosting or they may know of someone who might like to host.
 - Who has hosted in the past? Even if it is five years ago, perhaps they would like to host again.
 - Ask your current host families if they know of any potential hosts for next year. They will know who their student has met. Host families are often asked by others what the experience is like; perhaps they have planted seeds you can follow up with.
 - Ask who are friends with your current inbound. Whose house has he/she gone to? Keep track of these families and follow up with an invitation to host next year.
 - If a family can't host, ask them if they know of someone who might like to.

- “STEP” families may also make ideal host families.

Other Ideas

- Have a presence at special events:
 - Promote Rotary Youth Exchange at Rotary Club events, Community festival and fundraisers
 - Have a current inbound student or Rotex talk to a youth group, a boy or girl scout group or other youth organizations. Have them talk about the wonderful relationships they developed with their host families. Get students dreaming about having an exchange student in their home.
 - Visit school webpages and look for world language clubs, social studies clubs or service clubs to speak to and invite students in those classes to speak to their families about hosting. Perhaps the teachers would send a flyer home with the students after you speak to them.
- Make Personal connections
 - Whenever you are in social situations, casually bring the topic up
 - Have you ever thought of hosting?
 - Can you think of anyone that would be a good host family?
 - Always have it in the back of your mind....do the casual asks all the time...if there seems to be some interest, write their name down and follow up with a formal invitation later.
 - Talk about hosting with people you know: Friends with kids, friends with no children, retired folks, people who like travel or who would like to travel
 - Talk to everyone about what your inbound student is doing ...how wonderful they are, fun things they are doing or you have learned from them.
 - Follow up on any leads. Inform, ask, inform, ask...
- Youth Exchange Committee activities
 - Have a party with snacks and search the school or other directory for possible host families to contact. Make phone calls together. Make the brainstorming time fun, recruit others, and get excited together.
 - Hold a public gathering of potential host families...advertise in the paper or whatever ways you can think of. Perhaps hold it at a back area of a coffee shop or something easy to get to and explain to the potential hosts what the program is how it works, what is needed. It is a great idea to have past host families there that can share what their experience was and encourage others.
 - When your inbound student gives their presentation at Rotary, have them invite their friends. This can lead to students going home and introducing the idea of hosting to their families.

Once you have your host families

- Take really good care of the host families and show them lots of appreciation. This will help the reputation of hosting and lead to new or renewed hosts.
 - Acknowledge and thank them often, do it publicly too. They are the rock stars!
 - If there is an “issue” act on it quickly, take the burden off the host family to figure it out.
 - Check in with them regularly to see if everything is ok, any “issues”?
 - Invite them to Rotary meetings, especially when it involves youth exchange, treat them like royalty and have the club President acknowledge their service.
 - Having an 'Emergency Host' on standby is always a good idea and can provide an added sense of security to the host families and the host club - just in case.

- Knit the host families together, so it feels like they have support with one another instead of three isolated host families.
 - Have joint potlucks early on. Have the families meet each other, become friends with each other.
 - By supporting families and giving them the opportunity to have a positive experience, it will be easier to recruit in our communities. Word gets out how fun it is and soon families will be contacting you to be put on the list.
 - Create a “community” feeling in the experience. Families often host again because they don't want to be outside that circle.

If you need assistance, feel free to contact Steve Trine. District 5790 Youth Exchange Officer at strinerotary5790yeo@gmail.com or by calling 817-658-6118.