

Finding and Nurturing Host Families

Ideas for Recruiting Host Families:

Giving young people the opportunity to discover new cultures and expand their understanding of the world are key benefits of the Rotary Youth Exchange program. Yet clubs often struggle to find families who are willing to open their homes – and their hearts -- to these enthusiastic young people. Host families do not need to be Rotarian families; in fact, people often become interested in joining Rotary because of their involvement in Youth Exchange. Here are some tips to help your Club find and nurture a Youth Exchange host family:

- Start with your Rotary Club. Encourage Rotarians to host students. You may wish to make this appeal during a meeting at which spouses are present or after another student has attended a meeting and has met many of the club's members. Ask Rotarians to recommend non-Rotarian families they feel are qualified and may be interested in hosting a Youth Exchange student.
- Double-the fun. It's sometimes easier to find host families if more than one club sponsors an inbound student. Work with a nearby club to co-host a student and expand your pool of host volunteers.
- Ask families who have successfully hosted students to recommend other families in the community who would be interested in hosting.
- Pay it forward. Ask parents of former Youth Exchange participants to host an inbound student. They understand the importance of finding responsible parents to provide a home for these special guests.
- Go back to school. Arrange for a former or current Youth Exchange student to address the local parent-teacher association or a school assembly and personally recommend the program. Ask the foreign language teachers in your local high school if they would be interested or if they know of a family who would enjoy sharing their home with a foreign exchange student.
- Get out in the community. Promote the program to religious institutions, youth groups, athletic clubs, and cultural groups. Set up a booth at a library, community center, shopping center, or other public place to answer questions.
- Send out news releases to local media, including school newspapers, or broadcast a public service announcement about your Youth Exchange program on a local radio or TV station. If your club or district is currently hosting exchange students, submit an article to the local newspaper that highlights interesting experiences.
- Arrange for time out. Everyone can benefit from a little time apart. Ask members of your club to host the exchange student for day trips and special activities. Don't wait for volunteers -- keep a calendar at club meetings to encourage members to act on those good intentions.
- Meet up. Invite potential hosts, including Rotary members, friends, family, and neighbors to events organized for exchange students. If you can get people to interact with these amazing kids, you may have less difficulty finding host families.

Who Can Host:

Any caring and responsible family with an interest in hosting a young person from another country can be a tremendous host family! The best host families are really just normal families and they don't fall into any one, easy-to-define category.

Rotary differs from many international exchange programs in that our students generally live with two or more families during their exchange year. This gives the student a more well-rounded experience in a culture, allowing them the opportunity to experience family life from multiple perspectives. It is also less of a commitment for host families; the typical length of stay being three to four months instead of a full year.

Rotary Host families run the full spectrum of possibilities. And they can live anywhere—the suburbs, the city or even a farm. Here are some myths and realities of being a host family:

- Myth – “Only Rotarians can be host families for Rotary Youth Exchange students.”
 - **FACT - Families DO NOT need to be Rotarians to host Rotary Exchange Students.**
- Myth – “To be a host parent, you must currently have children living in your home.”
 - **FACT - It doesn't matter if you have children, you're single, you're an “empty nester” or you're a same sex couple...you can host. In fact...**
 - Families with small children make great host families because young children get the experience of having a big brother or sister and the exchange student often enjoys the relaxed atmosphere of practicing their language skills with a younger child.
 - Families with high school age children are ideal because host brothers and sisters can quickly get the student involved in school and community activities.
 - Empty Nesters or retired couples are good too because they can have more time to spend with their student than younger parents.

A host family is responsible for room and board for the student, supporting and guiding the student through the cultural adjustment and overseeing schoolwork. Generally, the student is treated as one of their own. Host families are not reimbursed or paid for their efforts. Nor is there any charge to become a host family.

Host Family Support:

To ensure a successful exchange for both the host family and the student, Rotary provides a team of dedicated volunteers to answer all questions. Throughout the exchange, they will check in regularly to make sure things are going well and support the host family and student. All volunteers are trained to successfully navigate cross-cultural adjustments and the natural cultural shock that will occur.

Addressing the Excuses:

- **Don't think you have room; be creative!** If possible, it is desirable that the student has his/her own room but this is not absolutely necessary. Each time an exchange student moves into one host family's home, their girls gladly give up one or the other of their bedrooms.
- **Think your life is too boring?** This is all new to the exchange students; they won't be bored! Host families share our culture with the exchange student as it exists in everyday life. This does not mean elaborate entertainment; it does mean making the exchange student a part of your family with the opportunity to share in all aspects - home, school and community - "warts and all."
- **Not sure how to entertain a student?** The exchange student should not be treated as a guest. They are expected to assist with household responsibilities as any other child in the family does. Students are encouraged to become involved in school, Rotary and community activities. The Host Family is under no obligation to provide the student with travel experiences. However, if possible, it is encouraged to have the student accompany the host family on trips or vacations in order for the student and family to bond/connect more deeply.
- **What? You don't speak Czech?** Most exchange students will have studied English, sometimes to a considerable extent. But, to even the best students, it will be a "foreign" tongue, a language learned from books rather than daily use. Patience and understanding will be important.
- **Think you can't afford to host a student?** Our Club will provide the exchange student with a monthly stipend for miscellaneous expenses. The student's own family is expected to provide funds for clothing, travel or other expenses. The host family is expected to pay for the exchange student's activities with the family and there will be some extra expenses to the host family such as meals, gas, extra school outings, haircuts, etc. This is like adding another child to your family for a short period of time.
- **Not sure you have time to be a host parent?** Host families should expect to help their exchange student meet Rotary obligations. The exchange student should attend Rotary meetings and functions. These occasions are an important feature of the exchange, part of the program's ambassadorial aspect.
- **Don't have children living at home?** Exchange students should be exposed to a variety of different host family situations. Rotary Host families run the full spectrum of possibilities. And they can live anywhere—the suburbs, the city or even a farm. Here are some myths and realities of being a host family:
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- **Don't like the idea of being subject to a background check or having your family screened?** Put yourself in the shoes of the exchange student's natural parents – wouldn't you want an assurance that the host family has been checked out a bit?