How do you find host families?

The best host families are responsible, willing, and interested in welcoming a young person from another country into their home. Host families need not be Rotarian families; in fact, people often become interested in joining Rotary because of their involvement in Youth Exchange. Host families can be recruited using many of the same tools used to advertise the program to potential students.

In looking for host families, I have used several different venues…

* Is there a “welcome back night” at the high school? Can you set up a table or display? Will they let you hand out or post a flier? (There’s some great information, fliers, etc. on the RI website under “youth programs”.)
* Many times, there is a school counselor who is selected to work only with the exchange students. They are usually familiar with past host families and possible new host families.
* Is there a foreign language class(es) that the school will allow you (great to take an inbound exchange student with you too) to talk to the class(es) about the program? Many times the student may not want to (or can’t) go on exchange, but becomes excited about the possibility of hosting a student in their own home and will convince parents.
* Is there a school sport coach, club supervisor, music teacher, etc. that may teach a class or supervise students that have a similar interest as your student that you are looking for a host family for? Since they are working closely with the students and their families, they can give some helpful insight into who may have already hosted for a different program, or who may be a possible great host family for you.
* The rebound students and their families have always helped, either by hosting or asking around. They have friends from school and neighbors that we normally don’t have access to… (Rebounds usually like to be involved upon their return and are always happy to help.)
* The inbound students themselves have met so many other students at school. Sometimes friends’ parents have asked to be a host family.
* Have your club get involved with short term exchanges. The students that go out on a short term exchange are excited about the program and many would love to host a long term student.
* Members of your club and their children. If they can’t host themselves, they have been great helps, asking friends and family, school mates, etc.
* Ask your outbound students/families if they would like to host or can help find interested families. (Parents of outbound students cannot be required to host as a condition of their child’s participation in the program.) One of the clubs hosts a spaghetti dinner for their outbound students and families. They ask the student to invite at least 3 other families that might be interested in hosting. At the dinner, they spend time talking about the program and hosting.
* Does your club get involved with hosting the students who arrive in the Spring with the Scanex Train Trip? It is a two day host/stay that has “hooked” many families. (Ask Steve Schwab for more information)
* Will another club help you? Sometimes clubs who have been involved for a while have a “maser” list of host families they have used in the past, are willing to host, but aren’t needed this current year. They also have their own rebound student who could be asked to help.
* Advertisements in local or community newspapers. (Please remember you cannot use a picture or student name in your ad.)
* Ask families who have hosted before if they would like to host again or can recommend another family.
* Churches/ministers/clergy that members are affiliated with are good sources. I have found many wonderful host families through a member of my club who is a minister. He has suggested families and even put general information in his bulletin to the church members about hosting an exchange student.
* I have found host families in some of the most interesting places. The trick is to just keep talking to people about it and don’t be afraid to ask… I met the President of the Rose Festival at an event awhile back and told him I worked with the YE program for Rotary. He said that he had hosted a 2 week Japanese student a few years back in another program…That was my in! Ah ha, “would you be interested in hosting again?” Yes, he was. No one had approached him and he probably wouldn’t have gone out searching to host, but he is now.. I found a host family for a student in West Linn on an airplane on my way to India about 4 years ago! A grocery store where I go with all my students on a semi-frequent basis has a manager that asked me about the students. He is now hosting.

Host families are essential to the program, and Rotarians in the host club should work to maintain a positive relationship with the families. Invite them to club meetings and/or events, and show appreciation in person and through written thank you notes. Following an exchange, ask each family member to complete an evaluation form or do an “exit” interview in person…A great time to take a small thank you gift to the family! A small house planet, a gift cart to a restaurant, a gift basket of goodies… It doesn’t have to be anything large, just something to show that you appreciated their opening their home to your student. Cultivation a relationship with the host families increases the possibility that they will want to host students in the future.

I have found that host families are usually a little unclear as to who is who and what their responsibilities to the student are. Even after doing an interview with the family and explaining the program, many questions arise over the course of the student’s stay.

It is always a good idea to put together a notebook for the host family. This gives them a good understanding of their student and their student’s interests, background, hobbies/activities, and needs before they enter into the host family’s home.

This notebook follows the student from home to home, with each family adding information; such as sports participating in, coach’s names and contact information, school difficulties and/or issues, up-coming events… any information the family feels might be helpful for the next family to know.

A sample of the type of information that should be included in this notebook is as follows…

1. Student information
   1. A copy of the student’s full application, including medical release
   2. Information on the student’s country and/or culture
   3. Flight schedule (if known)
   4. School Information…What school will the student be attending. Who will register the student. Who is the student’s counselor at school. Records from the students home country. Immunization records. Etc.
2. Host family information
   1. What are the responsibilities of the host family
   2. First night questionnaire
   3. Hosting and inbound guidelines, District 5100 rules and inbound guidelines
   4. Youth Protection Policy and procedure
   5. Emergency issues and procedures... contacts, medical insurance, emergency fund, Etc.
3. Club information
   1. Club YE committee roster/club contacts
   2. Student’s counselor at club. Phone number and/or email
   3. Who is responsible for getting the students allowance to the student. Phone number and/or email
   4. Student expenses explanation… How much allowance does the student get and when. What other expenses does the club cover for the student. Etc.
   5. When are meetings. How does the student get to the meetings. What other activities should the student be attending. Etc.
4. District information
   1. District YE Committee Roster
   2. District YE Country Officer for the student. Phone number and/or email
   3. District activity calendar
5. Other information