



# Become a RYE Host Family

rotary  
youth  
exchange

Have you ever thought about becoming a Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE) Student Host Family for a high school age child (15.5-18.5 yrs old) from another country? If not, maybe you should. For many it has been among the most rewarding experiences of their lives!

## **THE EXPERIENCE:**

For many families, hosting a foreign exchange student is an engaging and enriching experience that has many benefits that continue for decades after the initial hosting period is over:

- You get to be a global ambassador for the USA and shape people's perception of our country for the better;
- You and your family members get a chance to broaden your horizons and learn about another country and culture;
- You get the satisfaction of knowing you have helped to shape a young person's perspective, broaden their views, and influence their future.
- You do not need to be a Rotarian or have children at home to host. Some of our best host Families have been those that are empty-nesters or retired- they have extra time to engage with the student.
- That said, if you do have children in your home:
  - They will learn how to live and thrive with someone from a different country and cultural background, which can be an invaluable life skill;
  - They may develop an interest in becoming a RYE student to another country, which can have lifelong benefits for them personally, academically, and professionally

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT AS A HOST PARENT:**

Each *inbound* exchange student lives with three host families over the course of their stay in the US. This means that over the 10+ months they are here (mid-August to mid- or end-of-June), each family will host for approximately 3+ months - that is only about 12 weeks, and it goes FAST.

During those 3 months, the student will live with you in your home as a member of your family. As the host parent, you are responsible for taking care of them as you would your own children. This includes:

- Feeding them, both at home and at school (they can pack a lunch, or you can give them lunch money).
- Providing them with a room with a real bed (they can share a room with a same-sex sibling, but no more than two kids to a room), space to do their homework, and access to laundry facilities to wash the clothes they bring with them.
- Getting them to school and to extracurricular activities. If there is a school bus, they can ride it with the other kids. If you need assistance with transportation to get them to activities, Rotarians from our club can help.

- Full participation in family activities, including helping with household chores. Treat them the same as your own children, that's part of the point of RYE.

Although you don't need to think of yourself as a tour guide, it's great to include your RYE student in the full variety of experiences your family enjoys. This could be everything from volunteer experiences to a vacation, but even going on a hike, to a local baseball game, or making pizza from scratch is an experience that they may not get in their home country. Small things can become memorable moments when shared with an exchange student. We had a student who developed a hankering for burgers from Boomers Drive-In which is definitely not an experience he would have had back home in Peru!

You are not responsible for the following:

- Clothing them, they will bring their own clothes and any additional clothes should be purchased with their own money.
- Medical expenses (each student is required to carry pretty comprehensive travel and medical insurance)
- Spending money: The student will receive a monthly stipend from their Rotary Club to use as spending money for incidental expenses (typically \$100+/month). Any additional spending monies needed would be provided by the natural parents.
- They are permitted, under the terms of their visa, to do informal work for pay, such as babysitting or mowing the lawn for you or your neighbors, to make some pocket money for incidentals, but they are not permitted to hold a real job.

Bellingham is hoping to have 3-5 inbound students arriving for the 2024-2025 school year, which is very exciting. Having multiple students who are there to support each other and have this shared experience is helpful to all involved. That means there are likely going to be 9-15 host families in the core group who are there to support each other as well!

### **SUPPORT FOR HOST FAMILIES**

It is also important to know that each student will have their own Rotary counselor who will work with the student on things like school issues, making sure they are doing what they need to, visa requirements etc. You also have the entire Rotary Youth Exchange Committee and Clubs available for support. Imagine the pit at the Indy 500 with a team at the ready to do what needs to be done to keep the car on the road- that's us! We are all invested in making sure that both the students and the host families have a phenomenal experience.

### **THE PROCESS FOR BECOMING A HOST PARENT:**

We will have information on the entire exchange program here: <https://youthexchange5050.org/>

Here is where you can find additional information on becoming a host family: <https://youthexchange5050.org/sitepage/host-families> (it is under the Host Families menu on the left)

Here are the next steps:

1. Fill out the Host Family Application: [https://yehub.net/cgi-bin/W05\\_get.cgi?pgid=aphf1](https://yehub.net/cgi-bin/W05_get.cgi?pgid=aphf1) (you can save your progress as you go in case you don't have time to tackle the whole thing at once). This will require three personal references and information on the residents and your home.
2. A background check will be performed for each household member over 18 years.
3. You and the adult residents of your household will take two online training courses in Youth Protection Awareness and Host Family Training (allow for about an hour each)
4. A representative from the Youth Exchange Committee will visit with you and your family at your home and provide you with materials to assist you in preparing for your upcoming host experience.
5. We will provide an orientation session for all family members who live in your household, so everyone knows what to expect.

Of course, you are also welcome to attend Rotary meetings, learn a bit more about Rotary, and meet the rest of your pit crew!

If you are interested, please feel free to reach out with questions. We hope that you are excited about the prospect of becoming a host parent and we look forward to hearing from you!

## **Personal Testimonies:**

### **Ward and Shauna Naf:**

Being a host family was one of the most enriching experiences of our lives. We were blessed to host Carla from Spain several years ago. She started school at Sehome High School when she was living with us. We got to celebrate the holidays with her, learning about Spanish traditions as well as teaching her about ours. We helped her through the first few months of shaky English and the inevitable misunderstandings. She was thrilled to learn that she could get prosciutto and melon here and she was introduced to chocolate chip cookies. A go-getter, she participated in sports during every season at Sehome, so we got to attend cross-country running meets, saw her play basketball (which she still participates in back in Spain), and softball. Our son was the same age as Carla, and I think some of the experiences he has chosen for himself are directly related to seeing Carla take on the challenge of being an exchange student. We live in a multi-generational household and my mother relished the time she got to be host grandma.

This summer, we had the pleasure of vacationing with Carla in Florence, Italy and seeing what an amazing young woman she is becoming. I am confident our families will now be connected for the rest of our lives. I really had no idea going into it what we would get out of it. I would definitely do it again! We want a similar enriching experience for you!

### **Felicity and Curtis Dye:**

My family has had the pleasure of hosting multiple times. The three-month time frame is well suited to the student and the family. It is enough time to really form a relationship with the student, but also allows for a student to experience other families in the US. This also allows for the families to schedule other commitments in the year of their exchange.

Rotary is unique in its local support of the student; not only do you have a whole club of Rotarians to assist with transportation and events, but each student has *two* specific assigned support people during their exchange. This really helps if decisions need to be made or extra help is needed.

We keep in touch with all our former Exchange Daughters and Sons. We have had the good fortune to visit them and their natural families in their home countries- such a treat to know a "local" in far-away places.

Hosting is one of the most rewarding volunteer jobs that I have ever done. It really makes me feel like I am making a difference to a young person and enriching not only their life but ours.

**Scott Herman:**

I had the privilege to be both a host brother and an exchange student through RYE, so I got to see both sides of the coin.

My Senior year of high school (1992) my family hosted a young man from Venezuela (Jon) for 6 months. He and I got along well, but were very different types of people, so living with Jon not only exposed me to him and his culture, but many different people from my own community and the RYE program (the other exchange students) that I would otherwise not have gotten to know. Living with Jon was a great experience for me and my family, we had a great time and it really motivated me to become an exchange student myself. My mother enjoyed the experience so much that she hosted another student from Catalonia/Spain (Jordi) several years later when I was away at college.

I spent the year after graduating high school and before college (1993-1994) living in Chile as a RYE student, where I spent the entire year living with one host family, while their eldest son spent the year in California. I became very close with my host family, in particular my host father, and remain in regular contact with them to this day. I learned a tremendous amount about myself, humanity in general, and the world, and the lessons from that experience have massively influenced my adult life. It helped me to get into a better college and get scholarships to afford it; it taught me how to live and work with people from other cultures which has been an enormously advantageous skill professionally; it gave me a boost in self-confidence at a point in my life that I really needed it; plus I learned to speak fluent Spanish which has been a huge personal and professional boost throughout my life. These are just a few of the things that I got from RYE, and each year I become aware of more. As my wife likes to say about me, because of RYE I could make friends with a shrub!

**Debbie Kiene:**

My perspective comes from being a Rotary International Exchange student in the French-Canadian town of Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec during the 1973-1974 school year.

Details of our Rotary Youth Exchange program include the statement, "Our program differs from many international exchange programs in that our students generally live with three families during their exchange year. We've found this gives the student a well-rounded experience in a culture, having experienced family life from at least three different perspectives."

I was blessed beyond measure to experience that well-rounded cultural perspective through living with all 3 of my host families. Each of them whole-heartedly enveloped me into their day-to-day life as a daughter, sister, granddaughter, and friend. Was there sadness for host parents and student in moving from family to family? At first, until we realized that our relationships and activities together could continue, and they did. I didn't lose a family when I moved, I was gifted a larger family, and my hosts made new friends. I had enough time with each of my 3 host families to develop a close bond, and at the same time got a broader experience of local culture through multiple exchange families plus sharing and partnership with a whole community of Rotarians.

I became a Rotarian myself many years ago, in part to begin to repay the experience and opportunities I was provided through the RYE program and to encourage others to participate. To this day, almost 50 years later, I still communicate with members of my host families. My youngest host sister visited me last year and we laughed and shared stories as if we were back in 1974. She too became a Rotary exchange student and later a host mom and speaks of those times fondly. The gift of forever families through Rotary Youth Exchange continues to give and I will be forever grateful.

**Harte & Jan Bressler:**

Jan and I hosted Rotary Exchange students twice back in the '80s. The first was a young woman (Moni) from Chihuahua, Mexico and the second was a young woman (Jane) from Adelaide, Australia.

When we had Moni, our two children were aged 2 & 4. Coming from Mexico, our expectation was that she would be surprised by all the modern conveniences of the US as this was her first time out of Mexico. Her visit was an experience in just the opposite situation. You see, she came from a very wealthy family that had servants and chauffeurs. During her stay with us, she learned how to make a bed, cook a meal and how to be around toddlers. She has since married and has children and grandchildren of her own. We like to think that her early exposure to our family way of life was helpful in her growth. We are still in touch with Moni via Facebook.

A year later, we hosted Jane from Australia. She hadn't been out of Australia before and was quite taken by the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. We took several vacations with Jane up to Banff and the coastal beaches in the 3 months that we hosted her. She returned to visit many years later having become a successful businesswoman. Both young ladies bonded instantly to Jan and I, as well as our young toddlers, who are now approaching their late 40s. Our kids remember Moni and Jane as important family members at a special time in their lives.