



**Intercultural
Programs USA**

Your Family is Exceptional!

Bring the World
Home with an AFS
Exchange Student

Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures



On the cover:

Top row: Linn (Norway), Sygriit (Netherlands), and Juliana (Brazil)

Bottom row: Rocco (Italy), Diane, and Xavier (Spain)

Diane & Mike Gambill

We have been hosting exchange students with AFS since 2000. We have always kept in touch with all of our “kids” and talked about getting everyone together. We finally did it this past Christmas and it was the absolute best having five of them under one roof! It was incredible seeing how everyone blended together into one single family — even though they had never met before and were from different parts of the world. It was a joy to see the ways in which they had matured into young adults, and it was also wonderful to see them act as kids once again. Wearing our pajamas, we opened up gifts at midnight on Christmas Eve and sang Christmas carols while sipping on hot chocolate. Each one said it felt like returning home, and we were happy to echo that same feeling of belonging.

We have heard others mention that having children changes your life. While we do not have children of our own, we find it amazing how much we have changed by hosting five foreign exchange students. Being exposed to other cultures, personalities, and habits changed our thinking and perspective on life. We believe it has made both of us better people: more open, understanding, and caring. Through hosting, we’ve learned how quickly acceptance happens, but more than that, how much love is shared from day one.

Of course it was very hard to say goodbye to our “sons and daughters” after they lived with us for a year, but we always knew we’d see each other again. We are so grateful for our Christmas holiday together. Perhaps the next memory will be from one of their weddings, the birth of one of their children, or simply a trip abroad. AFS has enriched our lives in so many ways — we only wish we had done it sooner.

Extraordinary Host Families

Each year, more than 2,300 international high school students from more than 90 countries come to the US with AFS-USA to study in high schools and live with host families. Our AFS international partners select young ambassadors who are eager to experience being a member of a family, school, and community in America.

As a leader in international high school exchange for more than 60 years, AFS differs from many other exchange organizations. Among the most important distinctions is that AFS has a network of thousands of volunteers in the US, many of whom have hosted themselves or studied abroad with AFS. These local volunteers support families, students, and schools in gaining the most from the hosting experience.

Hosting an international student means more than providing a bed and meals. As an AFS Host Family, you'll welcome a new member into your home, share your everyday lives, and learn and grow as you get to know one another.

Throughout this booklet, we'll introduce you to all kinds of extraordinary families who opened their homes and shared their lives with AFS Exchange Students. As you read more about their experiences, we hope you'll think about how you will benefit by adding an international branch to your family tree.

Read stories about other exceptional host families and start the application process:

www.afsusa.org/hostfamily

Bennie and Ruth find hosting brings twice the rewards with host daughters Boong and Therese.



Bennie & Ruth Eubanks, Boong from Thailand, and Therese from Norway

My wife and I have been involved with AFS for 20 years. When our daughters were still at home, we hosted several students. But when our daughters married and moved out of the house, we stopped hosting. While the house felt empty, we were not sure if hosting would be a good experience for the student if there was no host sibling in the home.

Boy, were we wrong! In 2006, we decided to host again, and then again in 2007. In 2008, we hosted two girls at once! What a great experience this continues to be for my wife and me. Not only have we made friends from around the world, we've met some wonderful people in our very own community who help make all of this happen.



The Mooks and Luis enjoy a family outing with fellow AFS student, Jan.
Top row: Milana, Bob, Luis, and Kit
Bottom row: Lee, Bobby, and Jan
Middle row: Casey

Robert Mook & Milana Dezube and Luis from Panama

How did our family become an AFS Host Family? I was listening to my friend tell me about her AFS Exchange Student who was coming from France. Hosting an exchange student sounded fabulous! We are already a large family with four boys ages 17, 15, 12, and 8, but the chance to really get to know another culture through close personal relationships seemed ideal.

We chose to host Luis, a student from Panama. After the first week, I knew that he was a perfect fit for our family. Our group of boys became inseparable, and by Christmas I realized how hard it was going to be to part with my new host son. He adds a new dimension to our lives. Our family has formed a lasting friendship with Luis — from learning about Panama to discussing politics and family relationships, and yes, even from watching soccer. If only countries could mend fences through similar growth and friendships.



Alex makes a great pizza for the first time with host dad Damian's help.

Damian Pisanelli and Alex from Germany

Fifteen years after my AFS Exchange in Sweden, I decided to reconnect by volunteering. It seemed all I did was work and I felt there had to be more to life. Within days of connecting with AFS locally, I found myself at the Seattle-Tacoma airport with my first assignment — to welcome exchange students from Thailand and Ecuador. I had already had a life-changing experience as a student abroad; little did I know that the biggest changes would happen right here at home.

As an AFS Volunteer, I've had many wonderful opportunities to build my skills and expand my world — like being a team leader on a six-week program in Ghana with three teenage boys and twenty-seven teenage girls! It wasn't until my partner and I decided to host exchange students that I truly realized how much I had to give and gain.

Through the years, I've hosted students from Germany, France, Finland, and other countries. Each experience has been different and not without its challenges, but I wouldn't change a thing. Through hosting, I learned that while every student is unique, I could be the kind of mentor and role model that would help each to have the best possible exchange in the US. Most significantly, I discovered what a great parent I can be and this has motivated me to adopt a child. As my host son, Alex, has said to me, "You'll never be good at calculus, but you'll make a great dad."



Son Tariq (left) and AFS host son Per Kristoffer (right), with host mom Marcia, are new friends and AFS brothers.

Marcia Raglin and Per Kristoffer from Norway

When my son first approached me with the idea of hosting an exchange student, I must admit I was very apprehensive. Being a single parent with one teenage son, we have a quiet lifestyle that's very routine. I also didn't think I was ready for two teenage boys! My son, Tariq, convinced me that this is something we should do, so I decided to give it a shot (though not without reservations). When I learned that Kristoffer was part of a very large family and seemed to be active and outgoing, I wondered how he'd fit with our family. Tariq kept encouraging me, saying, "It's going to be fine, Mother."

So far it's been great. We have a very good rapport. Kristoffer is soaking up this experience and we're having fun. He has a very mature approach and good coping skills, and I believe the orientation he received prior to coming here has served him well.

One of the things that has really affected me is the bond that has already formed between my son and Kristoffer. They are both benefitting from this experience — Tariq has a sibling for the first time in his life and Kristoffer has become a sports protege. I look forward to going home to my two kids at the end of my workday. They are usually waiting to tell me all about what has happened at school, on the bus, at practice... whatever is going on I get my earful! The simple things matter most, like just spending time talking together, which is how we share and get to know each other.

It's still early in our AFS year, but I envision we are only going to have greater bonding and more meaningful experiences together.

Raima's year of firsts includes being a "big sister" to Gabe.



Timothy & Kristen Lachenmeier and Raima from Kyrgyzstan

This has been a year of “firsts” for all of us. For us, it was finally having a daughter and a sister! For Raima, it involved many things: seeing the ocean, learning to swim, crabbing and clamming, skiing, cooking a turkey, counseling junior high girls at Outdoor School, experiencing living with a puppy, and having a little brother.

Raima, a Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) scholar has the drive, ambition, and heart to change the world. Her senior project at her high school involved learning how local churches serve meals to the homeless and hungry three nights a week. Soon she will cook *ash* (a traditional Kyrgyz dish) for 80 people who have come to know her through her service to them. She has become part of the community here.

We have learned so much about a small country in Central Asia — Kyrgyzstan — and can appreciate more how interconnected we all are. Raima has learned about our culture too, and will take that knowledge back home and share it with others. We are so glad we chose to go on this adventure with Raima!

Host parents Doug and Dana beam with pride over Mareenah's accomplishments.



Doug & Dana Deane and Mareenah from Thailand

I read a story in the local paper about AFS, and I thought it might be a great volunteering opportunity for my family and me. Then we heard about Mareenah. We had a real heart-to-heart about whether or not we wanted to change our lives that dramatically, and in the end we decided to welcome the opportunity to host her.

Right from the start we found it easy to work together; we found her a compass at REI and a prayer rug from the Islamic Center so that she'd be able to pray right from the start (She's repaid our hospitality by learning to beat us in Rummy Tiles!). It's so much fun sharing everyday life with someone who sees everything as new.

Mareenah's parents were saving money for *Hajj*, the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims perform, but they used that money to send Mareenah to the United States with AFS instead. They sacrificed quite a bit in order to send her here. Because we understand how much this opportunity means to Mareenah and her parents, we are doing all that we can to ensure that she does well in school and actively engages in her community. This has been a great experience for all and we will greatly miss Mareenah when she returns to Thailand.



Redefine Your Family

In 1964, Helen and Henry Smith opened their home to host AFS Exchange Student Rosalind (Ro) Waddy from Australia, who was their second AFS daughter. Their daughter, Chana, would develop a lifelong connection with her host sister Ro. After Chana married Fred Hays and began her own family, the Hays sent their son abroad with AFS, inspired their daughter to be an AFS Volunteer, and together Fred and Chana Hays hosted more than 25 AFS sons and daughters!

The Hays have redefined the definition of family and they are not unique. Since 1947, AFS has made it possible for thousands of people to embrace a new culture and expand their horizons.

Learn more about becoming an AFS Host Family and begin the application process:

www.afsusa.org/hostfamily

Top row: Fred Hays (Support and Orientation Coordinator for AFS Capitol Area Team); and Susan McConnell (Chana's sister)

Third row: Ro (Waddy) Hume (Chana's AFS sister from Australia to North Towawanda, NY 1964-65); Charlotte Hays Murray (daughter of Fred and Chana, and AFS Charm City Coordinator); Jeff Murray (Charlotte's husband); and Elliott Hays (son of Fred and Chana, and an AFS Exchange Student from the US to Sicily 1995-96)

Second row: Stacy Hume (Ro's daughter) with her son, Jacob; Peach Hays (Elliot's wife); and Chana Hays (AFS Capitol Area Team Coordinator) with her grandson, Andrew Murray

First row: Aron Freyr Johannssen (Iceland to the US 2009-10) and Gyorgy Schmidt (Hungary to the US 2005-06), who are both AFS sons of Fred and Chana

Jean McQuady, AFS Cluster Coordinator, and Fion, YES Exchange Student from Malaysia

Fion from Malaysia came to the Bay Area after receiving a full scholarship through the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program, which is funded by the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Right from the start, Fion was enthusiastic and eager to get involved in her new high school and community, and her warm smile left a piece of her heart with everyone she met. YES is a public diplomacy initiative that builds bridges of international understanding, especially between Americans and people in countries with significant Muslim populations, so YES students are truly youth ambassadors. Talking about her country and culture was one of Fion's priorities. During her stay with us, Fion visited with Lt. Governor John Garamendi along with other YES participants from Egypt and Indonesia. Together, these students left an indelible impression about the critical need for high schools, host families, and communities to embrace the YES Program.

Fion was the first exchange student at her high school in California, where she maintained a straight-A average! Fion continued to volunteer throughout her stay in the US and never stopped discovering the beauty in everything around her, from the people she met to places she visited. She especially loved exploring caves and hiking on the Mist Trail in Yosemite.

I feel so very blessed to have been the Cluster Coordinator for this remarkable exchange experience, and I encourage families and schools to get involved.



Students pictured are left to right. Sirush from Armenia, Dina from Egypt, Rijal from Indonesia, and Fion from Malaysia meet with Lt. Governor John Garamendi. The AFS Cluster Coordinator (not pictured) is Jean McQuady.

AFS and Schools Partnering to Build Global Connections

AFS is proud to partner with schools that are committed to providing their students with a global education and opportunities for intercultural learning. We honor the educators who welcome international students into their schools, invite AFS into their classrooms, and help to make it possible for their US students to study abroad. The following three educators represent thousands of others who are changing people's lives and promoting global competency.

Jon Flynn, Alternative Education Teacher Ashland High School, Ashland, WI

While today's technology creates the potential for youth to reach across international borders to learn about different cultures, there is no substitution for the personal understanding that comes from really getting to know an individual with dissimilar life experiences. Ashland High School welcomes the addition of exchange students each year. Having international ambassadors who can become part of the student body and share firsthand the unique experiences of growing up in another country enriches everyone's high school experience.

Richard Trogisch, Principal The School Without Walls, Washington, DC

Hosting AFS students is very relevant in this ever-shrinking world and now, global economy where all people must be able to get along and learn from each other in order to be successful providers for their families and productive global citizens. An educator in the 21st century that does not see the "global" handwriting on the wall is doing his/her students a major disservice and limits their futures by not promoting global education and the development of positive, long-term, intercultural relationships.

Roger Ipswitch, Global Initiatives Polytechnic School, Pasadena, CA

Long before international student exchanges became popular, even trendy, AFS provided the opportunity for young people to interact directly with other young people, rather than the more common pattern of adult-to-student contact. For more than 40 years, Polytechnic School has worked in educational partnership with AFS. Each year, Poly waives tuition for an AFS foreign exchange student, recruits host families, and helps to make it possible for more than 150 Poly students to travel and study abroad.



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AFS-USA works toward a more just and peaceful world by providing international and intercultural learning experiences to individuals, families, schools, and communities through a global volunteer partnership.

Learn more about hosting a student:
www.afsusa.org/hostfamily • 1-800-876-2377

