

## So you have decided to host a Christmas International House Program...

### GETTING STARTED

You will want to find answers to these questions, for your own planning and for the National Office:

**1. Who will be program coordinator?** This person will oversee the entire CIH Program. S/he will register the Program with National CIH, ensure that deadlines are met, coordinate the program itself, and be the liaison with the church staff. The Program Coordinator creates a paragraph about your program that will help students choose your program (see Sample Website).

**2. How many students can be hosted?** There are two ways to determine the number of students your program will host: Set a goal number of students to host and then find host families/living arrangements to meet that goal, or determine the number of students which you can provide for and request that number of students. You can increase your number during the registration period if you find you can host more.

**3. Can we accommodate single males and/or females, married couples, families? Can we accommodate students with disabilities?** How many Males, Females, Couples, and Families will make up the total number?

**4. Will the students be in private homes (Host Program) or in a church, church camp or conference center (Group Housing Program)?** After reading in the following section the considerations of each type of program, please contact the National Office if you would like an experienced program director to mentor you while you set up your host or group program. In both scenarios, *be aware that some students have dietary restrictions.*

**5. How will the program be funded?**

**6. How will the students be transported?**

**7. What types of activities can we plan?** (see below)

Survey churches, clubs, and other organizations to determine their interest and level of commitment to helping your community host a CIH program.

The more students your community can host will mean that you meet more international students and experience more than just one culture. If there is enough commitment to establish a CIH Program, we ask that you register as a participating Program no later than June 30<sup>th</sup>, if possible. We will ask you for some of the above information, and you will be asked to include a brief description of your program that we may include on the NCIH website. See a current program webpage as an example.

Each year the NCIH Executive Committee establishes the official dates for the program. Individual programs, though, do have the option of choosing specific dates that best suits their needs.

## **RECRUITING HOSTS AND GATHERING SUPPORT**

Use whatever inexpensive resources are available to raise local interest in your CIH Program. Begin publicizing in early September. Consider church bulletin boards, church newsletters, pulpit announcements, letters to local churches, civic club newsletters, bulletin board displays at the grocery store, at schools, and the local newspaper, or by contacting Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, local International Adoption organizations, and families who have hosted exchange students. Word-of-mouth through family, neighbors, and co-workers is also a great way to advertise your need for hosts, volunteers, chaperones, bus drivers, etc. Make a list of your needs: hosts for students, hosts for meals, drivers for activities, and tour chaperones. List the names and telephone numbers of each contact person.

**Host Family Program Considerations:** The advantage of a host family program is intimate cross-cultural sharing among students and hosts. It is also suggested, though, that some group activities, meals and programming be planned as a group activity.

1. Do students live with one family for two weeks, or will they be able to change families after the first week? The latter means more hosts but is an alternative for those families who want to host but will be out of town for Christmas or the following week.
2. What is expected of a host family – sleeping arrangements, bathrooms, meals, transportation, etc.?
3. Have “back-up” families available in case of a last minute cancellation or emergencies. Often people will host if the need is urgent, but would rather not be the first choice.
4. Encourage at least two students per family. While this may seem overwhelming, especially during the craziness of the holidays, most families find that it is actually easier to host two students rather than just one.

**Group Housing Program Considerations:** The advantage is cross-cultural sharing among the students.

1. Find, set up, maintain, and dismantle living arrangements
2. You may want to make a diagram of each floor available for use
3. Estimate number of beds in each room

4. Locate the kitchen facilities with refrigerators, coffee makers, microwaves
5. Locate emergency exits and restrooms
6. Are there showers and bathrooms with adequate hot water? If not enough, check with nearby hotels, YMCAs, armories, etc.
7. Determine the maximum occupancy for single men, women, married couples, families
8. Determine who provides beds, blankets, pillows, towels, etc.
9. Centrally locate a bulletin board for CIH information
10. You may want to make arrangements with a local physician to donate his/her time should the need arise.
11. Alert police department that people are staying in the church or group housing location
12. Set up a communal area with comfortable furniture, ping-pong or billiards table and accessories, board games (chess, checkers, pictionary, scrabble), puzzles, TV, VCR, radio/CD player, iron and ironing board
13. Set up security personnel at night and "lights out" policy
14. Locate trash disposal, custodians, bathroom cleaning and restocking
15. Determine what chores the students will be responsible for
16. Return borrowed items, clean blankets, restore the facility

### **ACTIVITIES**

You will want to create a schedule of tours, recreation, discussions, free time, dinner and special events such as an International Night. Become familiar with the history and attractions of the area. The Tourist Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, and the internet are additional resources for entrance fees and hours of operation. Group Programs should plan one big group activity each day; Host Family Programs should plan several activities over the two week period. Determine how much spending/sightseeing money each student should bring.

Each Program's activities will be unique, but consider:

1. Public (and free!) monuments, museums, the state capitol, historical sites
2. Local businesses (in Atlanta, the World of Coke and CNN Center are popular)
3. Outdoor activities like roller/ice-skating, hiking, or sledding, a trip to the beach
4. Sporting events - either professional, collegiate or high school
5. Typical Christmas activities: making stockings, gingerbread houses, or ornaments; caroling; gift exchanges (either traditional, "Secret Santa," or "white elephant"); or Christmas Eve candle-lighting
6. Shopping, game night, group pictures
7. Quiet time for students to write in their journals, write postcards, take a nap
8. Anything that is unique to your area and of interest to international students
9. International night – a favorite of both hosts and students! Students prepare foods from their native countries for hosts to sample, and are encouraged to share dances, songs, or other native talents with the audience.

### **TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS**

1. Provide transportation to and from the airport, bus or train station on arrival and departure days
2. Determine pickup point at airport, train station, bus station arrivals
3. Provide "CIH" placards to drivers so students can locate their ride quickly
4. Provide transportation for all group activities during CIH
5. Provide maps and routes to drivers to circumvent traffic problems
6. Arrange for drivers, chaperones, and funds for gas
7. Arrange/borrow cars, vans, buses
8. Each student coming to your Program should be given a phone number to call in case arrival plans change at the last minute.

## HOST ORIENTATION

### BEFORE THE STUDENTS ARRIVE

By mid-November, your Program will have received the names of all students assigned to your Program. Assign them to a Host family/Facility and immediately sent them a Student Packet or Welcome Packet which contains:

1. Your CIH Rules and Program Guidelines, to which they must adhere
2. Local Program information – weather conditions, special clothes needed, costumes, musical instruments to bring for talent night.
3. Host Family/Facility information
4. The schedule of activities
5. **A request for their arrival and departure times**
6. An information sheet (see Sample Information Sheet) may also be filled out by the students about general interests.

Many students are likely to feel better about attending your Program once they have heard from you. After you have sent them the Student Packet, feel free to send emails, make phone calls, or send letters to answer their questions about the Program or their host family.

### STUDENT ORIENTATION

We strongly suggest that you hold an orientation session for all students at the beginning of your program, where you clarify your expectations of the students and also what they can expect from the program. Also use this time to let them get to know you and each other.

Review the Rules and Guidelines of National CIH, of your Program (being on time, smoking, alcohol use, phone calls, internet usage, participation in all events, keeping an open mind), and any rules of the Activity Center. Many issues can be avoided if the students know that when they are expected to participate and when they can retreat into their bedrooms or iphones. You might think of including an “English-only” rule for group time, so that no student is left out. We have found that even if only one people-group is participating in the conversation at the time, then other students will avoid them and feel uncomfortable.

Review the program schedule in detail and be sure that all questions are answered.

Ensure that each student has the contact information for the Host(s), the Activity Center, and Program Coordinator. A tour of the facility may be appropriate.

During the orientation, we suggest that you explain to the students about how lucky they are for being able to participate in this unique concept of living with an American host. Also explain what Christmas means to Christians, what Christmas means to you, and why Christians give gifts.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Flexibility is the key word in any Christmas International House program, especially in the first few days. Because some students arrive early, late or not at all, individual programs need to develop policies for how to deal with changes in schedules.

Good communication with students and effective planning will make your task easier. Keep in mind that time schedules may not be as important to the students as they are to you. Provide opportunities for as many people as possible in your church(es) to meet with the students. Let your faith be expressed through your hospitality and friendship. CIH provides an opportunity for dialogue and witness, a time for learning and sharing.

Most of all, enjoy one another.