



# **PARTNERS OF THE AMERICAS**

**Indiana, USA/Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil**

## **HOST FAMILY ORIENTATION HANDBOOK**

### **Introduction:**

You and your family have agreed to be a Youth Ambassador host family, and you may be starting to wonder what your relationship will be and how you will all grow and change through this experience over the eight-week period.

When you were selected, you became part of a cluster or group of people in our state who are participating in the Partners of the Americas people-to-people program building good will, understanding, and cooperation among the peoples of the Americas and Caribbean.

The Youth Ambassador Program Committee member in your local community is there to provide you information and guidance, backed up by the Program Coordinators, Jhani Laupus in Indianapolis and Hal Roepke in Muncie.

They will work with you to coordinate travel arranged by Partners for the Youth Ambassadors to and from Brazil and within Indiana, assist with solving any problems with the host school, act as a facilitator/mediator for any conflicts that arise, and be responsive to individual needs that come up.

### **Communication and Cultural Differences:**

The basis for developing a trusting relationship is communication. People from another cultural background, in this case Brazilian, may have some different basic assumptions about the world. Once the common ground of living in the same culture is taken away, communication and understanding can become much more challenging.

**The first step in communicating well with someone from another country is to recognize how our ways of communicating in the US are unique.** North Americans tend to speak in surprisingly **informal** or casual ways to almost anyone, regardless of social position or relationship, based on our cultural commitment to equality and, possibly, our new world melting pot experience. Whatever the reason, we tend to call others by first names from the moment we meet and often talk about personal feelings and experiences with people we have just met. Brazilians also tend to be very informal but may not be so comfortable with feelings and personal experiences.

**North Americans tend also to be more direct** than Brazilians in many areas of conversation. We say “hello” and quickly get to the essence of our purpose. Brazilians are not terribly formal but do give more attention to greetings and asking how you are first, as is evident in their more elaborate greeting ritual of clapping the shoulders of guys or hugging and kissing women on the cheek.

**North Americans are often seen as judgmental** because of this directness but, also, because our culture emphasizes individual decision-making and criticism or judgment intended to make something better. This probably stems from the value we give to creativity of the individual that encourages free expression of criticism to an uncommon extent that we don't typically realize.

Misunderstanding may result not just because you assume that your Youth Ambassador has understood when she/he hasn't, but also because she/he is not as likely as a North American student to be comfortable questioning you, simply asking for further explanation. The Youth Ambassador may feel more constrained not just to avoid being a pest, interrupting busy Hoosier host parents, but because it is socially less acceptable for them to challenge authority of an older authority figure. For example, the Brazilian education system is modeled on the French system in which, traditionally, the professor lectures, and the students never speak. In addition, they receive strict instructions before they leave home that they are not to criticize or complain.

Finally, remember the important role that **non-verbal clues** play in communication. Here, North Americans and Brazilians are similar in that we both generally use a lot of gestures and expressive facial changes with moderate to dramatic changes in our voice inflections. However, the foreign speaker tends to import the same inflections and patterns from his or her native language into the new language, English, and they may not always be the same.

The most important thing if you do have trouble communicating, is to try to isolate exactly what was said by you and by the student in order to understand and explain to the student how he/she was understood/misunderstood in English. It is important to remember that **good cross-cultural communication takes additional effort, thought and time**. Your student will be more tired, especially in early days. Communications between Hoosiers and your Gaucho daughter or son is usually pretty easy and informal as we share the informality and openness of blended New World cultures. But a little extra attention, especially in reaching understanding in the initial week will go a long way to bridging all the cultural pitfalls.

### **Fundamental Qualities for a Successful Relationship**

Mutual Respect - --- Cooperation -----Flexibility

All of these characteristics are cornerstones of the Youth Ambassador selection and orientation process. Each Gaucho Youth Ambassador is asked to write an application in

English, explaining their reasons for applying for the 8-week immersion experience. Then, they are asked to attend several sessions in person where they are evaluated in writing and in interviews for their attitudes, adaptability, and flexibility. They also engage in team-building and problem-solving activities with the other candidates. After selection, they have several orientation sessions with the Brazilian coordinator and a language teacher, right up to the week of departure.

## **Getting Your Family Ready**

It is important for your whole family to talk about the arrival of the Youth Ambassador and goals for the visit. The goals are probably pretty general ones that you put down on the Host Family Information form. Talking about the arrival will help everyone be ready for the temporary disruption that orienting a new member of into the family and the community will cause. Some things to think about are the following:

- How will the wake up and bathroom schedules be adjusted?
- How will privacy, dress and undress around the house, and displays of affection be handled?
- How will rules about telephone, TV/game time, food supplies, and study/quiet time be explained?
- How can you help your family think about helping the Brazilian adjust and about his or her likes and dislikes that should be communicated? What advice can you (the parents) give the Brazilian teen to help them befriend their new family members?

You may want to think about minimizing other changes in your family schedule, new home projects or other disruptions and adjustments, while all the teens in the family adjust to each other and a new semester and schedule.

### **First Contact:**

If possible, begin corresponding via email before the Youth Ambassador leaves Brazil. Describe your family, mention a special activity you plan soon after his/her arrival and extend a warm welcome. No need to give many details which might overwhelm him/ her about expectations and a hectic pace they are not yet sure they can handle.

### **The Airport Pickup and First Hours:**

Have at least one family member in Indianapolis to greet your Youth Ambassador and the group she/he is part of. Plan to spend about an hour at the Host Family Orientation in Indianapolis before taking your Youth Ambassador home. You may consider having a snack or meal on the way home to talk and get acquainted. The Youth Ambassador will be anxious to see their new home and to get oriented to surroundings, and he/she will be tired from all the excitement of international travel and new friends and places. Except for stopping to eat, a pretty direct trip home is best and some time for the YA to put things in order in the new room, maybe rest or have some private time.

**Indiana Partners of the Americas asks you to provide the first call home to parents as soon as possible upon arrival at the YA's new home, at your expense, as one of**

your commitments to the program. This should be a **high priority** to alleviate everyone's concerns from winter travel complications that often arise.

Try to make the first hours a demonstration of how you want to go forward with this new family member. Rather than treating him/her as an honored guest to be waited on, show the house and where and how to get food; put on some music and tell him/her that you will be at the computer or in the kitchen while they get their room organized and want to come back out to learn more and get better acquainted. Tell them when and how the next meal will occur and expectations for their participation. If a family member wants to engage them in an activity, a walk or drive around the neighborhood later, this can be very helpful. A trip to the school he or she will attend should be a priority in the first day or two. Other things to consider:

- Decide what you want the Youth Ambassador to call you (*they will call the coordinators by their first names: Ana, Jhani, Leslie*)
- Create a welcoming atmosphere with something special for his/her room, a map of town and/or a brochure about something you might take them to;
- Try to make the early days easy by accommodating for Arrival Fatigue and language change; allow for extra rest, extra water and lotion in our winter climate and heated homes, and extra discussion time in the evening or around meal time.
- Try to speak simply and repeat directions in different ways but in your normal tone of voice, to help him/her begin to adjust to your native speech mannerisms and encourage your teens to do the same until all are sure the YA is understanding.
- Be sensitive to food and culture differences at meals; let your new family member follow your example, rather than being served first.
- Over the first week, make a trip to the usual places with your YA: school, bank, grocery, church or synagogue (if applicable), drug store, library, etc.

The Youth Ambassadors will have a brochure-type directory of contact information on airports and coordinators for the flight to Indianapolis. Providing a small directory of contact information and cell phone numbers of the new host family and school to put in a pocket or purse is a helpful touch, especially for working parents

Please feel free to ask Jhani Laupus (317-257-2333) or Hal Roepke (765-284-7929) if you have questions.