



## AFICE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Academic Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (AFICE) is a student exchange program dedicated to bringing the youth of different nations and cultures together at a personal family level, forging bonds of friendship that will last a lifetime. AFICE was founded with the belief that increasing understanding and tolerance between nations is a worthwhile endeavor, and AFICE focuses on cultural exchanges for students of high school age in order to further that cause. The majority of exchange students studying in the United States each year are college age students who live in dormitories or apartments, often having little or no personal contact with the community in which they live. While these students will gain a good education, they do not necessarily gain any understanding of our country or its people and they return home with little or no empathy for the various ways of life that make up the culture of the United States. Conversely, many families in the United States are insulated from peoples of other cultures, lacking the opportunity to interact and form bonds with citizens of other countries. Instead of following the course that many exchange programs do, AFICE chooses to concentrate on high school students who will actually become a part of a community in the United States by living as a member of their host family: Eating meals, conversing, playing, and studying. In short, these students are immersed in a new way of life; joining into the culture and community of their host family. Significantly, this happens at a time in their lives when many people make their most long-lasting friendships. Once their program ends, the AFICE students then return to their home countries, bringing their new understandings and friendships along. But what they leave behind is just as important: host families are left with a deeper appreciation and insight into another culture, closing gaps of perception that may exist. AFICE's goal is to create bridges of understanding, tolerance, and peace between the peoples of the world by starting at the basic level: with personal relationships. The AFICE students who come to the United States to live and learn as part of one of our communities are the same people who may grow up to be the leaders of tomorrow.

The AFICE program has been developed with the expertise of people who believe in the value of cultural exchange and have many years of experience in the field of international student exchange. They believe in building a program of integrity that

will be a shining example of what a student exchange program should be. AFICE consists of a National Office located in San Diego, California, Area Coordinators and many Community Representatives. Students on the AFICE program should not have completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary study or should be at least 15 years of age but not more than 18 and 6 months years of age at the time of enrollment in their American school. Independent organizations overseas are responsible for the recruitment and screening of the potential student candidates for the AFICE program.

AFICE's Community Representatives are the backbone of the entire organization. The Representatives are responsible for performing many key duties: interviewing prospective host families, matching up the family's interests with those of available students, providing pre-arrival orientation to the host family and post-arrival orientation to the students and families on the program, maintaining contact with the students and host families and schools, supervising the students throughout the duration of the program, arranging gatherings and short excursions for the students under their care, and providing the first level of counseling for the students and host families should any difficulties arise. AFICE's Area Coordinators oversee the Community Representatives, ensuring that all families are properly screened, all students are properly supervised, and providing a second level of counseling when needed. The AFICE National Office is the top level, communicating with the overseas partner organizations that recruit and screen students overseas for the AFICE program, working with the United States Department of State to provide visa documents to the students, and providing the final level of supervision and counseling for the entire country.

In the other direction, AFICE contracts with independent organizations overseas who recruit, interview and screen potential student candidates for participation on the AFICE program. All students must be recommended by Principals and Teachers in their local schools overseas before they are accepted for the Program. Only those students who can evidence academic interest and achievement, exemplary character, curiosity, adaptability, and good command of the English language are acceptable. Each student must satisfactorily complete a personal interview by qualified representatives of AFICE. The interviewers' written evaluation becomes a part of the student's complete dossier.

Exchange Students arrive with round-trip airline tickets marked "non-refundable" issued to their final destination. The Exchange Students also have complete medical coverage for the entire duration of their stay in the United States. The cost for both is included in the student fees. The natural parents provide a monthly allowance and the American Host Families are responsible for room and board.

The American Host Families are recruited year-round. Before the new school year begins, AFICE believes that it is important to find qualified host families as early as possible so that correspondence can begin that much sooner between the host family and student. Experience has proven that this correspondence helps to eliminate many false expectations and to build friendship, trust and understanding. After the beginning of the new school year, AFICE continues to recruit qualified host families should circumstances require the student to relocate.

Each prospective American Host Family is personally interviewed by the local Community Representative. The prospective Host Family must complete a detailed Host Family Application covering the family's background, interests, and hobbies. The Host Family must also provide two to four references to the Community Representative, preferably one from an employer, and one from a community organization (church, service club or other such organization), or from a friend who knows the family well attesting to the stability and good reputation of the family. The host family must also have adequate financial resources to undertake hosting a high school exchange student. In addition, all adult members of the host family household must undergo a criminal background check as part of the screening process.

Exchange Students and their parents are required to attend an intensive Orientation Meeting overseas prior to their son's or daughter's departure. At the time of arrival of the Exchange Students, the AFICE Community Representative and/or the Host Families will be at the airport to meet the students. Soon after the Exchange Students arrive, the AFICE Community Representative will conduct a comprehensive Orientation Meeting based on a detailed agenda. At this time students and Host Families are once more informed about the rules of behavior and official restrictions under which the AFICE Program functions. At this meeting Exchange Students meet privately with their Community Representative to become better acquainted.

Every Student and Host Family is furnished with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the AFICE Community Representative, information about the appropriate AFICE Area Coordinator Office, the AFICE National Office and the official United States Department of State, Washington, D.C. The National AFICE Office has a 24-hour answering service.

Approximately three weeks after the students arrive, the Community Representative will contact once more each student and Host Family to reconfirm that everything is satisfactory. Monthly communication with the Host Family and Exchange Student will be maintained throughout the year. During the school year AFICE requires that local Community Representatives have three get-togethers for parties and celebrations of holidays.

The AFICE Program stresses family living as the heart of the learning experience — offering students from foreign lands the chance to share in other cultures through personal involvement in the homes, schools and communities of their host country.