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Friendship Partner Information Sheet

International students are often very lonely and new students may need to get oriented to their new surroundings when they first arrive in Urbana. By inviting an international student to spend some time with you and/or your family and by having fun together, the student will feel they have a friend here in Urbana. In return, you and/or your family will be enriched by learning about the student's culture.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM AN ENGLISH CONVERSATION PARTNER?

Partners in the ECP program meet for an hour weekly or two hours bi-weekly for English conversation. In the Friendship Partner program, partners keep in touch weekly and meet together monthly. The focus is to include the student in your individual and/or family activities and share aspects of your cultures with one another. Although this friendship will certainly benefit the student's grasp of English, it is not the primary focus.

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT IS EXPECTED?

We ask that you include your student in an activity that you and/or your family are doing at least once a month, or join an activity that he/she initiates. If you would like to interact with your student more often, we encourage you to go ahead! We match you with the expectation that you will maintain the friendship for two semesters (or if student is here less than that, for the time he/she is here). If the student is here longer than two semesters, it is up to you and the student to agree on whether or not to continue.

WHEN WOULD I BE NEEDED?

All year round! Most international students arrive in the fall, but we have requests for Friendship Partners throughout the year.

HOW WILL I AND/OR MY FAMILY BE MATCHED WITH A STUDENT?

After your New Volunteer Application is approved and you complete a short training, we look at our list of students waiting for partners, and try to find a match with similar interests. The extent to which this is possible depends on who is on the list. If you are a single person, we would only match you with a student of the same gender. If you prefer a student from a particular country, cultural, or religious background, we will try to accommodate that if possible. The vast majority of students that request our services are from Asia. We rarely receive requests from European or Latin American students.

WHAT IF I AM UNABLE TO CONTACT THE STUDENT I HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED?

Please remember that you are the host to a guest in our country and realize that it can be

very intimidating for an international student to make the first contact, especially if he/she is using a language that is not his/her mother tongue. Please do not give up after one attempt; try the student several times, and call him/her if your emails are not answered. If after these attempts you are still unsuccessful, please contact IFI so that we can either facilitate the contact or match you with another student.

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HOW LONG IS MY COMMITMENT?

Since you are only asked to meet one time per month (minimum), we would like to see you continue your relationship with the student for at least six months. In an ideal situation a friendship would develop and last until the student or you move away from the Urbana area.

WHAT IF MY STUDENT RETURNS TO HIS/HER COUNTRY OR CAN NO LONGER MEET WITH ME?

Then please let us know and we would be happy to match you with someone else!

DO THESE STUDENTS SPEAK ENGLISH?

Yes, students must have a sufficient grasp of English to function in the university setting. If the person is the spouse of a student, his/her English may not be quite as good. However, as you interact with the student and/or spouse, he/she will improve their knowledge and usage of English. This would be a side benefit for the student and/or spouse!

WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES WOULD BE SUITABLE?

If you are meeting with the student one-on-one, then just feel free to hang out – cook and/or share a meal together, go shopping, take a bike ride, etc. If your whole family is involved, invite the student for a family birthday or cookout, to attend a family sports game, or to a concert. We have lots of other ideas – see “Activities to Do with International Friends” on our website: <https://cincy.ifipartners.org/involve/friendship-partners/>

WHAT ABOUT SHARING MY FAITH?

Your commitment to the student should be that of unconditional friendship and love. Please be sensitive to the fact that the students come from many different cultural and religious backgrounds and may have little or no previous exposure to Christianity. We hope that over time you will build a relationship of trust which would be an appropriate context for sharing spiritually. We ask that you not force spiritual discussion but be sensitive to the student and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. In many cases, the students are very open to such discussions. It is appropriate to include your faith naturally as it relates to your life experiences.