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*Have you ever been asked what differentiates YFU from other exchange organizations? What is it about our programs that set us apart? While each of understands the truly life-changing aspects of our work, articulating sentiment is often easier said than done. Because exchange models can be similar, we did not focus on program differentiation from our competitors. Instead, this ‘why YFU’ messaging synthesizes the core of what truly sets us apart as told through our stories.*

*In an effort to help you answer these questions and provide universal consistency in our messaging, this series of talking points was developed. Addresses not only why cultural exchange matters but ‘why’ YFU. The following messaging focuses on our programs, mission, history, continued relevance, and the lifelong impact of YFU exchange.*

# MESSAGING

## Why Does Cultural Exchange Matter?

YFU’s distinctive brand of cultural exchange opens minds and hearts, enables learning that transforms lives, and ultimately helps to make us citizens of one world. While it is true that all travel broadens perspective and exposes the traveler to new experiences, YFU’s programs transform who you are and permanently change the way you see.

***Cultural Exchange Opens Minds and Hearts.***

* Both students and host families create relationships and emotional bonds with people from another culture, resulting in an extended family, a feeling that no money can buy.
* This is an opportunity to see the world up close. YFU exchange experiences expose participants to everyday life in a different society. It’s learning from the inside out, which only happens when a person has time to internalize what they are taking in. Our core program allows the time to become immersed in daily life, while shorter stays focus more deeply on specific aspects of a culture.
* Curiosity about the world expands cultural awareness and acceptance of other ways to live, which leads to broader perspective and greater understanding.
* The YFU experience corrects impressions and stereotypes that are all too easily formed by relying on mass and social media.

***Cultural Exchange is Learning that Transforms Lives.***

* The YFU core experience teaches young adults about the world. Young people may seek out cultural exchange for adventure and to escape the confines of the known, but they end up getting something else entirely out of the experience. They emerge as young adults, more independent and mature, seeing with fresh eyes. And as much as they learn about new cultures, these students learn more about themselves. Personal growth is a key benefit of YFU’s core program, as students gain:
	+ Self-reliance, resourcefulness, and confidence; without parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches to fall back on, you have to rely more on yourself.
	+ Better decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills.
	+ Resilience and independence of thought; program participants are less likely to unquestioningly accept something that someone else tells them.
	+ Tolerance of risk and adaptability in dealing with the unexpected.
* These young ambassadors not only transform themselves but also their adopted school systems, serving as exemplars of other cultures and adding to the everyday educational experience.
* What they learn now will last a lifetime.

***Cultural Exchange Makes Us Citizens of One World.***

* How does cultural exchange broaden our view? It:
	+ Enhances global understanding by deepening our appreciation for other cultures and customs, which in turn increases tolerance, reduces violence, and helps to eliminate stereotypes.
	+ Reinforces our common humanity by underscoring that people everywhere share the same emotions, joys, and challenges.
* Host families share their own traditions, holidays, and customs, offering each student a unique, personal version of life in the host country and an understanding of its diversity. Students share in day-to-day life; when seen through fresh eyes, the ordinary can become extraordinary.

## Why YFU?

YFU offers you the journey of a lifetime, an adventure that allows you to discover the best in yourself and your family, forge lifelong connections, and change the way you see the world. We stay with you every step of the way, from application to return, creating a safe, supportive environment in which to explore and gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, and creating hope for the future.

The legacy and philosophy of our founder is as powerful and timely today as it was in 1951, and in that time, we have established a track record of success.

Our people set us apart. We are:

* A network of volunteers — 12,000 people embedded in communities across the world provide a safety net of support.
* A confederation of 70\* plus countries, working together in trust and partnership and embracing the same standards of quality.
* Staff members — for whom the work is as much a calling as a job.

Unique in offering a continuum of programs for students of all ages that meets people where they are, we deliver experiences that range in length from a few weeks to 10 months and allow participants to tailor the experience to their interests and lifestyles.

Flexible, transparent, and inclusive, YFU works hard to place participants regardless of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or learning challenges.

## Why Now?

Though we will always make our home in one country, we increasingly recognize that we are citizens of a single world…and that world is changing.

Innovation and technology have shrunk the world, and “global” is the adjective of the 21st century. We are more interdependent; we speak of one economy, one climate, and are aware that all humankind’s actions are connected. We also have come to accept that the challenges we face are bigger than any individual country can solve alone.

Ironically, the more mass and social media seem to connect us, the easier it is to form stereotypes, and we can fooled into thinking that a country’s reality matches what we see in cinemas and on YouTube. YFU came into the world to meet the real need to heal a broken world. Our mission is still as vital as it ever was. Our cultural exchange programs provide the ultimate reality check to a worldview based on stereotypes. In helping people of all ages to make the world their home, we help them to appreciate differences and embrace similarities. YFU is a positive first step in a lifelong journey of international connection.

* *There are approximately 56 YFU recognized partner organizations; YFU USA also cooperates with other international agencies and grant program countries.*

# YFU TALKING POINTS

## Students

* Through the exchange experience, YFU students gain intercultural understanding, learn mutual respect, and develop a sense of social responsibility. Their experience abroad gives them leadership competencies necessary to meet the challenges and benefit from the opportunities of a fast-changing global community. They emerge as young adults, more independent and mature, seeing with fresh eyes.
* Personal growth is a key benefit of YFU’s core program, as students gain:
	+ Self-reliance, resourcefulness, and confidence; without parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches to fall back on, you have to rely more on yourself.
	+ Better decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills.
	+ Resilience and independence of thought; program participants are less likely to unquestioningly accept something that someone else tells them.
	+ Tolerance of risk and adaptability in dealing with the unexpected.
* Students *become* the teachers, educating host parents, schools, and entire communities, modeling and explaining their indigenous cultures.

## Natural Parents

* Intercultural exchange is an investment in your child’s future, teaching them skills that cannot be learned in any other way. Students:
	+ Return with greater confidence and maturity.
	+ Gain leadership skills and global competencies that will position them for success in a highly competitive, interconnected society.
	+ Are better able to adapt to university life and prepare for their future careers. Employers find value in YFU alumni because they demonstrate superior problem solving skills, language aptitude and an intuitive understanding of another country and it’s people.
* YFU provides you and your child with the support, logistics and tools for a safe exchange experience. From helping select a program, to cultural orientations and travel assistance, YFU is with you throughout the entire journey. All students are placed with a carefully screened host family with access to counseling, tutoring and worldwide emergency assistance around the clock.
* Cultural exchange enhances the meaning of “home,” creating a deeper appreciation for where one comes from. Your child will not only learn from their host family and exchange community, but will also share lessons and values they’ve learned from you.

## Alumni

The YFU experience lives on long after you return home to your native country. For YFU alumni:

* Getting to know and love people in different places helps you to make the world your home.
* Host families often become part of your extended family, and, as years pass, reciprocal visits can renew bonds and friendships.
* The experience of cultural exchange can:
	+ Sharpen awareness of the cultural differences that set us apart and the hopes and dreams that we all share.
	+ Stimulate a lifelong interest in international affairs and influence career choices.
	+ Connect YFU alumni into a network of individuals who have shared a singular experience that remains close to their hearts.
* Becoming a YFU volunteer, a host family, or a financial contributor/donor can be a way of giving back and expressing gratitude for the many opportunities you had as a student. It also allows you to stay connected to the cultural exchange experience.

## Host Families

* This is a chance to share your story, your traditions, and your customs while learning about others.
* Your ordinary life is extraordinary to an exchange student.
* You are an ambassador just being yourself.
* Expand and enrich your family life by introducing your family to a new culture and language — bring the world home to you.
* Change the course of an individual life.
* Be a catalyst in making us citizens of one world.

## Volunteers

* Volunteering at YFU opens up a world of opportunity – you can become a part of an international family for the first time or renew cultural connections through our global network.
* YFU offers volunteers a chance to meet and engage with like-minded people who share your interest in the broader world.
* YFU volunteers are the vital link between students and families and the YFU network worldwide – providing a safety net of support.
* You could change the course of an individual life.

## Schools

Schools are an essential part of the YFU experience and serve as a major venue for learning – both inside and outside the classroom – for students participating in international cultural exchange. Whether one of your students is studying abroad or you are hosting an exchange student, your school benefits, too.

* YFU participation is a great way to introduce students to the global world, adding a broader perspective and bringing civics and social studies alive.
* Exposing students to an “in-person” narrative combats stereotypes and enhances diversity.
* The YFU experience is a good way to improve foreign language skills, an invaluable asset in a global economy. The entire classroom has the opportunity to bond with exchange students, giving everyone a chance to make the world their home.

## Donors

A gift to YFU brings the world a little bit closer together. It:

* Reduces violence and helps to eliminate stereotypes.
* Promotes the understanding of cultural differences and underscores a sense of common humanity.
* Results in increased tolerance.
* Prepares students to work and lead in an interdependent, international economy.

# ABOUT YFU

## Mission

YFU advances intercultural understanding, mutual respect and social responsibility through educational exchanges for youth, families and communities.

## What Does YFU Provide?

* The legacy and philosophy of our founder is as powerful and timely today as it was more than 60 years ago, and in that time, we have established a track record of success.
* Our cultural exchange programs provide the ultimate reality check to a world-view based on stereotypes. In helping people of all ages to make the world their home, participants learn to appreciate differences and embrace similarities.
* YFU provides students and families with the support, logistics and tools for a safe exchange experience and we’re there with you every step of the way. All students:
	+ Are placed with a carefully selected host family
	+ Enrolled in school (semester or year programs)
	+ Have access to counseling, tutoring, worldwide emergency assistance and support through their Area Representative
	+ Receive full travel assistance in major airports
	+ Receive support from a local Area Representative
* YFU offers 250+ merit-based scholarships to students every year. Students are encouraged to consider all of their scholarship options and to apply to as many for which they are eligible.

## Ensuring a Safe Living Environment

YFU USA enforces rigorous standards for host family screening and selection. These include in-home interviews, reference checks, and criminal background checks. YFU USA conducts participant orientation programs to educate both students and host families about personal safety and ensures monthly contact by trained representatives to supervise and support participants while they are on program. Partner countries conduct criminal background checks for overseas host families when legal and appropriate. All staff and volunteers are subject to an annual criminal background check and follow a code of conduct.

* YFU is committed to high standards of program quality and student safety and has been a leader in exchange programming since our founding in 1951.
* YFU USA has rigorous standards for host family screening and selection, including in-home interviews, reference checks, and criminal background checks.
* YFU secures written school enrollment permission, conducts participant orientation programs, and ensures monthly contact by trained representatives to supervise and support students on program.
* Our organizational structure includes numerous safety nets and layers of protection to ensure student welfare.
* YFU has been recognized in the international education community for its commitment to program quality and student safety.
* YFU USA is pleased to be a sponsor in good standing with the US Department of State J-1 Visa Designation Office.
* Since the inception of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), an industry accrediting organization, YFU USA has been fully-listed in all three J-1 visa categories of exchange: Inbound Long-term, Outbound Long-term and Short-term Inbound/Outbound programs.
* More than 96% of YFU exchange participants rate their YFU experience positively.

*Refer all press inquiries to: Alicia Kubert Smith* *akubert@yfu.org*.

## Facts & Figures

* 1,350+ active US volunteers, 12,000 (approximately) volunteers worldwide.
* Outbound Programs:
	+ 340 American high students sent abroad in 2014.
* Inbound Programs:
	+ 1,692 YFU international high school students were welcomed to the US in 2014.
	+ 102 students participated in the YFU Community College Program (CCP) during 2014 and were placed at 17 partner college campuses, across 10 US states.
* YFU USA exchanged more than 260,000+ total YFU students since 1951.
* 4,300+ annual student exchangees worldwide (including non-US exchanges).
* Exchanging with 70 (approximately) countries. We exchange with 56+ YFU partner organizations, and various other country office and grant program organizations.
* 3 US Regional offices:
	+ Horizon District (supporting - AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, LA, MS, MT, NM, NV, OK, OR, TX, UT, WA, WY )
	+ Founders District (supporting - MI)
	+ Heartland District (supporting - IA, IL, KS, MN, MO, ND, NE, SD, WI)
	+ Northeast District (supporting - CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT, WV)
	+ Southeast District (supporting - AL, DC, DE, FL, GA, IN, KY, MD, NC, SC, TN, VA)
* Approximately 110 full-time US employees + approximately 100 seasonal employees.

*\* All facts as of January 2015*

## Boilerplate

For learners of all ages who want a life-changing cultural exchange experience, Youth For Understanding (YFU) offers a wide range of opportunities to see the world up close. The global YFU network, consisting of partners in more than 70 different countries, is united by the belief that curiosity about the world expands cultural awareness and acceptance of other ways to live, which leads to broader perspective and greater understanding. YFU’s unique intercultural exchanges open minds and hearts, enable learning that transforms lives, change the way you see the world and help to overcome stereotypes. Selected to administer more government and corporate scholarships than any other high school exchange program, YFU has remained a trusted leader of intercultural exchange programs since 1951 because of its commitment to safety, reputation for quality, and exceptional support services.

*YFU advances intercultural understanding, mutual respect and social responsibility through educational exchanges for youth, families and communities.*