Making Placements: The Unconventional Approach

By Barb Kilkka, Area Coordinator

Most people make placements by looking for willing host families and then matching the right student to them, and that's what I did when I first volunteered. But in the last couple years, the opposite approach, finding a student first and then seeking the right family for him/her has been much more successful for me (I had a hand in 36 placements last year).

Let me give you some real-life examples of how it has worked. First, you take a student's profile and look for some natural "hooks" that will help you meet the needs of a family or organization and then start making calls.

Russian (or Korean or ?) student: call families with adopted Russian children and say, "I just read a profile of this great kid from Russia, and I couldn't help but think of you and what a great opportunity it might be for you to help your children know something more about their birth culture." If you don't know these families personally, seek out local adoption support organizations, which we have found willing to spread the word. Adoptive and foster parents have been especially willing host parents for us.

Music-oriented student: choose a couple you really like and contact the president of the Music Boosters at your school. Or better yet, copy bubble profiles of these students and go to the next music competition or performance in your area. Be early and take some flyers around and give them out and talk to parents, students, everybody you meet, saying you're really looking for a music-oriented family for a particular student (use his/her name---make the student seem real to them!). You can do the same with any Sports Booster clubs (or coaches) at your schools!

I regularly go to school/community events where I always take along flyers with bubble profiles that FIT THAT CLIENTELE:

--at basketball games/tournaments, I have profiles of a few kids with a basketball interest (often I'll put up a poster too with those students on it)

--same goes for volleyball tournaments, school and AAU---when the kids have breaks for lunch, I talk to a whole team referring to a kid or two that fits their interest (not all the teams will be from your area, of course, but you may get good leads for another volunteer!)

--at track meets in the spring, I stop by and walk around and talk to kids or parents in their down-time with profiles of a runner or two---they have lots of free time to talk at these events

--at choir competitions, I take some singers

--Forensics tournaments (often in March and April) are another good source of likely families—check out where and when they are in your area---stop by around the lunch hour of Saturday tournaments and talk to the various teams

--for our struggling local girls' hockey team, I have told them I'll look for a girl to play hockey if they'll find a home for her

--for a religious Baptist student, I contacted youth ministers at several area churches

--for each language teacher at your school, try to have flyers of a student they can post in their classroom who speaks that language

When you approach your former host families, don't simply call and ask, "So, are you planning to host again?" Instead, call or mail or e-mail them with a SPECIFIC student in mind! "I simply had to call you today! When I saw Jose (or Ingrid or Takato or ?), I couldn't help but think how perfectly s/he would fit in your family because of his interest in/talent for _____! I know you probably haven't even decided yet, but just take a look… I put this one on hold for you because he's simply too good to pass up!"

Whenever possible, speak to people about a REAL student that you draw a WORD PICTURE about. If the first family doesn't want to host now, ask them to suggest someone else with that interest or ask if they would give you phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc. Talk about how much you would like to welcome this special student in your community, in your school, in their group.

So, those are the basics. Now, you can choose a special student or two, and try this approach. It really works!