



Area Representative: Support Training

OBJECTIVE: Upon completion of this training session, participants will demonstrate understanding of the importance of establishing personal contact with their students, documenting all contacts and the tools available to them as they provide assistance.

GOALS: By the end of this session, participants will be able to

- Identify the Area Representative role
- Understand the support structure and flow of communication
- Identify means of establishing personal contact and effective communication
- Understand the role of documentation in effective support
- Identify tools available as they provide support

MATERIALS: *Volunteer Training Manual, Volunteer Handbook, Contact Report screen shot, Tips for Active Listening, Mediation Agreement Form.*

OUTLINE OF CONTENT:

1. Climate Setter
2. Introduction
3. Establishing Personal Contact
4. Documentation
5. Tools for Assisting Students and Host Families
6. Summary

METHOD:

1. Climate Setter

NOTE to FACILITATOR: In order to grab attention and stress importance of the Area Representative establishing personal contact with students, this may be acted out in a role play at live trainings or read aloud if used in a phone training.

SCENARIO: Ms. McGillis agrees to be an Area Representative for Johanna, a young lady from Germany who will attend the high school where she is teaching.

She first meets Johanna when her host family brings her in to the school for new student orientation. She gives them a tour of the school, tells them she'll be happy to assist with the hosting and exchange experience this year and makes sure the family knows her phone number.

When school starts a week later it didn't take long for Johanna to make friends, as she is very friendly. Ms. McGillis sees Johanna walking in the halls between classes several times a week, where they wave, say "hello" and Ms. McGillis asks Johanna how she is doing. Johanna usually says "Fine.", sometimes telling Ms. McGillis about a good grade or tough class.

About a month into school, they barely have time to do more than exchange a few brief words in the hall or lunch room, where Johanna is surrounded by her new friends from the cheerleading squad. It's a busy, noisy table, so conversations usually go something like this:

Ms. McGillis: "How's cheerleading?"

Johanna: "Oh, it's great. I've met so many people! It's nice to be getting exercise, too."

Ms. McGillis: "That's great to hear. Well, let me know if you need anything."

Johanna: "Okay."

Johanna really seems to be enjoying cheerleading. Ms. McGillis sees her at the football games on Friday evenings, and they usually wave to each other. Ms. McGillis also keeps an eye on Johanna's grades. She knows that Johanna is mostly making "B's," and has just one "C" in math. That shouldn't be a problem, however, because her host brother is in the same class, and when she called to check in with the host family, she asked them to have her host brother give her some extra help with math.

On a Friday night towards the end of September at the football game Ms. McGillis is sitting in the crowd, talking to her colleagues and some students. Johanna waves to her, and waves again. Ms. McGillis waves back, and continues talking with her friends. A moment later she notices that Johanna is still waving to her, seemingly trying to get her attention. Ms. McGillis starts to get up, and then it's too late: the cheerleaders run off for their next cheer. Johanna looks a bit distressed but does the cheer well, and even seems to be continuing her cheer. Her voice carries across the sidelines (speak in chanting/cheering from)... "Ms. Mc-Gillis...my host brother keeps asking me... what my bra size is....! He walked in on me in the shower... last night!"

DEBRIEF (with large group):

- Do you think a student would choose such a method to tell their AR about a problem?
- Has Ms. McGillis ever met with Johanna alone?
- Does Johanna know how to contact Ms. McGillis?
- Do you think, based on the frequency and environment in which Johanna speaks with Ms. McGillis, that she would tell her about something like this?

2. Introduction

Far from home, natural support networks and their native language, your student may feel uncomfortable, afraid to ask for help and is definitely in a vulnerable position. As mentioned on page 44 of your *Volunteer Training Manual*, students are dependant upon program sponsors whose integrity, expertise and professionalism must be above reproach.

As a representative of YFU, you are a mentor for your student and must be their advocate and support even if or when you don't agree with their behavior or decisions.

If you could please refer to the image of the Youth for Understanding support pyramid on page 40 of your *Volunteer Handbook*, you will see that you, as an Area Representative, are part of an overall support system that includes the host family, host community, YFU organization and natural family in the home country. Keep in mind though, that as the local YFU representative, you are the key support person for students on program.

Your role is to:

- maintain regular contact
- help the student and family identify and resolve issues and
- document your efforts

As illustrated by the pyramid, you are supported directly in your role as Area Representative by your Area Coordinator and/or Support Services Manager (SSM). The SSM can call upon the services of the YFU USA national office and professional counselors, authorize tutoring, and consult with the partner national office staff which is in contact with the student's natural parents.

3. Establishing Personal Contact

The relationship between Johanna and Ms. McGillis was exaggerated to illustrate what point? (*The importance of personal contact!*)

It is important to meet your student *in person* within the first week of arrival; you may be the very first YFU representative that the student talks with while on program. A second contact during the first month is critical. If your area group has a welcoming social event for all students you will see your student in person there. Otherwise you should establish contact via phone or in person. Developing friendly, easy, and open lines of communication is most effective soon after the student has arrived.

What are some things you can talk with your student about during the first conversations? (*Elicit ideas to write on the flip chart and direct participants to page 48 of the Volunteer Training Manual for more ideas.*)

It is important to be a careful listener, as sometimes students are hesitant to tell you if there is a problem, or perhaps come from a culture where problems are not addressed openly.

Let's look at the Active Listening Skills sheet. Does any advice stand out as particularly useful?

4. Documentation

Though documentation does not supersede the actual contact in importance, it is a critical element of student support.

NOTE to FACILITATOR: Remind participants of CSJET and J-1 visa regulations, of keeping notes for themselves.

And because it is so important, how and why (other than being mandated to) do we document contact with students?

NOTE to FACILITATOR: Write the group's answers on a flipchart, seeing if any participants are aware of monthly contacts, quarterly school contacts, or that we document on my.yfu.org.

The official monthly contact is documented on my.yfu.org. Take a look at the screen shot of a contact report. Has anyone completed a 'monthly contact report already'? How long does it take? As you complete your monthly contact report, which should be done within a day or two of having talked with or met your student, remember that you do not need to ask each question on the report, word for word. They are simply guidelines.

Please remember that YFU must maintain confidentiality as much as possible and you are dealing with potentially personal issues. Please be respectful of student and host family privacy by not sharing more than general information outside of Youth for Understanding, and personal information about students and host families with other volunteers only on a need to know basis.

5. Tools for Assisting Students and Host Families

NOTE to FACILITATOR: This may be acted out in a role play at live trainings or read aloud if used in a phone training.

SCENARIO: Louise is a 17 year old student from Colombia living with the Jones Family. They have three small children and attend a church in the area. Louise has had a hard time making friends in her school. She is a very quiet girl and is struggling with homesickness. The host parents are very supportive of her and encourage her to make new friends at church and at school.

One day Louise calls Janelle, her Area Rep, very upset. Janelle finds time to visit Louise at home, where they go outside to talk. Louise is very upset as she explains that she can not stay in the Jones' home because they treat her like a child. Janelle talks with Louise to figure out specifically what the host parents are doing that makes her feel this way. Louise says that the host family will not let her watch PG-13 movies. Janelle can not believe that the host family would not let a 17 year old watch a PG-13 movie, but she knows that everyone is different. So Janelle sets up a meeting with the host family to find out what is going on.

DEBRIEF: What tools does Janelle have to assist with such a meeting that will assure she hears all sides of the situation? Take a moment to find the Information Gathering Form found

on pages 56 and 57 in your *Volunteer Training Manual*. Let's as a group write down answers to as many questions as we can on the Information Gathering Form.

As I read on, continue noting new information on your Information Gathering Form as it comes up.

SCENARIO continued: The host parents confirmed that they told Louise she could not watch PG-13 movies while in their home. They do not believe in letting children watch movies that do not follow their beliefs, do not want those movies in their home, and do not feel that they should change just because they have opened their home to Louise. The AR tries to work out a compromise with the Jones and Louise, but the Jones feel very strongly about this belief. Louise says she will try and follow the rules of the home.

A week later Louise calls Janelle crying, saying she is sure that she can no longer stay in the home. Louise tells Janelle that she has had a hard time finding friends, and that she had to turn down invitations from potential friends because they were going to see a movie that was rated PG-13. When Janelle questions further, she finds out that Louise did not actually ask whether she could go. Janelle tells Louise that it was great she was trying to follow the house rules, and encourages Louise to speak to her host parents for more clarity on the rule: could she watch such movies outside of the home? She also tells Louise that she will follow up with a phone call the next day to speak with the Jones about that subject.

Janelle calls the next day, and it is confirmed by the Jones, after discussion with Louise, that they would allow Louise to view PG-13 movies if she is with friends the Jones approve of and it is outside the family home.

DEBRIEF: Have we reached resolution?

Okay, how about a new twist?!

SCENARIO continued: Janelle gets a phone call the following week from an angry Mrs. Jones. Louise was supposed to go to a school football game on Friday evening with friends that the Jones have met. She was picked up by the friends, but a neighbor saw the girls that evening at the movies. The movie just so happened to be rated R. Mrs. Jones has put Louise on restriction, after Louise confirms that had been the true plan all along. Mrs. Jones expressed how extremely disappointed she was that Louise violated their trust by lying about where she was going that evening.

When Janelle speaks with Louise, she tells Janelle that she wanted to be with those girls, it didn't matter where they were going. She doesn't understand all these rules about movies, but she will try and do better, and will tell her host parents the truth about where she is going when she is out with friends. Janelle has Louise sign a behavioral contract (pass out example) stating that she will not lie to her host family about where she is going.

Two weeks later Janelle gets another phone call from Mr. Jones, and this is really a heated phone call: they want Louise out immediately. Louise had snuck out one evening after she had supposedly gone to bed, and it wasn't clear where she had been: one of the younger children had heard noise in the night, and told the Jones that Louise wasn't in her room. The Jones waited up for her, and smelled alcohol on her breath when she came home. Mrs. Jones stated that she could not have that influence on her children. Janelle moves Louise to a temporary host family and Louise is given a letter of warning from YFU.

DEBRIEF: Why is she put on warning? (she has violated host family rules, and YFU policy and the law).

NOTE to FACILITATOR: Be sure to mention that being put on warning is a change in status on program.

SCENARIO continued: The first weekend Louise is in her temporary host family, she sneaks out and gets drunk with her friends. The temporary host family contacts Janelle. While Janelle is trying hard to support Louise, she is very clear that she must respect the rules of the host family and program while she is here, no matter if the rules are different from where she comes from. Louise is put on probation for the remainder of program.

DEBRIEF: Why is she on probation? (she has violated warning status, YFU policy and the law).

NOTE to FACILITATOR: Mention what probation status means – danger of early return.

SCENARIO continued: Louise seems to have taken her probation seriously, and is communicating well with her temporary family. She also seems to be making new friends through their church youth group. They agree to keep her for the remainder of the semester. About a month later, Janelle gets a phone call at 2:30 am from the host family: Louise was arrested at a keg party for underage drinking. Janelle calls the district office to speak with the person on call that weekend. An early return is requested for Louise.

DEBRIEF: Why would she be asked to return home?

NOTE to FACILITATOR: Talk about early return:

- *difference between voluntary and involuntary return*
- *only 3% of all students in a given year return home early*
- *the only person who may approve early return is the President of YFU*
- *almost 25% of all students change host families - incompatible matches are not unusual or considered failures: sometimes a peg simply will not fit into a square hole!*

Another tool that is critical to you in your support work is the YFU Policies. Remember that you are working as a volunteer on a team with a diverse group of people: there are bound to be differences of opinion on the best course to take with an issue, or even fundamentally concerning

opinions on child-rearing. What does allow us consistency is familiarity with YFU policies. While there will be gray areas that warrant respectful discussion, YFU policies serve as the guidelines for staff and volunteers alike, all around the world. Where can you find YFU policies? (*Volunteer Handbook*, pages 46-53)

Your Area Coordinator and Support Services Manager are also valuable tools to you. We have talked about the support structure and communication lines within the support structure. Keep in mind that even though YFU keeps office hours from 9 am to 5 pm, there is always someone on call in case of an emergency. With that said, most problems can and should be handled at the local level.

ACTIVITY: Let's do a quick exercise. I'll read three scenarios, you tell me whom you should contacted – the support services manager or the Area Coordinator and when – during business hours or after hours.

- A family you are working with calls at 2 in the morning because the student has been taken to the emergency room with appendicitis and will have to undergo emergency surgery. (*call the support services manager after hours*)
- Your student continues to have language adjustment issues. She also comes home from school and sleeps for several hours every day. (*call or email the Area Coordinator during daytime hours*)
- A host mother calls with a suspicion that her student has an eating disorder. (*call the support services manager during business hours*)

DEBRIEF: Please refer to pages 65-67 in your *Volunteer Training Manual* for a more complete list of scenarios. There are some situations that are true emergencies (medical or legal issues), and some that are urgent, but can be handled during business hours the following day.

6. Summary

Let me throw out a few more scenarios for you, and you tell me how they make you feel:

- You keep calling to check in on your student for a monthly contact, and after leaving messages three times with various people at the house, he still hasn't called you back.
- You get a phone call from the school saying that your student hasn't been there for a week.
- Any time you have come by a host family's house to pick up your student, or have called to see how things are going, the host father is either absent, in the back room, or hands over the phone to his wife immediately. When you ask him how things are going, it's just, "fine," and nothing else.

These situations should make you feel uneasy. Going back to what we discussed initially about the importance of your role, students are vulnerable and could potentially become victims of emotional, financial and sexual abuse. **If you establish a personal relationship of trust with the student, they are much more likely to turn to you and ask for help.**

Let's take a moment to look at page 57 in your *Volunteer Training Manual*. Here are some ways of safeguarding against exploitation.

NOTE to FACILITATOR: refer to warning signs and mention the process of notification.

Remember that your role as an Area Representative is of vital importance to the student, the host family and to YFU. And when dealing with a teenager far from familiar surroundings and people,

no news is not good news, it's just no news!