



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

Alma Mater Email Template For Staff

SUBJECT: Share a Meal, Change the World

Dear YFU host families,

Thank you for taking a leap of faith.

In your courage and willingness to host a **YES** Scholar, you are already well on your way to dispelling harmful stereotypes and enriching the world. Such a mission could not be more relevant, particularly during this period of empathy and community, known to Muslims around the world as the holy month of Ramadan.

We are eager to bring this to your attention, as you prepare your lives and homes for the arrival of these students who are eager to immerse themselves in American culture and tradition—while sharing their own life-long traditions and expectations of the customs that are upheld by their communities throughout this month of fasting and prayer. You will find discussing the end-of-Ramadan Eid celebrations, which occur just prior to your students' departure from their home, can be an excellent jumpstart for dialogue and cultural exchange with your international YFU student.

During Ramadan, Muslims place themselves under many restrictions in order to refocus their minds on spiritual pursuits and charity as well as to achieve self-accountability and self-restraint. The time dedicated to these activities is similar to Lent in the Christian tradition. Amongst the things they must forego during the daylight hours of that entire month, is all eating and drinking, including water. Needless to say, such a feat is no easy task. Those who are fasting must rise well before dawn, to have time for a morning meal—known as the 'Suhur,' before the sun is up. In the evening, they break the fast in a meal known as the 'Iftar,' shortly after the sunset and must retire very early for the night in order to be able to get up for the Suhur.

This year, Eid-el-Fitr—which honors the end of Ramadan—will fall on July 28th-29th. This means that some of the incoming YES students will celebrate it just prior to their departure to the U.S. Other YES students will be arriving within the weeks just after the Eid. Regardless, they will be eager to share their experience of Ramadan this year, and the ensuing celebrations with you.

Imam *Mohamad Bashir Arafat*, of the Muslim Community Center in Baltimore, Maryland describes Ramadan in America as the month of outreach, during which American Muslims invite their non-Muslim counterparts to experience Iftar with them. He believes that the simple act of sharing a meal with someone, emphasizes our common humanity and strengthens our bonds with one another. This message of building bridges and opening new avenues of dialogue, resonates with the founding mission of YFU and purpose of the YES program.

Read more about what YFU YES scholars take from their experiences in America, here: yfuusa.org/host-a-student/opportunities/youth-exchange-study-yes.php

You can also learn more about how Ramadan in America is unique in the following video by Imam Arafat: iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/video/2013/06/20130617276447.html

Thank you for helping us promote international understanding and world peace.

Sincerely,

<<Field director name here>>