

About the Volunteer Host Family Program

the *Fresh Air* fund
serving children since 1877

“When we started I thought the program was about what we would be giving to a child from the city. I didn’t know how much she would give back to our family.”

Summertime is Fresh Air time for children growing up in New York City’s toughest neighborhoods. Through The Fresh Air Fund’s Volunteer Host Family Program, inner-city children can stay for one week or more with welcoming families in over 300 rural and suburban communities across 13 states from Virginia to Maine and Canada.

Since 1877, more than 1.7 million inner-city children have experienced the joys of summer in the country, away from the concrete and noise. The bonds that are forged between families and their Fresh Air children can change lives – and last a lifetime.

Host families and Friendly Towns

The communities in which volunteer host families live and welcome children every year are called Friendly Towns, and each Friendly Town is managed by a committee of local volunteer leaders.

The committee publicizes the program, screens applications, checks references, interviews families in their homes and approves new hosts. Friendly Town committees are led by Chairpeople, who are in turn supervised by regional volunteer Fresh Air Fund Representatives who report to staff at The Fresh Air Fund.

Fund Representatives help plan transportation, conduct area meetings, help with publicity and work directly with Fresh Air Fund staff to prepare for each summer.

(over, please)



The Hurst Family

This past summer, for the ninth year in a row, Meah left her home in the Bronx to visit the Hurst family in Denver, Pennsylvania. She has always fit right in with the family’s four children. Amy Hurst, 14, is just about Meah’s age, so they “get along best.” And the Hurst’s youngest child, Kelly Jo, can’t remember a time when Meah was not part of her summer.

Meah says that every year with the Hurst family is “loads of fun,” and “never routine.” Highlights of last summer include a trip to the amusement park, where Meah braved the roller coasters, and casual swimming trips with the Hurst’s extended family and friends.

During the school year, Meah keeps up with the Hurst family by exchanging letters and small gifts. As an eighth grader, Meah has started to think about more serious matters, like college, and even says that she would consider going to school in Pennsylvania!

Joyce Hurst concludes, “We look forward to spending more time with Meah in the future, and seeing what dreams she can fulfill in the exciting years to come.”

The Fresh Air Fund provides support to Fund Representatives, Chairpeople and host families 24 hours a day when Fresh Air children are visiting their towns.

How the program works

At The Fresh Air Fund's office in New York City, a professional staff oversees the activities of Friendly Town volunteers and assists them with policies, procedures, committee development, transportation plans and publicity activities. The Fresh Air Fund also works closely with 90 social service and community organizations across New York City to register Fresh Air children.

The Fresh Air Fund provides transportation for children to and from Friendly Towns, arranges for payment of any medical expenses for children without insurance and provides liability insurance for hosts and committee volunteers.

In addition to the Volunteer Host Family Program, The Fresh Air Fund has five camps in upstate New York where 3,000 inner-city children enjoy free camping experiences each summer. During the rest of the year, The Fresh Air Fund also helps youngsters in New York City with tutoring, high school placements, career exploration and the transition to college.

What is expected of a volunteer host family

What does The Fresh Air Fund expect from volunteer host families? Laughter, fresh air, and fun!

All you have to do is take a child into your home for one or two weeks during the summer.

Host families come from all walks of life and can be any age, race, religion, economic status, or sexual orientation. You can be a single parent or a working parent – in fact, many of the families who host work full time. Empty nesters make great hosts as well.

And while it's true that there will be one more mouth to feed while you are a host, many of the activities that you and your Fresh Air Fund child experience together cost virtually nothing. A simple walk through the park, catching fireflies in a jar, or taking a swim in a local lake or pond would mean the world to an inner-city child.

The benefits of hosting a Fresh Air Fund child

“We just finished our first hosting experience...”

“We are the luckiest people on earth to have had this opportunity to open our homes and our hearts. Thank you Fresh Air Fund team for all you have done to provide this opportunity to adults and children alike.”



For many host families and their Fresh Air Fund children, the experience offers a unique opportunity to learn from one another.

For children, getting away from the city opens their eyes to what the world has to offer. For families, it is a reminder of all that they have... and all that they have to give. Rarely does a host family regret the experience. More often, they are surprised by how much it changes their lives just as much as it does the life of their Fresh Air child.

Speak with a volunteer host family

Many of our volunteer host families welcome the opportunity to speak to you about their experience. Feel free to ask us for a referral and we'll be happy to put you in touch with a volunteer host family.

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