

What Does Being a Good Ambassador Really Mean?

Pat Hughes, FF Blue Mountains

Good morning members. The workshop title is "What does being a good ambassador really mean?" Our brief for this workshop is "Have we lost the sense of importance and true meaning of the word. How can we weave the true meaning of "cultural" ambassador into our hosting and traveling experiences?"

We believe for this to happen there needs to be three equally important facets to this challenge:

- The knowledge of the philosophy of FFI and the culture within the club.
- The traveling ambassador
- The hosting family and program for the exchange.

Our three workshop presenters are Lesley from Sydney Club, Warren from Adelaide Club and I, Pat from Blue Mountains Club.

Whether we are hosts or ambassadors we always have that element of excitement and enthusiasm as we meet with our fellow members from across the world. The first impressions as we would all agree do matter.

The welcome, the home preparations, the little niceties of a welcome card, flowers, pre stamped postcards of your area, space for unpacking, the bedroom comfort including pillow choice, and spare blanket, etc... do matter. But consider also the explaining of available power points, and explanation of how things work e.g. toilets and showers and air conditioning. Discuss internet usage. Discuss the detail for the program - time they will need to have breakfast with you, most suitable clothing to wear and things to take for that day's activity and the time to leave home. This information may need to be a written supplement to your clubs exchange booklet. Check their religious needs. This all reinforces to the ambassador that they are welcome in your home, and you are interested in them and their comfort.

Demonstrate the culture in the typical family home e.g. the routines of your home life, Plan with them their free time. Encourage them to share their routines, customs, family attitudes with you. Feel comfortable to discuss anything, perhaps even controversial subjects e.g. attitude to homosexuality, sex before marriage, system of our government, pensions, health care, policy on refugees.

The opportunity to enjoy the experience of having ambassadors visiting our area, should be available to all members.

So often clubs have a shortage of beds available for hosting - this can be a challenge due to older members having moved into smaller homes, club members still working and not able to get flex days, problems relating to aging of hosts. Co-hosting is being established in a number of Australian clubs now, to involve members for whom the above conditions and others apply. Co-hosts are allocated to every host. Co-hosts are involved with all the responsibilities and sharing of hosting except providing the bed. There is no perceived status of one being more important than another! This concept works best where the host and co-host know each other well.

Clubs use various ways to overcome actual bed shortage e.g. using non-member friends, using local hotels or guest houses. These can create specific problems, which need to be fully discussed prior to the exchange, solutions considered, perhaps becoming part of club guidelines.

We all can relate to exchanges where we have hosted, and mostly these have been very happy experiences with life-long friendships being forged. What made these so memorable - the personalities, the sharing chats over the meal table, our interest and knowledge in their family, lives and their country? Also the welcome the ambassador has received at the host's home and whether their fatigue levels were noted, both physical and language ability. It helps by having as much prior 'knowing of the ambassador' - host placements should be made as soon as possible so that communication can be established before meeting face to face.

The big question is how do we ensure our non-member hosts or those who have been placed in commercial accommodation, do fully experience the warmth of a home experience?

We would like you to form into very small groups to discuss this. Consider: What information or involvement in your Club life do these non-members have, do they understand what FFI is all about etc.

This is an aspect of another workshop topic at this conference - "Presenting FF to your community." It is not a B&B hosting and should not carry a 'cheapie way to travel' attitude from these non-members.

There are responsibilities expected of a host/ co-host, day and dinner hosts. Consider the situation of traveling family groups, how does the club program relate to the ages of the ambassadors? We all may have had memorable hostings for the wrong reasons ... What happened, did you analyze how to prevent this situation happening again. Was it neglect of something we have outlined today?

Remember the FFI pledge and the Mission statement "To promote global understanding across the barriers that separate people."