

# AN INTRODUCTION TO **HOSTING** WITH THE FRESH AIR FUND



This guide is a glimpse into the hosting process. After a Host Family is matched with a child, more detailed information about specific policies, helpful tips and suggestions, and information about your Fresh Air child and their family will be provided.

## **The Fresh Air Fund's Friendly Towns Program**

Fresh Air Fund Host Families have invited Fresh Air children into their homes for over 140 years. Host Families live in rural, suburban, and small town communities in 14 states along the East Coast and Southern Canada. Each community is called a Friendly Town, and is managed by a team of dedicated local volunteers, led by Chairs and Fund Reps. Volunteers recruit new Host Families, interview potential Host Families, conduct home safety inspections, and check references for potential Host Families. They also escort children on their trips to and from the city, and provide support and guidance to Host Families.

the *Fresh Air* fund  
*because a summer can last a lifetime™*

[www.freshair.org](http://www.freshair.org)



## What is The Fresh Air Fund?

Since 1877, The Fresh Air Fund, an independent, not-for-profit agency, has unlocked the limitless potential of more than 1.8 million New York City children from low-income communities. Each year, thousands of children experience outdoor summer adventures through visits with volunteer Host Families along the East Coast and Southern Canada and at The Fund's overnight camps in Fishkill, NY. Some Fresh Air children also participate in year-round leadership and educational programs.

## What to Expect?

### Before the Visit - You are Matched!

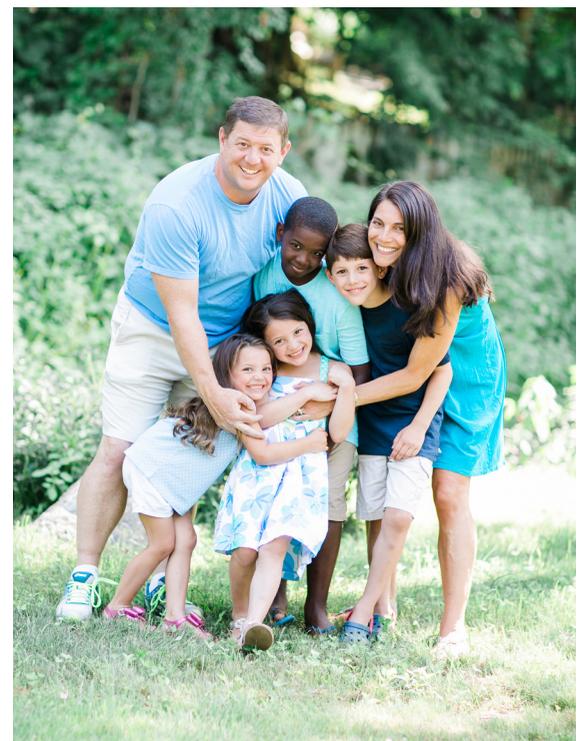
Once you are matched with a Fresh Air child, it's time to prepare your family and your home for your hosting experience.

### Make Contact!

Be sure to contact the Fresh Air child and their Parent/Guardian to introduce yourself, answer questions, and start to build a relationship prior to their arrival. Families that have more contact before a visit tend to have easier first day transitions. You will receive suggested talking points that can help during this conversation.

### Preparing your Family

- Discuss what to expect from the Fresh Air child's visit.
- Remind your children they will be sharing their home, toys, possibly room, and their parents with another child.
- Point out that while they will have some things in common with the Fresh Air child, they will also have differences, which is one of the exciting aspects of the experience.
- Encourage empathy by talking together about a time they were in a new environment or away from their friends and family and how they felt.



# Creating Summer Memories - Planning the Visit

A summer visit with The Fresh Air Fund is about:

- having fun, exploring, and making new friends
- learning, sharing, and making memories
- providing a safe, loving, and non-judgmental space for the Fresh Air child

Fresh Air children and your family will have a range of emotions as they embark on their new adventure. Fresh Air children are likely to feel nervous and for many it will be their first time away from home.

- Our best advice for getting ready is to relax, smile, and be flexible.
- Think about safety. Walk around your home, backyard, block, and neighborhood, and explore your surroundings from a Fresh Air child's perspective. Check for any possible safety hazards and look for anything in the environment that might be unfamiliar and not safe for a Fresh Air child.
- Don't overplan. There is no need to plan a "big" event like a trip to an amusement park or to the beach every day. Fresh Air children overwhelmingly cite the simple pleasures of summer as their favorite parts of the visit.
- Review all of the materials you have received from The Fresh Air Fund and your local Volunteer, including this guide.

Fresh Air children want to talk, laugh, and play. They tell us they like to:

- run barefoot in the grass, splash in backyard sprinklers, build sandcastles
- swim, ride bikes, go fishing, walk down country lanes
- see farm animals, pick berries, catch fireflies
- make s'mores, count the stars, listen to the silence on quiet evenings
- go to barbeques, have picnics, sit with the family at dinner
- play with Legos, work on puzzles, do crafts, play board games
- make new friends

## Saying Hello - The First Day of the Visit

Children generally travel to and from their Friendly Towns on buses chartered by The Fresh Air Fund. Your Volunteer will tell you the scheduled date of arrival and the bus stop location. Occasionally, there are special arrangements made for pick up and/or drop off.

### Bus Arrival

On the day of the bus arrival, remember:

- To be sure you are reachable by your local Volunteer by the agreed upon method (email, text, phone, etc.) as the bus may arrive early or be delayed.
- A handmade welcome sign makes a Fresh Air child feel special when they get off the bus.
- Your guest may be a little shy, tired, nervous, hungry, motion sick, or even over-excited. Do whatever makes you and your visitor feel right at home.
- To call the child's parents shortly after they arrive. If you are unable to reach the child's parent, please contact your Volunteer.

### Home Arrival

When you get home:

- Show your Fresh Air child around your home.
- Introduce family members and pets. Some children may be VERY nervous around pets if they are not used to them, so make introductions to furry family members slowly.
- Explain your household routine and rules as simply as you can, including expected chores, daily schedules (sleep/wake times), and screen time limits.
- Then have some fun, though remember it has already been a long and eventful day, so save any big activities for later in the week!





## During the Visit

Your local Volunteer and The Fresh Air Fund are available to support you. Every Host Family experience is unique and you may encounter some bumps along the way. Common challenges include homesickness, bed-wetting, challenges integrating Fresh Air siblings, and picky eating. Your Volunteer and the Support Services team are available with tips and support for these common issues.

### Medical Issues

If your Fresh Air child needs medical attention, call a doctor immediately. Then call your Volunteer right away. If you do not reach your Volunteer, call Support Services. Support Services will be able to provide the child's medical form and insurance information. Even if a child has a minor issue or needs over-the-counter medicine or home treatment, ALWAYS contact your Volunteer. The Fresh Air Fund will pay any medical expenses not covered by insurance.

### Support Services

There is an extensive support system in place to make your visit a success. Feel free to ask a lot of questions – we are here to help. Your Volunteer is available to assist you throughout the year. During your summer visit, you will also receive 24/7 support from the NYC Office. Interpreters are available through the NYC Office.

### Communication with City Parents/Guardians

Parents want to hear how their child is doing and appreciate updates from both you and their child during the visit. The communication desired by both families can be discussed and clarified during the pre-trip phone calls. A simple text to say hello or with a photo of the fun the Fresh Air child is having can ease a City Parent's mind.

### Waving Goodbye

All visits come to an end, but the memories of happy summer experiences last a lifetime. On departure day:

- Be sure to arrive on time.
- Pack a **nut-free** lunch for the child to eat.
- Unless you are 100% certain you are willing and able to host the Fresh Air child the following summer, do not tell them you will.
- Avoid an outpouring of gifts. A small memento of your time together is fine, but you've already given the biggest gift of all - memories to last a lifetime.

# Who are Fresh Air Fund Children - A Snapshot

## Fresh Air Children...

- Want to have a fun summer discovering new things, exploring the world around them, and gaining new perspectives.
- Want to share who they are with your family while celebrating differences.
- Want to be compassionately cared for, accepted, and loved.
- Are between 7 and 13 years old when they visit a new Host Family.
- Are residents of New York City, which is home to nearly 2 million children, 1 out of 3 who are living in poverty.
- Are from households whose income meets the federal guidelines defining poverty.
- Speak English, though some are learning as non-native English speakers.
- Are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.

For example, in 2017, Friendly Towns applicants self-identified as:

- 55% African-American/Black
- 31% as Hispanic/ Latino
- 15% as Asian
- 3% as White
- 1% as American Indian/Pacific Islander.

\*\*Note: Due to some applicants self-reporting as multiple racial/ethnic groups, totals are >100%.

In 2017, Friendly Towns applicants reported 27 primary languages spoken in their homes, with the most common languages identified as English, Chinese, Spanish, French, and Korean.

**The most important thing to know is that ALL Fresh Air children are children!**

## Matching Our Fresh Air Children

City Parents ultimately choose the Host Family their child will visit. During the matching process, City Parents consider various pieces of information, including:

- Date of the trip
- Host Family structure
- Location
- Pets
- Activities

The Fresh Air Fund strives to create strong matches. In some cases, a Host Family is not matched their first summer, a child cancels, or the match doesn't work out as hoped. We encourage all families to be patient and flexible throughout the matching and hosting process.



## Some Fresh Air Children may...

- Come from homes with: two parents, one parent, or one or two absent parents.
- Come from homes where parents are unemployed or where parents work multiple jobs.
- Live in foster care or in homeless shelters.
- Be mature or act childish for their age.
- Be responsible for looking after younger siblings.
- Be immigrants, first generation Americans, or have families who have been in the US for several generations.
- Identify as: Christian, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, atheist, or other.
- Identify as: straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, fluid, or gender non-conforming.
- Have cool new sneakers.
- Have cool technology (that they are encouraged to either leave at home or abide by host imposed screen time limits).
- Love or hate being active.
- Love broccoli and spinach or hate broccoli and spinach.
- Be big or small for their age.
- Be afraid of dogs, love dogs, or be hesitant around dogs.
- Love to giggle.
- Have never been more than 1 mile from home or have traveled overseas.
- Love pizza or hate pizza.
- Love ice cream or hate ice cream.
- Be required to travel with prescription medication, including asthma inhalers, allergy medicine, and/or EpiPens, etc. If you are matched with a child who requires an EpiPen, your local Volunteer can refer you to some videos and rest assured, most children who travel with EpiPens can self-administer. Please note that the requirement to travel with an EpiPen is **NOT** considered a special need.

**Please be prepared to welcome a child who fits any of these above descriptions.**

## Children with "Special Needs"

Some Fresh Air Children have "Special Needs," which can include mental health needs, social-emotional needs, and/or medical needs. These children are only matched to families who have indicated they are comfortable managing these needs. Please speak with your Volunteer if your home might be suitable to host a child with a special need, and to discuss which needs are most appropriate for your family to manage.

## Host Policies & Expectations



1. All adults associated with the household must complete an interview and a background check. Fresh Air children need to be supervised in an age-appropriate manner\* at all times by an adult who has passed a background check and any additional criminal clearances as required by state law, and been approved by The Fresh Air Fund (FAF). The interview process also includes a Volunteer visiting your home, meeting with all individuals living in the home, conducting a safety check, and contacting references (including one from a professional who works with children and families (pediatrician, coach, teacher, clergy member, etc.)). Re-interviews are conducted every three years for all Host Families. The FAF may choose to deny a Host application at any time.

2. Please contact the Fresh Air child's parent prior to the visit and when they arrive at the Host Family home.

3. If a Fresh Air child needs medical treatment, FAF will always guarantee payment. Do not hesitate to take the child to a doctor or hospital. Report any medical issues immediately to your Volunteer or FAF's office.

4. Corporal punishment is not allowed. Ensure fair consequences for your Fresh Air child and your own children. Avoid being stricter with your own children than your Fresh Air child, as well as being stricter with the Fresh Air child.

5. Assume that any Fresh Air child cannot swim, and supervise all Fresh Air children during all water activities, regardless of swimming ability. Children must wear life jackets when they are in a watercraft. Discuss any watercraft you will use with your local Volunteer.\*

6. Exercise the utmost caution and safety, following all state laws with regards to motor vehicles. Ensure that any Fresh Air child uses approved safety equipment in good condition, including but not limited to: bike/scooter helmets, seat belts, and life jackets when participating in any relevant activity. Booster seats may be required. Check with your Volunteer about your state laws.\*

\*Your local Volunteer can provide you with further information

7. FAF extends its liability insurance to Host Families who are operating within all Fresh Air Fund policies. Any claims will be adjudicated by our insurance company.

8. FAF has additional policies, including that some activities and travel require special permission in writing from City Parents. Inform your local Volunteer about specific activities you are planning during the visit as some require special permission.\*

9. During the Fresh Air child's visit, all firearms must be locked in a gun safe and all ammunition locked separately from the guns. Fresh Air children are **NEVER** allowed to handle firearms, including BB guns.

10. Contact your Volunteer and then Support Services if you are having problems with homesickness, behavior, or if the Fresh Air child needs to move from your home for any reason.

11. Keep your Fresh Air child out of harm's way and ensure their safety in accordance with FAF policy. Use sound judgment and make decisions that are in the best interests of the Fresh Air child.

12. Use alcohol, tobacco, and, cannabis (where legalized), responsibly, minimizing any Fresh Air Fund child's exposure to such activities. Do not smoke/vape in confined spaces with any Fresh Air child.

13. Celebrate the differences between your family and that of any Fresh Air child's by learning and sharing with each other. Provide a safe, loving, and non-judgmental space for any Fresh Air child to thrive and grow.

## Important Contact Information and Trip Details

Your Chair's Name:

Your Fund Rep's Name:

Your Chair's Phone Number:

Your Fund Rep's Phone Number:

Your Chair's Email Address:

Your Fund Rep's Email Address:

Your Friendly Town Name:

NYC Office 24/7 Support Services

Your Trip Dates:

Phone Number: 1-800-367-0003