



Host Family Handbook

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Welcoming a student into your home—An Experience of a Lifetime

Becoming a host family to a young student from a different country and culture is both an enriching and challenging experience. Welcoming international students into our homes helps develop friendships that will last a lifetime and by sharing your home and offering guidance to your student your family becomes an important part of their life.

Atlantic Education International Program . . .

Atlantic Education International is an incorporated agency which manages and coordinates the international education programs and services for the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It serves as the point of contact and coordination of international education matters including marketing and building capacity for further expansion.

AEI's sole shareholder is the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development who provides the mandate and overall responsibility for its actions. AEI's future growth is predicated on capacity to have off-shore schools and virtual high schools using the New Brunswick curriculum and for NB schools to accommodate in-coming international students. The province benefits from the revenue the programs provide as well as the diversity international students bring to our classrooms. AEI's revenues will contribute at least \$250,000 annually to the budget of New Brunswick. Payments to districts, schools, homestay parents and coordinators raise the estimated economic impact of AEI activities to approximately \$4.5 million.

Marketed in various countries, AEI uses international education fairs and contracted education agents to recruit potential students to the program. The agents act as representatives of AEI not only in recruiting the students but helping them with their applications and travel arrangements. They also act as the liaison between AEI and the student's parents while the students are in Canada.

A student's acceptance to the program is based on school performance, adaptability, English language ability, and good health. All students must obtain student Visas to come into the country to study. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, a department within the Canadian Government, is responsible for issuing student Visas.

After students apply to study in New Brunswick, AEI reviews applications and, if approved, assigns them to one of the regional Districts, and then places the student in one of their participating schools. The availability of a suitable homestay placement in the region often determines the choice of school.

The students' countries . . .

AEI works closely with agents around the world to bring students to the province. Students come from all over the world including Europe, Asia, Central and South America.

Becoming a host family . . .

Families interested in becoming a host family should contact their local school and speak with an Atlantic Education International Homestay Coordinator representative. After speaking to the AEI representative, the family receives information for their perusal.

The AEI representative follows-up with the family and organizes a home visit. At this time, a host family profile is completed as well as the paperwork for a criminal records check and Child Abuse Registry search.

Home visits are an opportunity for families to ask questions and gather more information on the program and for the AEI representative to assess their suitability. Upon approval, the AEI representative matches a student with a host family. Matches are based on family and student interests, and family and student preferences.

Host families agree to:

- provide a private bedroom
- treat the student as one of their own family members
- provide food for three balanced meals per day
- provide laundry facilities
- invite and encourage participation in family events and travel
- show local culture and visit some highlights of the area
- explain family rules and expectations be familiar with program rules
- provide use of common areas in the home (living room, family room, etc.)
- allow use of telephone and appropriate computer according to family house rules
- encourage involvement in daily functions of family life (meal preparation, clean up etc.)
- provide guidance and advice for school and social problems
- whenever possible, provide transportation to the school or other local sites to facilitate their participation in extra-curricular activities

Host families are not responsible for:

- **Student finances**—students are responsible for setting up their own bank accounts. Host families are not responsible for providing an allowance, monitoring spending, or lending money. However, families should pay their students if they babysit their other children.
- **Individual items**—students are responsible for purchasing their own toiletry items, school supplies, club memberships, social events etc. However, if the family takes their student to dinner or a social event, then the family is responsible for the cost.

- **Monitoring food**—families are not responsible for putting the student on any kind of diet including one for personal or religious beliefs. Families are; however, responsible for providing healthy meals and snacks.

Preparing for the arrival of your student . . .

A successful homestay happens when all members of the family agree that taking an international student into the home is a good idea. If any family member disagrees then it could cause problems throughout the school year.

Once a student is placed, families can begin preparing the bedroom for the student. Necessities for your student include a bed, a desk, and somewhere to store clothes and other personal items. Other useful items:

- clock radio
- bulletin board (if families do not want items attached to the walls)
- calendar
- reading light
- extra blankets (many students come from warmer climates)
- any other small touches

Students should also have:

- set of keys
- list of important phone numbers (police, emergency contacts etc.)
- small notebook for writing information.

It is a good idea to start corresponding with your student and their family once AEI identifies your student and indicates when they will arrive. However, the first contact should come from the student. This helps to give the family better insight to the student's personality, their likes and dislikes, and their expectations. In return the student's family learns more about the family their child will be living with while attending school. Corresponding will also help make your first meeting less awkward.

It is useful to contact local Canadian students in the area who are close in age to the international student. Let them know an international student is arriving. Ask them if they might show the student around the school; take them to a few social events etc. This makes the first few weeks much easier on the student as they feel much less alone.

Student arrival . . .

Once correspondence begins with the student host families could hear from them as to their flight arrival information. If you receive this information please inform the Homestay Coordinator so the information can be checked with the agent. **Consider this information tentative! A staff member from AEI confirms all flights.** During peak travel times arrangements often change and agents are trying to get the most economical flights for the students so things can change at the last minute.

One member of the host family should be at the airport to greet the student upon arrival. A representative from AEI will also be there to ensure safe arrival and departure with the host family.

Program representatives greet students with signs that have their name printed on it. AEI encourages families to do their own colourful signs to welcoming their students. Families may also welcome their student with balloons, flowers, or small gifts.

Once students arrive at their homestay, excitement is high. During the first hours students may not be the least bit tired and usually want to take in as much as they possibly can. However, some students will be tired or jet-lagged after the long journey. Some will be very hungry and others will not be hungry or want to eat for a day or two. Remember, the combination of being excited and being on a different time clock can produce some different behavior. Some students adjust quickly to their new home, while others take much longer.

After arriving home from the airport, show the student their room and around the house. Ensure their documents (passport, return airline ticket etc) are put in a secure location. Tell them where things are and how they work. However, with all the excitement in those first few hours, students may not remember everything their host family has told them.

Think about the student waking up the next morning in a strange house and anticipate what they might be wondering. Remember, the more help students get with practical matters the more at ease they will feel. Don't be afraid to explain simple things. In a new culture even the small things are new. Also remember families have an established way of interacting and a way of daily operation. Adding a new person to this mixture is a jolt to all family members. Be clear and direct with the student and approach matters and questions with an open mind. Hesitation and confusion often occur for both family and student during the first few weeks of the program. Working out what place the student will take in the host family often leads to some awkward moments. This is normal. However, once things get worked through everyone can concentrate on building interesting and enriching relationships. **Remember: be patient with your student.**

Culture shock and international students . . .

Culture shock happens to all international students in varying degrees. At orientation AEI representatives discuss culture shock and methods of dealing with the problem. Four phases to be aware of:

1. The Honeymoon - students are excited about their new experiences and surroundings. Students will begin to associate Canada with their home country. They will also look for similarities between the two, and this helps them feel more comfortable.

2. Shock - students start to feel a little disorientated. They will start to notice the differences between Canadian living and home. At this point the student might feel the most homesick. Most students do not display strong symptoms however some may get sleepier or need more time alone away from the host family. Keep the lines of communication open during this time as the student may want to talk about their feelings.

3. Recovery - students feel more comfortable, relaxed and secure within their surroundings.

4. Home free - students are now members of the family. Students will begin to enjoy the differences of their new life. They will also display more confidence and feel at home with their host family.

Students will go through these stages at different paces and some may not experience any culture shock. Culture shock is temporary for most students. With a little understanding and guidance from the host family, students can recover quickly.

Those first few weeks . . .

The first several weeks of the program can be a difficult time for international students and their host families. AEI suggests students and host families spend that time getting to know each other better. Issues families will want to address:

1. Food - typically when students first arrive they do not eat a lot. Imagine uprooting your life, living with a family from a different culture and having to eat different foods. It may take a week or two before students begin eating any amount of food. A good idea is to take them on a trip to the grocery store where they can point out some of their favorite foods.

2. Supervision - Prior to undertaking this international program it is imperative that students and their parents understand the students will be subject to the rules and procedures of their host family. In accordance with the above, student's liberties may vary from that which they are ordinarily accustomed in their own home. This is part of the experience. All reasonable rules must be followed. If there is a discrepancy students are encouraged to contact their home-stay coordinator with questions or concerns about any host family policy. Further, all students have a right to essential privacy in their home-stay; however the host family at their discretion reserves the right to search any room or item found within their home.

3. Language - students might find it difficult to talk with and understand their new family and friends. AEI suggests families and friends speak slowly and try avoiding slang. Help your student with their pronunciation and with speaking in sentences. Before long, the student will sound just like any member of the family.

4. Manners - what we perceive as good manners can be completely different in another country. Silence and lack of curiosity in some areas of the world is considered rude. However, in some cultures it is a sign of respect. In some cultures, people do not say please and thank-you as readily as we do in Canada. On the other hand, in some cultures it would be considered unbelievably polite according to our standards. A student's level of modesty can be quite different from your own.

5. Transportation - most of our students come from large cities where public transportation is readily available. Some students find it difficult to rely on their host family to drive them to their various activities. They might complain about their location as a result. Explain that in many places across the country this is the reality and that the student just needs to get used to it and adjust. **AEI prohibits students from driving while part of the program.** Students are able to take a driver's education program and obtain their license if they have permission from their parents. However, they are only allowed driving with the licensed driving instructor.

6. School and Friends - all international students must attend school. They must also put an effort into their studies. Some students claim that because they are not here for school credit that they do not need to do homework or assignments. It is a good idea to remind them of program rules and expectations. Encouraging the student to enroll in extracurricular activities is a great way from them to meet new students. This is part of the contract the student signed when enrolling with AEI. It also helps make their stay here in Canada richer and more memorable.

7. Cultural Sensitivity - students come from many different countries and walks of life. Customs about cleanliness, including showers and laundry, to personal space, including shaking hands, hugging, and table manners may vary greatly from ours. Families are encouraged to discuss these and other habits with their students as early as possible.

Family visits from home . . .

Visits from family back home are encouraged, although some students will find these visits disruptive. Students get into a routine and become part of a Canadian family and sometimes find it stressful to balance this with the presence of family members from home. However, this is a very positive experience and a wonderful opportunity for the host parents to meet their students' parents. It is not advisable that family from home visits during exam time.

AEI does not recommend families stay with their child's host families. They should make arrangements for their own accommodations. Host families are not responsible for accommodations or meals for their student's families visiting New Brunswick. Extending New Brunswick hospitality is encouraged and hosting the family for a meal in the home is always welcome.

Student travel . . .

Students wishing to travel outside of New Brunswick with their host families must have permission from the program and their natural families. A permission form is given to the agent/school to pass along to natural families to sign. This form is given to the homestay coordinators approving student travel.

Students wishing to travel outside of NB and have been granted approval by their biological families must have a Program Release Form completed.

The student is responsible for the costs associated with travel. AEI asks host families to inform them before taking their student on a trip that is going to last more than a day. In case of an emergency, AEI needs to know here to reach the student or family.

Medical insurance . . .

Students receive medical coverage and pay for their medical coverage through their program fees. They will receive a card showing they have Insurance coverage. If they have any procedure done at the hospital, the Insurance Company – in some cases - receives a direct bill from the hospital, however sometimes a student will be required to pay for a service upfront but will be reimbursed after the Insurance Company receives their receipt and claim form.

Claim forms must always be completed even if it is direct billed to AEI.

Insurance does not cover regular trips to the dentist. However, the insurance will cover the cost of the dentist if the visit is the result of an accident.

Money . . .

Students are responsible for their own financial matters. AEI recommends families should help their student set up a personal bank account. Families should discuss any plans the students and their parents have for spending money.

AEI strongly advises host families not to lend money to their student. If hosts feel their student is not receiving enough money from home or is spending beyond their means, they should contact the Homestay Coordinator.

Financial reimbursement for host families . . .

Host families receive bi-monthly financial reimbursement from AEI. Families receive payment from AEI, not from the student or the student's family directly.

Use of telephone and computer . . .

When students arrive, families should clarify the use of the telephone and computer, and make sure the student understands. AEI recommends families explain how to operate the telephone, answer properly, and pay the bill.

AEI encourages students to invest in prepaid telephone calling cards. Many local stores sell the prepaid international and national telephone cards. Student benefit from the cards because they don't owe their host family any money on their phone bills.

Some students bring their own laptops and others use family computers. It is important that host families understand they have the right and responsibility to monitor and restrict all computer use. Families who enforce time limits for their own children can also enforce time limits for their international students.

Departure . . .

Students cease to be considered participants in AEI after June 30 if they are here for the academic year. Although their medical insurance runs out at this time, students may continue it for an extra cost.

AEI encourages host families not to host their student through the summer months. Host families have no obligation to house their student once the school term is over. However, if families wish, the student can remain with them throughout summer months or into a new school term. AEI is not responsible for students who stay with their host family through the summer.

Extending a student's stay . . .

All student Visas have an expiry date. If your student wants to extend their Visa, an AEI representative has the necessary application package from the Canadian Immigration Department. Students may need a full physical examination for the approval of their extension. The examination may cost your student approximately \$200 Cdn. Students should send their application for extension at least six weeks before the expiry date of the Visa.

Support for the host family . . .

AEI gives support to all the host families involved with the program. Host families can talk to the Homestay Coordinator or school board representative when problems arise. They also have a network of other host families for support. AEI recognizes that without the support of these families 'AEI would not continue to grow and become successful.

Guidelines for a successful homestay experience . . .

- Welcome the student into the home with care and understanding. Remember the student may be homesick upon arrival and show compassion and sensitivity to this condition.
- Understand and agree to accept this student as one of the family. It may be uncomfortable at first but include them in normal family activities.
- Talk to your student regularly. Show interest in their school projects, activities, or spend recreational time with your student. On occasion AEI will take them to places of local interest or to sightseeing attractions. Encourage students to make friends at school and in the neighbourhood. School and community activities are an important part of your student's experience in New Brunswick. Provide a reasonable amount of transportation for your student to attend school activities or other community activities.
- Monitor the students' progress in school. Offer assistance and guidance to the international student when possible.
- Maintain communication with the Homestay Coordinator. Try to resolve problems through proactive communication and understanding.
- Successful families also give their students time, attention, and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Final Message . . .

Every year AEI continues to grow in the number of students and its successes. This is mainly due to the wonderful hospitality students receive from their host families. We would like to thank you for continuing to support our program and for being an invaluable contributor to success of AEI. We hope you continue to be part of our program.