

YOUNG AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

The Young Ambassador Program is an exchange program that was developed to give Peoria young adults an opportunity to experience and understand other cultures and ways of life.

The Young Ambassador Program offers local high school students who have not entered their senior year of high school and reside in the city of Peoria, an opportunity to develop an understanding of different countries, their cultures and people through a family living experience. The high school delegates will be selected, through an extensive selection process, by an interview panel which includes representatives from the Peoria Sister City Board. The selection process will involve an application with a written essay, and interviews with the youth and their parents. The Sister City Board faces a difficult job of selecting the best of the best; a group of outstanding young people who are proud ambassadors of their city and country.

Peoria becomes a meeting place for the students from Ards to experience the American way of life. The Peoria students proudly show their city and state to their new international “brothers or sisters.” With their families, Peoria’s young ambassadors open their homes and their hearts to their visitors, many of whom continue to return in subsequent years to attend school, seek employment or just visit their American families and lifelong friends.

Before leaving for the exchange, the City of Peoria will host mandatory orientation with the students and their parents. The purpose of the orientation is to learn important information about culture, behavioral guidelines, and safety. The program participants and their families will also have an opportunity to correspond and email with their adopted families in advance of the trip abroad. Initially the youth will host their “twin” at their Peoria home. Subsequently the Peoria youth will travel to our sister city, the Borough of Ards, Northern Ireland. During their stay, they will have a chance to closely experience a new culture and make lifelong friends by living with the family of their exchange “twin.” The home stay experience makes it possible for the delegates to learn about their hosts’ cultures and customs in ways not possible to a casual visitor. It is the youth’s responsibility to be cooperative at every point of the host family stay; they are expected to be helpful in the household and to assume similar responsibilities to that of their host “twin.” The Peoria young ambassadors will bring back a wealth of fascinating stories about their stay abroad, their contacts with the people and the precious experiences, which teach them lifelong lessons.

The cost of social events hosted by Peoria, in relation to the youth exchange, is provided through community efforts through an outreach to local businesses called the Program Partners. Each of the Program Partners contributes toward the support of the orientation, tours of Arizona, and protocol-related events such as a Farewell Celebration. Group activities are planned during both the host portion and the travel portion of the exchange experience.

The Peoria Sister City Program provides for all appropriate travel-expenses for the delegates participating in the Young Ambassador Program. The host families will be responsible for absorbing expenses relating to hosting their exchange student.

Peoria Sister Cities

The Sister City Concept: City affiliations between the United States and other countries became a national effort when President Eisenhower proposed the program at a White House conference in 1956. To date, 1,200 American cities representing all 50 states have affiliated with 2,100 cities in 125 countries around the world. The objective of the program is to create goodwill and further international understanding at the community level on a continuing, long-term basis. It is not a movement to convert others to democratic ideals, but rather a way to help learn about the people of other countries, their customs, their similarities as well as the differences, and help chart a better road to understanding in the world. The Sister City Program provides a vehicle by which cities in the United States can find a forum for this interchange of information, ideas and people through the process of affiliation with cities of similar interest in other countries. The President of the United States has historically been the Honorary Chairman and the program has widespread support from the State Department down to local city councils.

Purpose of Youth Exchange: The purpose of the Young Ambassadors Program is to provide an opportunity for Peoria youth and their families to develop an understanding among the people of Ards, Northern Ireland, through a family living experience. Four youth will travel to Ards for two weeks during the summer, and host that same "twin" for a two week stay in Peoria. The Peoria Sister City Board will recommend candidates from our community for selection.

Youths' Time Commitment: During the selection process, absence from an interview or selection activity is grounds for disqualification. Once selected, all delegates are required to attend orientation and playing an active role in Peoria's Young Ambassador Program and its activities; give talks about the exchange experience, participate in future selection processes and, in general, promote the student exchange program.

Youth Responsibility Abroad: To be cooperative at every point of family living; to be helpful with the household and family duties; and to assume the same responsibility as the other members of the host family. The youth is expected to participate in many activities and relate these learning experiences of living in a foreign country to others upon his/her return to Peoria.

Cost: The Peoria Sister City Program will pay all appropriate travel-related expenses for delegates. Delegates will stay at the homes of host families abroad. Their own families will also be responsible for costs associated with hosting students from Ards. Group activities are planned by the City of Peoria to ensure a well-rounded community experience.

Application Requirements: Each applicant must be a U.S. citizen; be a Peoria resident; be a student at least 15 years old at the time of travel, but not yet a senior in high school; have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher; be in good health (and, upon request, be able to provide a doctor's statement of verification); demonstrate proof of health insurance coverage; applicant and at least one parent must have or be able to acquire a U.S. passport. Additionally, the applicant's parents must give their consent for participation in the program and agree to serve as a host family.

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BACKGROUND CHECK

Young Ambassador participation is contingent upon all adults that will be hosting a visiting ambassador having successfully cleared a background investigation. For the purposes of this program, any person living or regularly in your home that is 18 years of age or older is considered an adult and must submit to a background screening.

The City of Peoria has contracted with a certified vendor, through the Human Resources Department, to conduct these background investigations. Licensed investigators produce comprehensive histories which are reported back to Peoria directly. Otherwise, all reports are kept strictly confidential.

The following outlines the steps to necessary to complete the background investigation:

- Individuals, aged 18 years and older, that will be in the family home regularly while hosting the visiting youth must complete a consent form agreeing to the release of your personal information to the City of Peoria.
- The City of Peoria will submit the completed consent forms to city Human Resources Department for processing.
- Completed investigation reports will be returned to the City of Peoria Human Resources Department.

The successful clearance of a background investigation provides a measure of confidence to the families in our Sister City whose children will visit as Young Ambassadors. The families of the Young Ambassador's in Northern Ireland will be completing a similar process.

Details regarding this process will be provided to the families of the youth that are selected for participation in this year's program.

Terri Smith may be contacted at 623-773-7328 or by email at terri.smith@peoriaaz.gov. Please advise if you have any questions or concerns about this requirement.