



## **Statement of 2007 AFS Quality Standards and Conditions of Participation**

### **The AFS Mission Statement**

#### **AFS Statement of Purpose**

AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

#### **The Core Values and Attributes of AFS**

AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.

AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or social status.

AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.

## **Statement of AFS Educational Content and Learning Objectives**

AFS is committed to Intercultural learning. Through AFS programs of all types, people are removed temporarily from their home environments and introduced to differing values, ways of life, and patterns of thought in completely new environments. This experience enables AFS participants to acquire skills, attitudes, and knowledge useful throughout their lives as they attempt to cope sensitively and intelligently with the urgent challenges of the world of tomorrow. Similar learning often is acquired by others who come into close contact with participants on AFS programs.

Learning through an AFS experience involves growth and change in terms of personal values and skills, interpersonal relationship building, Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity, and global issues awareness.

### **Personal Values and Skills**

At the core of all AFS experiences is the removal of people from their familiar environment and their placement in a new environment. In such unusual circumstances, participants are confronted repeatedly with crises of varying dimensions. They must make judgments and embark on actions in the absence of familiar cues. But AFS participants are well prepared in advance, and they are assured of support and guidance on an as needed basis. Thus, participants are able to turn these crises into opportunities for reassessing their values, stretching their capacities, and practicing new skills. AFS participants also gain awareness of previously hidden aspects of themselves because of their constant contact with others who organize their lives on the basis of different assumptions

### **Interpersonal Relationship building**

Every AFS participant becomes fully involved in daily living and working arrangements with a variety of people in the new environment. Whether a participant's placement is as an individual or as a member of a group of exchange visitors, he or she must develop and maintain relationships with others from diverse backgrounds. The interpersonal skills developed in this Intercultural context are transferable to many other settings during the participant's lifetime. Host nationals often gain similar benefits from their contacts with the AFS participants.

### **Intercultural Knowledge and Sensitivity**

During the course of their immersion in the host culture, AFS participants are exposed to innumerable dimensions of that culture. These dimensions range from the simple acquisition of the necessities of daily life to the complex and subtle distinctions made by hosts among alternative values, social norms, and patterns of thought. In addition, most AFS exchanges include a formal learning component in which host nationals explain the social, political, economic, and religious structures of their country. In the case of exchanges involving adult professionals, hosts and visitors both gain new skills and alternative concepts, leading to a sharpening of their talents. The experience of actually being involved in so many dimensions of life has the effect of deepening participants' insights into their home culture as well as their knowledge of their host culture its strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of an outsider.

### **Global Issues awareness**

Living in a place other than one's home community often helps people to recognize way the world is interconnected: that problems in one community or part of the world often have an impact on other communities or other parts of the world. AFS participants become able to empathize with their hosts' perspective on some of these problems, and thus to appreciate that workable solutions must be culturally sensitive, not merely technologically feasible. Such awareness well prepares the AFS participant to take his or her place as a global citizen among those who are addressing the crises facing humankind.

## **2007 AFS Quality Standards and Conditions of Participation**

AFS Intercultural Programs is an international membership organization comprised of national volunteer organizations sharing a commitment to the common goals laid down in the attached AFS Mission Statement. Commitment to volunteerism is an important aspect of our mission, and many of the services referred to in these standards will be delivered by AFS volunteers who are supported by a small nucleus of professional staff.

### **Program Content and Development**

1. AFS is an educational organization, not a travel organization. By providing opportunities for intercultural learning, AFS benefits program participants, schools, and communities and helps to promote global education. Through a variety of structured experiences, educational materials, and individual guidance, AFS strives to achieve its learning objectives. Based on these objectives, the AFS learning experience helps participants and those with whom they come in close contact to acquire useful skills, attitudes and knowledge for coping sensitively and intelligently with the urgent challenges of the global community.
2. AFS will evaluate its programs to identify areas for improvement in program content and services.

### **Participant Screening, Placement and Support**

3. All participants, their natural families and host families will be interviewed. Their screening will be fairly conducted in accordance with AFS guidelines. These guidelines are based on experience and research; they emphasize adaptability, suitability, and interest in the goals and purposes of AFS.
4. Participants will receive their placement information before their departure for the host country. This information will include materials of a practical nature about the host country.
5. AFS is committed to providing suitable placement for qualified applicants, but reserves the right to cancel participation should this be warranted by changes in circumstances related to the applicant, the country of origin or the country of placement.

AFS programs provide intercultural learning opportunities for host family participants as well as for those individuals who will be living with them. Hosting families provide a supportive living environment for a person from another culture who will share their family life and home. Families host on a voluntary basis and are not paid to host.

6. To facilitate the adjustment to and the learning from the experience, AFS will provide participants, natural parents, host families and schools with information about the organization and an orientation to the program in which they are participating at different points before, during and after the AFS experience.

7. Support from AFS volunteers or staff will be available to participants and host families throughout their experience as needed.
8. Natural parents will be informed by AFS in a timely fashion of circumstances noticeably affecting the health or welfare of their son/daughter. In case of emergency or situations affecting the health and welfare of participants, AFS will use its best judgment to act in the best interest of participants.
9. AFS is committed to engaging competent carriers for participants' travel.

### **Program Fees and Finances**

10. AFS member organizations are not-for-profit. Their fees will be based on reasonable costs for providing the services outlined in the Participation Agreement according to these quality standards. They will include the cost of maintaining the support structure and may contain a contribution to program and participant diversity. The financial terms will be clearly identified at the time the Participation Agreement is signed. AFS Intercultural Programs and the AFS member organizations publish reports annually which provide information on the source and use of organizational funds.

### **Conditions of Participation**

11. Participation in AFS begins formally with the signing of an AFS Participation Agreement. In its essence this Agreement is identical for all participants on a program from any given country except potentially for different fees to different destinations.
12. AFS may send participants home early for failure to comply with the terms and conditions of participation as identified in the Participation Agreement.
13. AFS strives to promote a positive learning experience but cannot guarantee the health and safety of participants, and cannot protect participants from the consequences of a violation of the laws of the host country.

### **Volunteers**

14. AFS is a volunteer organization, and its services and support are primarily delivered by volunteers, backed up by professional staff. AFS volunteers give their time and knowledge, because they believe in the AFS mission. Their personal involvement adds a larger dimension to AFS programs, and the interaction between participants and volunteers enriches the intercultural experience of both. AFS is committed to providing appropriate screening, training, support and resources for its volunteers.