



Day 1 arrival from Japan - Shuri, Arisa and Host mom Becky

*“We’re not a hotel stay, we’re a homestay. The student should be able to integrate into the host’s family life.”*



Dinner at Firestone  
- Shuri from Japan

# Homestay Network *looking for hosts*

by Christina Scott

*Have you ever wanted to experience another culture or visit another country? This rich, fulfilling experience is within reach and you don’t even have to leave your home to get it.*

Canada Homestay Network (CHN) is a family-run, non-profit society which pairs exchange students from all over the world with host families from all across Canada. Founded in 1995, the organization operates in 40 countries some of which include including China, Japan, Thailand, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Colombia, and Canada. In Canada alone, CHN has worked with 60,000 students operating in 40 communities, including Lethbridge.



Braun family: Russell, Lori, Bodie & Toby with Noah from Korea

Lori Braun:

*"When we invited Noah into our home, we gained a son and a big brother. What we didn't expect to gain was a lifelong extended relationship with him and his family. We were fortunate enough to open our home to a number of visits from his family. We now tell everyone that we have family in Korea. Not many other people can say that."*

Lethbridge sees at least 175 Exchange student visits from this program each year, from places such as Japan, China, Korea, Germany and Italy. These students require housing, meals and a host family atmosphere during their stay, and the local CHN chapter works to help meet that demand. Two part-time staff work from home: A Relationship Manager Erica Laliberty, and Interviewer/relationship manager support, Michelle McCann.

"[Students] come here to study English," she says. "We work closely with Lethbridge College and Lethbridge School District. They arrange for the students to come, and we as the homestay network find all the different hosts to match with the students based on their requirements."

As Lethbridge is a regular participant in exchange programs, hosts are always needed. Recruitment is done through social media, active host referrals, trade shows through advertisements in each school's newsletter. In April, Lethbridge will be welcoming 70 students from Thailand

between the ages of 12 and 13. Although there are currently 100+ local hosts in CHN's database, the organization is looking to double that to meet the anticipated need. "Student/host matches depend on what the host and student's requirements are," says McCann. "Some [hosts] may want to take adults 18+, some may want to take younger students. Some students may have allergies to pets or foods, so you are always dealing with the variables. We like to have plenty of host families in order accommodate all students."

Those interested in hosting a student can apply online at [whyihost.ca](http://whyihost.ca). After the application is complete, staff from CHN arrange a home visit to complete an interview, home inspection, and to obtain important documents including a criminal record check, vulnerable sector check and child intervention checks. The potential host must also be able to provide a suitable room for the student, which includes a bed, a dresser, a desk, and a window that is a suitable size.



Pipe at Christmas Trade Show



Thansgiving family gathering with Pipe and Brandon from Columbia



Students from Japan and Taku from Lethbridge College



Host Mom Becky,  
Student Taichi from  
Japan and Howie -  
Summer 2017



Pipe Reyes from Columbia,  
first time in snow

“We look at the cleanliness of the home, the atmosphere of the home, and the attitude of the host: we want to know why they’re in it,” says McCann. “We’re not a hotel stay, we’re a homestay. The student should be able to integrate into the host’s family life.”

Once a host has been approved, their information and the specifics of their home goes into a Canada-wide organizational database that matches hosts and students by region. Following this, the interviewer and relationship manager work together with the host to ensure the match is successful.

“We take the time to see if the host might be interested, and tell them a little bit about the particular student they might be getting,” says McCann. “There’s a lot of communication back and forth.”

How long a student stays in Canada can vary, anywhere from two weeks to two months to two years, depending on the length of their academic program.

Once a host and student are paired, CHN will check in on things throughout the duration of their visit to answer any questions or solve any issues that may arise.

“If the student needs something beyond what the host can provide, they can contact the relationship manager and discuss it,” says McCann. “We also have a huge CHN peer support network across Canada that can provide 24/7 support. Many of our employees come from other cultures and speak different languages.”

McCann says serious issues between hosts and students are rare, but when clashes do occur, it’s usually because of differences in personality. In such a case that cannot be resolved, CHN will work diligently to resolve any issues before relocating a student to another host.

In most cases however, McCann says hosting is a rich and rewarding experience, creating memories that last a lifetime.

“One of our hosts Ria, lovingly says that every student that you get is a gift,” she recalls. “When they come off that bus and you meet them, you never know what you’re going to get. You get to share yourself and your home with another person, and you get to showcase your community.”

In addition to the rewarding experience, welcoming exchange students provides Canada and Lethbridge with a substantial economic boost. A 2016 study by Languages Canada found international students contribute an estimated \$530 million in tuition revenue, more than \$445 million in government revenue and created more than 81 million jobs.

In the city, McCann says the power of student spending should not be underestimated.

“They go to the ethnic food markets and restaurants. They visit to the Galt Museum, they attend many community sponsored events in Lethbridge, they go shopping at the mall, and they spend a lot of money. The school gets extra revenue for hosting exchange students because the students pay a premium to learn here.”

McCann wants hosts to know there are extra benefits for them, too. Hosts get a stipend to offset the cost of food for the student, and plenty of recognition through potlucks and other appreciation events.

For Pipe Reyes, a Grade 10 student from Colombia who stayed in Lethbridge for two months last September, A & W, the snow, and Canadian kindness is what he’ll remember most.

“The language is a challenge,” he said at the time. “On my first day, I got lost and I had to go into Tim Hortons to ask for help, and they let me borrow a phone. “I like that people are nice here.”

**To find out more about Canada Homestay network or to host, visit [www.whyihost.ca](http://www.whyihost.ca).**

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Columbian Group