

What does it take to be a Circle of Love host family?

That is a question that pops up about this time of year when we start actively looking for new host families for the upcoming summer visitors. The act of opening one's home to a stranger (whether it's a child or adult) can be a difficult decision. Are you going to have enough space, time, patience, or stamina? I can tell you as a previous host parent I think you have enough of each of those things.

Space: do you have an extra bed in your house? Not a guest suite – just a bed? That's all these kids need. They are happy and even more comfortable sharing if it's a spare bed in a child's room.

Time: There is a time commitment. First visit kids participate in English and computer classes at Bethel Tue. – Thurs. each week. Afternoon care has historically been offered at the East Madison Community Center and Helping Hands families are available to drive kids where they need to go. There is also time set aside for medical and dental visits. Is it too much – not really. Most activities are centered around your daily schedule and the kids are happy with errands which let them experience what our lifestyle is like.

Patience: It all runs a little short sometimes but most misunderstandings are quickly cleared up and the language barrier is easily broken down into essentially a game of charades (and that is only with the youngest of the kids without strong English skills and the translator and chaperone are available 24/7). If you are game – they are game and they are looking to please the generous hosts they have for the summer.

Stamina: I admit my own kids can run me ragged but the kids who come from Ukraine are not our over-scheduled, always plugged in western kids. They come from multi-generational families and are not use to the frantic pace we western families set for ourselves. Special outings to the store or walking around your neighborhood are treats because they offer insight into a world that doesn't exist for them at home. I can tell you that the love and generosity they will show you will make up for the most trying of times and it's not often we are offered the opportunity to participate in mission in our own homes.

Consider opening your home to a young person in need of fresh air, fresh food and water untainted by radiation. And open your heart to the possibility you will end the summer with a family that stretches halfway around the world.