



Care Professional Handbook

Your Guide to a Successful
Experience Abroad

 **apexsocial**
Unlock Your Potential

Congratulations and welcome to the Apex Social family! Since 2008, Apex has provided qualified Care Professionals who have education, therapy, and childcare training with the life-changing opportunity to experience a different part of the world.

You've been chosen as one of a select group of candidates about to embark on an exciting year of living and working in the United States. We are honored to have you in our program and look forward to working with you!

Apex Social Group is dedicated to providing you with personal & career development, experiential learning and cultural enrichment through a unique, interdisciplinary work experience. As such, we've created this useful Handbook to help you navigate the world of being a Care Professional. Please read it and let us know if you have any questions.

The following Handbook contains years of experience and best practices that will help to guide you through your time abroad. Please read it thoroughly and make a note of any questions you have along the way. Our team is available to answer your questions – before, during and after the program.

As a long-time host mom of multiple Care Professionals, I have made sure that this guide includes advice and guidance that will be useful for you – from pre-departure paperwork to understanding cross-cultural communication to setting expectations. Reviewing this handbook will help to ensure a rewarding experience for everyone involved.

We are convinced that this will be an enriching experience that will remain with you for a lifetime. So – take pictures, keep a journal, and take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

Welcome to the Apex Social family!

Best regards,



Susan Asay
Host Mom, Founder and CEO
Apex Social Group



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Welcome and congratulations! You've joined a special group of individuals who value experiential education, cultural exchange, personal and professional development and helping children reach their full potential. Whether you are a new or veteran Apex Social participant, we warmly welcome you to our program and look forward to working with you.

PART ONE: ABOUT US

Our Vision Statement

Apex Social Group is **known** and **trusted** as the **most respected service organization** in the world, **helping all** we serve **to reach** their **full potential**.

It's our goal to make that vision a reality for you. We are excited to have the opportunity to serve you and make a difference by bringing our mission to life.

Apex Social Group's Mission

Unlocking **children's greatest potential** through integrating skilled **Care Professionals** and **cultural exchange** into their family's **daily life**.



Empowering Children

to develop to their fullest abilities through consistent, one-on-one, in-home care.



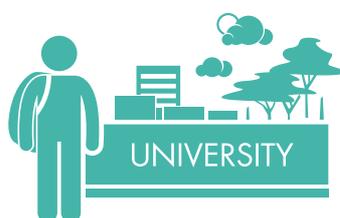
Empowering Care Professionals

by providing personal & career development, experiential learning and cultural enrichment through a unique, collaborative work experience.



Empowering Families

by providing specialized, skilled childcare and cultural exchange in the home through an individualized recruiting and matching process and the creation of an Apex Individualized Care Plan.



Empowering Schools & Universities

by providing access, support and program administration for their students and graduates to gain international interprofessional paid 12-24 months internship and work experience in the United States and Australia.

Our Non-Negotiables and Service Standards

Apex Social Group uses non-negotiables as our organization guidelines in daily functions, always working with high integrity and honoring our values. Our non-negotiables are at the foundation of Apex Social Group and encompass our standards of service and how we operate. It's our goal to deliver these high standards of service to you and your Host Family. We share them with you as our promise to you. We also invite you to embrace our non-negotiables as you begin your journey with your Host Family.

- 1.** Our associates, Care Professionals and Host Families are carefully selected. Each must believe in our culture, vision, mission, values and purpose. They must understand our program's expectations and needs.
- 2.** We believe in laughter and a sense of community. We are often separated physically but make a concentrated effort to feel connected.
- 3.** Company decisions, including all H.R. decisions (hiring, training, etc) will be driven by the vision, mission and values of the organization.
- 4.** We are empowered to fulfill customer needs, providing everyone we serve with the highest level of service thereby exceeding expectations on a regular basis.
- 5.** We are sensitive to our customers' and associates' unique and special needs, providing personalized service.
- 6.** We are timely in all business interactions with those we serve both internally and externally, including timely responses to any requests, emails and phone calls.
- 7.** We accomplish a relationship of trust with each customer contact.
- 8.** We assist each other, stepping out of our primary duties to effectively serve our customers. We are gracious and treat our customers and each other with respect and dignity.
- 9.** Confidentiality is paramount! We respect the privacy of our care professionals and families in what information is shared on social media and other formats and are careful to receive permission to share information. Never speak to anyone outside the company, including the press, about our care professionals or the families we serve and If you are approached for information, notify the CEO.
- 10.** Any associate who encounters a customer who has experienced any difficulty or error is responsible and empowered to own it, apologize, and find a resolve immediately.
- 11.** Apex Social Group is a unique organization that strives for excellence in everything. We strive to create joy in our workplace and always look for opportunities to "WOW" our customers and fellow employees. We strive to make our customer's experience memorable and unique.

- 12.** We are professional at all times. As professionals, all forms of communication must reflect Apex Social Group’s spirit of Excellence.
- 13.** We represent Apex Social Group in a professional manner when we meet those outside the organization by introducing ourselves warmly, with a smile and identifying our role with the organization.
- 14.** Our attire and personal image are professionally appropriate and should represent our commitment to excellence.
- 15.** Our responsibility is to create a great environment and reputation for our organization and each other. Our associates serve as ambassadors for the organization at all times.
- 16.** As an organization and as individuals, we believe in continuous improvement and we all have a responsibility to participate in the elimination of defects and transformation of our work area to achieve excellence.
- 17.** We are honest in regards to our strengths and weaknesses and understand how to productively share kudos and constructive criticism with colleagues. We make an effort to learn from the feedback for our personal and professional growth.
- 18.** We are not afraid to try new things, fail fast and fail forward. We learn from our mistakes and do not make them twice.



Apex Social Group Overview

Since 2008, Apex Social Group has been bringing together young experienced educators, therapists and care providers with families who have special care needs. We are committed to empowering skilled Care Professionals - individuals with degrees or significant experience in child-related fields such as pediatric nursing, occupational and physical therapy, speech therapy, special needs education, and early childhood education - and providing them with ongoing, interdisciplinary development before, during and after their placement with families in the United States through a cultural exchange experience.

As an Apex Care Professional you can expect:

- Personalized coaching from our expert Success Coaches to help you determine if a year or two working with an Apex Social family in the USA or Australia is the right step in your career.
- World class Training that prepares you to work in an international, interdisciplinary environment developed by our expert team which is led by an Internationally Board Certified Behavior Analyst, our Director of Educational & Therapeutic Resources.
- Ongoing support and education by our expert team with the goal of personal and professional development as well as optimizing the success of the placement with an Apex Social Group family.
- Personalized and innovative matching support
- Excellent benefits and compensation inclusive of exciting perks such as free room and board and travel opportunities.
- Logistical support from our travel, visa and HR experts
- Career Development support from our internal Career Center including job placement options in your home country for after your time working with Apex Social.
- Broadening your Network as you join your Host Family's care team and community plus the global community of other Apex Social Care Professionals as a lifetime member of our Alumni Network.
- Education & Volunteering opportunities in your new community.



Roles & Responsibilities

It is important that each participant in the Apex Social program understand his/her role and responsibilities. Below we've outlined key roles for Care Professionals and Host Families, as well as key roles for Apex Social Group's staff.

Understanding Your Role as a Care Professional

As a Care Professional, you are a valuable resource to your Host Family. Beyond your official childcare duties and program requirements, Apex encourages you to share and utilize your unique perspectives and qualifications – while still respecting the Host Family's established routines and lifestyle.

Care Professionals should:

- ***Be a resource to the Host Family*** – share observations about the children's behavior, recount useful information from therapy appointments or school visits, help to keep track of children's schedules, etc.
- ***Respect the Host Family*** – follow household rules, keep your personal space clean and tidy, support the host parent's decisions regarding childcare protocols, etc.
- ***Maintain open lines of communication*** – be proactive with questions, provide suggestions in a tactful manner, and share challenges as they take place, etc.
- ***Empathize with the host parent's perspective*** – be flexible with scheduling changes, communicate requests with sufficient notice, etc.
- ***Take an interest in the Host Family*** – celebrate the children's successes, remember your Host Family's birthdays, get to know the family's traditions, etc.
- ***Share knowledge and skill sets*** – share unique training and experiences, provide alternative perspectives, demonstrate different methodologies, etc.

Understanding Your Host Family's Role

At Apex Social Group, our expectation is that your Host Family should treat you as a member of the family. In addition to official Care Professional program regulations, it is also important that Host Families take to heart the cultural exchange component of the program.

Host families should:

- ***Take an interest in culture and background*** – ask questions about culture, share holiday traditions, learn a few words in their Care Professional's native language, etc.
- ***Treat their Care Professional as a family member*** – remember birthdays, include her/him in family meals and holiday celebrations, be patient, etc.
- ***Empathize with their Care Professional's point of view*** – be understanding, help her/him to make friends outside of the family, provide her/him with time and space away from work, etc.
- ***Help their Care Professional adjust to the new environment*** – make her/him to feel "at home" in their home, make introductions to neighbors and others in the greater community, etc.
- ***Keep lines of communication open*** – encourage their Care Professional to share challenges, have conversations about topics other than work or childcare duties, etc.
- ***Treat their Care Professional with respect*** – consider her/his option in decisions, treat their Care Professional like an adult, work as a team, never criticize her/him in front of the children, etc.

Understanding Apex Social Group's Role

Apex Social Group's main role is to ensure both Care Professionals and Host Families have a safe, productive and enjoyable experience during their program year – while also ensuring compliance with U.S. Department of State regulations. Care Professionals are assigned a Success Coach before departure for the U.S. Once in the U.S, Apex Social Group has three main points of contact for Care Professionals and Host Families: Area Directors, Regional Directors and our Customer Care Team.

Success Coach

Success Coaches are employees of Apex who provide support and guidance to Care Professionals, from application through departure to the U.S. The Success Coach is a Care Professional's main point of contact before arrival to the U.S.

Success Coach responsibilities include:

- Helping Care Professionals to complete their program application
- Providing applicants with an overview of the Care Professional program
- Assisting candidates to apply and obtain J-1 visas
- Pre-departure guidance and support

Directors of Apex Care & Development (ACDs) - acd@apex-social.com

Your ACD will be your first point of contact at Apex and will be your coach and mentor throughout your time abroad. Your ACD will contact you to schedule a welcome call before your departure and will be a resource to you throughout your program.

ACD responsibilities include:

- Conducting an interview with the Host Family (prior to the arrival)
- Contacting the Host Family and Care Professional (within 48 hours of the Care Professional's arrival)
- Arranging an arrival orientation with the Care Professional and Host Family (within two weeks of the Care Professional's arrival)
- Maintaining monthly communication with the Care Professional and Host Family
- Answering questions and providing year-round support and assistance
- Providing guidance on local educational opportunities
- Helping to problem solve if needed
- Implementing and follow-up on the Apex Individualized Care Plan

Apex Social Group Local Community Liaisons (LCL)

Apex Social's LCLs are local representatives who live within one hour of the Host Family's home. The primary role of the Community Liaison will be to create a fun, cultural, local connection for you to the community! The LCL will organize a monthly activity for all local Care Professionals to meet up and connect.

Local Community Liaison responsibilities include:

- Coordinating local Care Professional meet-ups and Host Family events
- Providing local in-person support in case of an emergency

Educational & Therapeutic Resources Team - etr@apex-social.com

This team is working to implement Apex Individualized Care Plans for each placement and provide ongoing education and support for Care Professionals and Families.

Customer Care Team - customercare@apex-social.com

This team provides support for all matters pertaining to visa application, travel, billing, insurance, extension application, education verification and more.

Apex Social Career Center - ascc@apex-social.org

The ASCC provides Career Coaching Workshops to Care Professionals throughout their placement helping them engage in the professional growth provided on the job and then provides job placement services upon their return to their home country.



PART TWO: PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE

Now that you've been accepted to the program and matched with your Host Family, it is time to begin your preparation for departure. There is a lot to be done before you come to the U.S.! Please review the following sections thoroughly and contact Apex Social if you have any questions. The more prepared you are before you leave, the more enjoyable your exchange experience will be.

Sign the Childcare Agreement

You will receive an email from Apex Social asking for your electronic signature on Apex Social Group's Childcare Agreement. Please sign and return this document as soon as possible.

Apply for J-1 Visa

The first step in applying for your J-1 visa is to obtain a DS-2019 form. Apex Social Group will provide you with this form, which permits you to seek an interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate. Once you receive your DS-2019 form in the mail, you must apply for an interview appointment in your home country's U.S. embassy or consulate.

Your local U.S. embassy or consultant website will explain specific procedures required to set up an appointment. It is important for you to thoroughly review all information for local procedures and instructions as these may vary depending upon the embassy or consulate. Interview wait times vary so we encourage you to schedule your appointment as soon as possible.

Purpose of the J-1 Au Pair Program

The J-1 au pair program was established in 1986 as an educational and cultural exchange program with a strong childcare component. Like other exchange visitor programs under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State, the J-1 au pair program provides au pairs and Host Families the opportunity to take part in a mutually rewarding program that is rooted in cultural exchange. Au pairs can continue their education while experiencing everyday life with an American family, and Host Families can receive reliable and responsible childcare from individuals who become part of the family.

Key Program Requirements

The U.S. Department of State has designated au pair sponsors, which includes both Apex Social Group and TIAPE (The International Au Pair Exchange)*. All sponsors, Host Families and au pairs must follow the regulations of the program set forth by the U.S. Department of State.

Host families are obliged to provide their Care Professionals with the following:

- Room and board, including a private bedroom for the Care Professional
- Weekly stipend, payable on the same day every week
- One and a half days off per week

- One full weekend off each month (Friday evening through Monday morning)
- Two weeks (10 days) of paid vacation
- \$500 toward the cost of required coursework at an accredited post-secondary U.S. institution of higher education

In exchange, you will provide up to 45 hours per week of live-in childcare (up to 10 hours in any one day) for children between the ages of three months and 17 years of age. Additional program requirements and details are outlined in your Care Professional Service Agreement. Comprehensive program regulations from the U.S. Department of State are included in the Appendix of this handbook (see section entitled “U.S. Department of State Program Regulations”).

** TIAPE is owned and operated by Susan Asay. Susan also owns Apex Social Group, though the two organizations are separately designated by the U.S. Department of State. US program support for Care Professionals under the TIAPE designation is provided by Apex Social Group staff and this handbook is designed for participants on both visa designations - Apex Social Group and TIAPE.*

Learn about Your Host Family & New Home

For most Care Professionals, there is a period of 4-8 weeks or more after you match with your Host Family and before you arrive in the U.S. This is a great time to start to learn about your Host Family and your new home for the next 12 months!

Learning about Your Host Family

It is important to begin to get to know your Host Family before you arrive in the U.S. This will help you to feel more comfortable with your Host Family – and help them feel more comfortable with you too! Technology has made it easier than ever before to communicate across countries – so connect with your Host Family in whatever medium works best for both of you. Many Care Professionals and Host Families use Skype, but you can also arrange a Google Hangout, WhatsApp, exchange emails, talk on the phone, chat via Facebook – or even write a letter! Exchange photos, ask each other questions about family and friends, ask for packing suggestions, give a video “tour” of your neighborhood, etc. Arranging these pre-arrival communications helps to ease the transition – for both you and your Host Family.



Learning about Your New Home

Learning about your new home – its history, sites, people, and culture – is a great way to prepare for your departure and get excited about this new chapter in your life. Below are some easy ways to get started!

- **Internet Searches:** The Internet is a great starting point for research – most U.S. cities (even the smaller ones) have their own Wikipedia pages and doing a Google search for the name of the city or town where you will live will provide you some results.
- **Travel Guidebooks:** Travel guidebooks about the U.S. are plentiful and are another great way to learn more about the U.S. and the specific city and state where you will live.
- **The Hofstede Centre:** The Hofstede Centre provides training and resources to those who work with people from different cultures, primarily from a business perspective. However, they have an interesting cultural tool, Country Comparison, which allows you to compare deeper cultural “dimensions” between different countries. <http://geert-hofstede.com/germany.html>
- **Newspapers, Magazines & Books:** Reading U.S. newspapers, magazines and books can be a great way to learn more about American culture. Most U.S. newspapers and magazines have websites that can be accessed for free or a small fee.

Health Insurance and Liability Insurance

All Care Professionals receive a premium health and accident insurance coverage from a third-party insurance company for the duration of their program. This insurance exceeds the minimum requirements of the U.S. Department of State for the Care Professional program. It's important to review your coverage so that you know what to expect while on the program.

Complete Online Childcare Training

Every Care Professional must complete 38 hours of preparatory childcare training before arriving in the U.S. In addition to the full day of fun and engaging training at the Apex Social Academy, Apex has developed our own online training program that is uniquely tailored for our Care Professionals!

You will enjoy learning in the Apex Social Online Academy. Your Success Coach will email you a login and password for your mandatory online childcare training program. The program offers courses on child development, first aid and safety as well as cultural exchange, personal and professional development. This is a great opportunity to practice your English and learn. **Note: you must complete your online training at least two weeks before you arrive in the U.S.**

Obtain International Driver's Permit

If you will be driving in the U.S. – either as part of your childcare responsibilities or during your free time – you must obtain an international driving permit from your home country before entering the U.S. Combined with your actual driver's license, the permit is a valid document that legally allows you to drive in the U.S. If you have any questions about how to obtain an international driver's license, ask your Success Coach. **Note: you will be required to obtain a U.S. driver's license as well. See “Getting a Driver's License” in Part III: Entering the U.S. for more information.**

Complete Travel Arrangements

Apex Social Group's travel agent will arrange for your flight from a designated gateway in your home country to a U.S. airport, where your Host Family will meet you and welcome you to your new home. You will receive your travel information via email, including an e-ticket for your flight.

Determine What to Pack

Packing can be one of the most exciting – and most challenging – aspects of pre-departure preparation. How do you decide what to bring and what to leave behind? Below are a few guidelines and suggestions:

Flight Restrictions

- Most airlines allow you to check one bag and carry on one smaller bag. Airlines typically charge extra for any single bag that weighs more than 50 pounds (approximately 23 kilograms). Check with your airline for specific requirements including weight and size limitations for both checked and carry-on bags.
- The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has strict guidelines for what can be brought on to a plane. Liquids, aerosols and gels can only be carried on if they are smaller than 3.4 ounces each and all fit into a clear, quart-sized zip-top bag.

Clothing

- Do your best not to over pack. You do not need to bring your entire wardrobe! Most people wear 20% of their clothes 80% of the time. When considering what to pack, think about what you wear most often and the types of clothes you will wear day-to-day both while working and in your free time.
- Clothes are inexpensive in the U.S., especially compared to many European countries, and discount stores abound. Many U.S. cities also have inexpensive European stores such as Zara or H&M where you can purchase additional clothing if you need them – or want them! 😊

Location

- Check the average monthly weather temperatures (both highs and lows) in the city where you will be living to help guide what you pack. For example, it is a common misconception that the entire state of California is warm and sunny every day. While this may be (somewhat) true for the southern part of the state, residents of San Francisco almost never leave their homes without a jacket!

Toiletries & Medications

- Don't bring a large number of toiletries (shampoo, face cream, toothpaste, feminine products, etc.) as these can be easily (and in most cases inexpensively) purchased in the U.S.
- Bring any personal prescriptions with you and talk to your local doctor if you will need to get refills during your time in the U.S.

Technology and Electronic Devices

- North American devices run on 110/125V electricity while the majority of the world runs on 220/240V. While certain older electronic devices might need a voltage converter or transformer, most new (or newer) devices are dual-voltage (including hairdryers, electric toothbrushes, etc.) or multi-voltage (camera and battery chargers, e-readers, smart phones, MP3 players, laptops, etc.). Check the label on any devices you plan to bring and leave single-voltage items behind (or plan to also get a converter). Dual-voltage and multi-voltage items don't require a converter.
- Most European mobile phones will not work in the U.S. and most Host Families provide their Care Professionals with a local mobile phone.

Personal Items

- Bring a few small personal items, such as pictures of friends and family, a few favorite books in your native language or other small mementos that will help you to feel more comfortable in your new home.

Car & Traveler's Checks

- Bring sufficient cash, traveler's checks or an ATM card you can use to access funds in your home country in order to cover expenses for the initial period of your stay. You will be paid your stipend each week but it is nice to have extra funds available to get started. You will also be responsible for all incidental costs related to your travel to the U.S. including meals and extra baggage fees.

Finally, talk to your Host Family and ask them if they have any suggestions for packing. Your Host Family might recommend items based on activities they like to do (e.g., boots for hiking, bathing suit for swimming, a ski jacket and pants for skiing, etc.)



Was sollte ich unbedingt einpacken?

Dokumente:

- Reisepass mit Visum
- DS-2019 - benötigst du für deine Einreise
- Program Acceptance Letter - benötigst du für die Beantragung deiner US Social Security Number
- EU-Führerschein & internationaler Führerschein
- Impfausweis
- Adresse und Telefonnummer deiner Gastfamilie und Area Director
- Nachweis über Auslandsversicherung
- Flugtickets (e-Ticket)
- Apex Social Notfall Hotline (24/7) +1 (844) 787-6566

Handgepäck:

- Handy, Laptop & Co.
- Bargeld & Kreditkarte
- Notfallnummer deiner Bank
- Notfallkleidung für 2 Tage
- Adressbuch
- Brille / Sonnenbrille
- Buch / Zeitschrift für den Flug
- alle notwendigen Dokumente

Hygieneartikel:

- Zahnbürste und Zahnpasta
- Deo
- Kamm / Bürste
- Rasierzeug
- ggf. Tampons / Binden
- Taschentücher
- Feuchttücher
- Make-Up

Medikamente:

- evtl. Allergiemittel
- evtl. Schmerzmittel
- Pflaster
- evtl. verschreibungspflichtige Medikamente

WICHTIG! Diese Medikamente benötigen eine schriftliche Bescheinigung von deinem Arzt (nutze gern den Vordruck vom ADAC - <https://www.adac.de/reise-freizeit/ratgeber/reisemedizin/medikamentenmitnahme>)

Weitere Utensilien:

- Steckdosenadapter
- Ladekabel / -geräte
- Gastgeschenke

Review Dr. Hartmann's Personality Assessment

Apex Social Group requires that all Care Professionals and Host Families take Dr. Hartmann's Color Code, which helps to identify core motives – why you do the things you do. The Color Code helps Care Professionals gain a deeper understanding of their own personalities and those of their Host Families. Be sure to read through your results prior to arriving in the U.S. It may also be useful to review the information on your Host Family's results. Understanding your Host Family's core motives as well as your own can help you in your day-to-day interactions.



RED (Power):

Reds are the power wielders and getting things done is what motivates them. They are responsible, decisive, and proactive.

BLUE (Intimacy):

Blues are the do-gooders and creating quality relationships and having purpose is what motivates them. They are loyal, sincere, and thoughtful.

WHITE (Peace):

Whites are the peacekeepers and staying calm and balanced in a crisis is what motivates them. They are kind, adaptable, and good listeners.

YELLOW (Fun):

Yellows are the fun lovers and living life in the moment is what motivate them. They are charismatic, spontaneous, and sociable.

Understand Arrival Procedures in the U.S.

Upon arrival in the U.S., flight attendants will distribute CF-6059 Customs Declaration Forms. Please take one and fill it out on the airplane. You will present your passport and DS-2019 form (as well as the completed Customs Declaration Form) to the Customs and Border Protection Officers (CBP Officer) in the first U.S. city where you land (even if this is not your final destination). They will scan your passport to generate an electronic arrival record (equivalent to the old I-94 card). You may also be asked to show evidence of sufficient financial funds and answer some questions about your stay in the U.S. Be sure to give answers that are truthful and complete. Make sure you receive all documents back (note: they will keep the Customs Declaration Form) before you proceed to baggage claim, where you collect your luggage. If your arrival airport is not your final destination, you will still need to get your luggage and go through U.S. customs.

In addition, please refer to the following recommendations, from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection:

- Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond the duration of your expected stay (longer if you think you will want to participate in the extension program).
- Carry important paperwork (passport, DS-2019 form, immigration documents, evidence of financial resources, name and contact information for the Responsible Officer for your program, etc.) on your person – do not check them into your luggage!
- Exchange visitors entering the U.S. for the first time under the J-1 visa may only be admitted up to 30-days prior to the program start date.
- You will be asked to state the reason you wish to enter the U.S. and provide information about your final destination. It is important you tell the CBP Officer that you will be an exchange visitor/ au pair. You may need to provide the name and address of Apex Social Group and your Host Family's name and address.
- If the inspector cannot automatically verify your information or you don't have all of the required documents, you may be escorted to an interview area known as "secondary inspection." Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research to verify information, away from primary inspection lines. It is recommended that you have the name and phone number for Apex Social Group (your exchange visitor program) in case your participation needs to be verified.
- Failure to provide proper documentation and to comply with entry/exit procedures is cause to refuse an exchange visitor admission to the U.S.



PART THREE: LIVING & WORKING WITH YOUR HOST FAMILY

This section provides information about day-to-day life with your Host Family – including childcare duties and your work schedule as well as logistical information about everything from getting a local driver’s license to planning vacation time.

Navigating the First Month

The first month of the Care Professional program is a time of adjustment – both for you and for your Host Family. This section provides suggestions for how to best navigate the first month and outlines certain U.S. Department of State regulations for this time period.

The First Few Days

When you arrive you will likely be very tired and jet lagged. Your initial interactions may be a bit awkward, but that is normal. Your Host Family and the host children will be very excited and happy to meet you. During the first few hours, it is best to engage in polite conversation and then, if possible, it’s ok to retire to your room to rest and unpack.

The U.S. Department of State requires that an adult member of your Host Family arrange to spend at least the first three days at home with you so that you can adjust to your new surroundings, get over your jet lag and get to know your host children. Apex Social Group recommends Host Families wait to begin official training until after their Care Professional has had her first night’s sleep in their home.

Your Apex Social Group Area Director (AD) will contact you and your Host Family within 48 hours of your arrival in the U.S. During this call, your Area Director will welcome you and arrange for an orientation at your Host Family’s home. This orientation will occur within two weeks of your arrival. This is a great time to ask your Area Director questions!

Below are some additional recommendations for the first few days:

- Drink as much water as possible so you don’t get dehydrated (this will help to ease jet lag)
- Get as much rest as possible but try to adapt your sleep/wake schedule to your current time zone
- Contact your natural family to let them know you have arrived safely
- Ask lots of questions so you can become familiar with your new role
- Take notes on any instructions your Host Family provides so you can review them as needed

Please be aware that the U.S. Department of State regulations require the following:

- At least one responsible adult is required to remain with you during your first three days in your Host Family’s home
- If your Host Family has a child under three months of age, at least one responsible adult is required to remain with you to assist in supervising the child at all times

The First Month

The first month of your stay will be a period of training and adjustment. You may feel a bit overwhelmed or emotional at times. This is a normal part of the adjustment period. In addition, you may find that your Host Family will also go through a period of adjustment. It can take some time to get used to a new person living and working in their home!

The first month is a great opportunity for you and your Host Family to get to know each other. The more time and energy you invest in the relationship at this stage, the better your overall exchange experience will be. Make yourself as available as possible and be sure to ask questions and get clarification on your duties and responsibilities.

Within two weeks of your arrival, your Area Director will conduct an arrival orientation with both you and your Host Family in the Host Family's home. During this meeting, your Area Director will get to know you, check in on how both of you are adjusting so far, and share information about the local community (e.g., gym locations, banks, museums, outdoor activities, educational options, etc.). As well, this is a great opportunity for you to ask any questions that have come up during the first few weeks.

Apex Social Group recommends you write down all the information, guidance and advice your Host Family provides (if they don't provide it to you in written form) so you can absorb the information over time instead of feeling pressure to memorize information.



Below are some important considerations to keep in mind:

Training is Ongoing

Training will not just happen in the first three days. Training is ongoing, with course corrections along the way. Be open to ongoing training and guidance from your Host Family.

Follow the Rules

It is important for you to follow household rules and expectations from the day you arrive. This will help demonstrate that you respect your Host Family and their home.

Be Flexible

Your Host Family will have their own way of doing things – and it might be different than what you know from your home country. Do your best to adapt to their way of doing things while offering alternative suggestions if you think they would be useful.

Have Realistic Expectations

It will take time for you and your Host Family to get to know each other and to have a routine that feels comfortable and easy. Don't be discouraged if things don't go perfectly from day one – your Host Family may not be as organized as you hope or the children may be especially fussy – this is normal.

Consider Your Best Behavior

It is tempting to be on your “best behavior” during the first few weeks after you arrive. While some extra consideration is thoughtful during your first few days, it is important that you behave in whatever way is considered normal and comfortable for you, so your Host Family can get to know you, your personality and your usual routines.

Privacy Considerations

While you are considered a member of your Host Family, it is important to be respectful of your Host Family's privacy. For example, your Host Family might not want you to enter certain rooms (for example, a home office or your host parent's bedroom). Most Host Families understand the importance of providing their Care Professional with privacy, either by not going into her room at all or only under specific circumstances. You will have personal access to your Host Family's life – so it is important that you are discreet and don't share private details with your friends or other Care Professionals.

Social Security Number & Bank Account

The below section provides you information on how to apply for a Social Security number and open a local bank account.

Apply for Social Security Number

All Care Professionals require a Social Security number soon after they arrive in the U.S. To obtain a Social Security number, you must go to the nearest Social Security Administration office.

Note – you should wait for at least 10 days from the date you enter the U.S. before filing an application with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The SSA cannot verify your status with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) until at least 10 days after your date of entry.

Please visit the Social Security Administration website (<https://www.ssa.gov/>) or ask your Host Family or Area Director for the closest location so you can make an appointment. The Social Security Administration office can be difficult, even for a local. Don't hesitate to ask your Host Family or Area Director for guidance and support.

You are required to bring the following documents to your appointment at your local Social Security Administration office:

- Social Security application form
- Form DS-2019
- Your passport with your J1-visa
- Your I-94 number
- A copy of the program participation letter from Apex Social Group

At the Social Security office, the SSA will verify your visa status, in order to grant you a Social Security number. If you are told you can't be verified, or that you are not in the database yet, you should ask to have your status verified through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Your Social Security Number application will then be faxed to a central office to be verified. You will receive your Social Security card and number in the mail, usually within a couple of weeks.

Apex Social Group will also send you a reminder email, with all of the relevant information, soon after you arrive in the U.S. If you have any problems applying for a Social Security number, please contact your Area Director for support.

Open a Bank Account

You will need to open a local bank account during your time in the U.S. You can ask your Host Family to recommend their local bank and ask if they can help you to open the account. Note: you will need a Social Security number before you can open a local bank account – see previous section for additional information about obtaining a Social Security number.



Driver's License & Driving Your Host Family's Car

The below section includes information about obtaining a U.S. driver's license and about driving your Host Family's car.

Driver's License

If you will be driving in the U.S. as part of your Care Professional responsibilities, you must arrive in the U.S. with an international driver's permit. In addition, you may be required to obtain a local U.S. driver's license. The rules regarding driver's licenses vary in the U.S., depending upon the state. In some states, it is possible to drive for a year on an international driver's license while in other states you are required to obtain a local license.

Many Host Families feel more comfortable knowing their Care Professional has a U.S. driver's license and has taken the time to learn the local driving laws and regulations. Apex Social Group recommends that you obtain a U.S. driver's license. Check with your Host Family or Area Director to see if you can (or if you are required to obtain) a U.S. driver's license. This information can be found at the local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). If so, you will need to make an appointment and study for both a written test and a driving test. Note: It is important to study for these tests! It is not uncommon for Americans to fail their first attempt because they did not take the tests seriously.

If you are not required or not able to obtain a U.S. driver's license, you should still become familiar with and obey all traffic laws and driving regulations. These may vary from state to state. Your city's local DMV usually has a free handbook with local rules and regulations or you can find the information on their website.

Driving Your Host Family's Car

In many American cities, a car is a necessity. Most Care Professionals will be driving as part of their childcare responsibilities.

While some Host Families may have an extra car for their Care Professional to use, most will share a car with their Care Professional. It's important to talk to your Host Family about using the car, particularly when you are off duty. Your Host Family will likely have some rules around car use, particularly around items such as providing advance notice for when you want to use the car, limits on distance/mileage, off-limits locations (if any), protocol for paying for gas/filling the gas tank, driving non-family members in the car, etc. It's important to be respectful of your Host Family's guidelines. Remember that using their car is a welcome benefit.

If your Host Family needs you to drive their children or allows you to use a car in your time off, they will add you to their car insurance policy. Apex Social Group program guidelines limit the amount you will need to pay in the case of an accident to a maximum of \$500 when driving in your free time and \$0 if driving while on duty. Talk to your Host Family about the car insurance policy and what you should do in case of an accident, a flat tire, or if you are pulled over by a police officer.

Mobile Phone Usage

You are not required to purchase your own mobile phone when you come to the U.S. Apex Social Group strongly recommends that Host Families provide their Care Professional with a mobile phone to make communication easier. Most Host Families do, often adding their Care Professional to an existing “family plan” so that everyone can easily connect for day-to-day needs as well as emergencies. You are not responsible for paying for a mobile phone or usage when it is primarily used for childcare-related activities. Apex Social Group recommends you discuss your Host Family’s usage plans – including texting, data usage (e.g., streaming video, etc.), GPS, and minutes – as well as guidelines for personal use, to avoid potential conflicts and overage charges.

Training with Your Host Family

Every Host Family has their own unique set of roles, responsibilities and routines specifically designed for their needs. Your Host Family is no different. When you arrive, it will be your responsibility to understand your specific role and responsibilities within the context of your family.

Apex Social Group recommends that all Host Families create a training manual or a collection of instructions to help train their Care Professional when they arrive. The training manual or instructions should include information on the following: parenting philosophy, background and information on each child, information about your typical schedule and childcare duties, household rules, and other information about the home, family and community. It should also include important contact information (schools, pediatricians, emergency phone numbers, therapist, neighbors, other family members, etc.).

If your Host Family has not written down your instructions, be sure to take notes so you can review the information later and ask additional questions.

Remember – training is an ongoing process. Talk to your Host Family and ask them questions to ensure you understand your responsibilities. Also, be patient with yourself. It will take time for you to incorporate your new duties and responsibilities.



Working Schedule & Childcare Duties

Your Host Family will provide you a weekly childcare schedule with specific childcare duties. Review these items carefully and ask questions if anything is unclear.

Work Schedule

Your Host Family should provide you a weekly work schedule so you have an understanding of your working (on duty) and non-working (off duty) hours. Some Host Families' schedules are the same every week while others change – but a Care Professional may never work (be on duty) more than 45 hours per week or 10 hours per day (see section entitled Weekly Schedule, Meetings, and Stipend for more information). Some families use a calendar or planner to create the weekly schedule, while others may use a shared electronic document (such as Google Docs), or even a whiteboard on the refrigerator.

Childcare Duties

Your primary responsibility as a Care Professional is childcare, though your Host Family might also ask you to do light housework related to the care of the children. You are also expected to pick up after yourself and clean your own room/bathroom. Though your duties may vary throughout the duration of the program, the below list includes some of the most likely duties.

Note: Your Host Family may not ask you to do additional non-childcare related work if your childcare hours are less than 45 hours per week. This is a restriction put in place by the U.S. Department of State.

Appropriate duties:

- General supervision and facilitating play
- Keeping children safe
- Assisting with special needs care
- Helping with homework
- Bathing and dressing children
- Brushing children's teeth
- Driving the children to and from school, activities, therapy sessions, doctor appointments, etc.
- Preparing the children's meals
- Tidying the children's rooms
- Doing the children's laundry
- Being present while the children sleep (this is considered working hours)
- Taking children on outings/outdoor play

It is important to keep in mind that you may not be asked to do non-childcare related services or heavy housework. The below list includes some relevant examples of inappropriate duties – duties your Host Family may not ask you to do, even if you have extra hours available.

Inappropriate duties:

- General housework or chores not directly related to caring for the children
- Yard work
- Washing windows
- Cleaning floors throughout the entire house
- Caring for the family pets
- Washing the family's laundry (with the exception of the children's laundry)
- Caring for another family's children (with the exception of approved play-dates)
- Making dinner for the entire family on a regular basis

On Duty vs. Off Duty

Maintaining distinctions between “on duty” (working hours) and “off duty” (non-working hours) is important to the overall health of the Host Family/Care Professional relationship. It is important for you to have a clear understanding of working hours vs. non-working hours so you have time to rest and relax.

Work Discussions During Work Time

Since you will likely be in your home during times you are not working, your Host Family may be tempted to discuss schedule changes or the children's needs during your non-working hours. While this may happen from time to time, if it becomes frequent, ask your Host Family if you can limit work-related conversations to working hours – and use non-working hours to know each other better.

Invited vs. Required Participation

Many families ask their Care Professionals to join them in family outings, events or even regular home traditions (e.g., Friday pizza and movie night). If these events are during off-duty hours, you are not obligated to attend. That said, we recommend joining in on some of these activities in an effort to get to know your Host Family better and to enjoy participating in events as “one of the family.” For example, while you may not always choose to eat meals with your Host Family, you should make an effort to do so on a fairly regular basis – especially if there are certain evenings the Host Family would like everyone together.

Helping Children Understand Off Duty

It may be difficult for children (particularly young children or those with special needs) to understand that you are not on-duty all the time. Do your best to be flexible and patient when responding to the children when you are off-duty and ask your host parents to help if necessary.



Household Rules and Disciplining Children

Care Professionals should understand and respect their Host Family's household rules as well as their preferred method of disciplining the children.

Following Household Rules

Your Host Family will likely have a list of household rules that they would like you to follow. This may be included in a training manual or discussed with you separately. It is important that you respect and follow your Host Family's rules.

If your Host Family doesn't have any specific rules established, you might want to proactively ask them about their expectations regarding specific activities. This proactive communication may help minimize any misunderstandings or future issues.

Some categories of activities to discuss include:

- Curfew (for work days and non-work days)
- Use of shared technology items (such as the family television or home phone)
- Use of personal technology while on duty (texting, emailing, etc.)
- Having visitors to the house (friends, family, dates, overnight guests, etc.)
- Expected participation in family meals and events
- Car use
- Posting photos of children or family on social media
- Drinking alcoholic beverages at home

Note: All Care Professionals must follow U.S. laws in addition to their Host Family's household rules (e.g., no one under age 21 may drink alcohol in the U.S.). Failure to follow U.S. laws may jeopardize your good standing in the Care Professional program.

If you don't agree with a rule, ask your Host Family if they can provide you more information about why that rule is important to them. Consider asking them if they will revisit the rule, after a few months, assuming things are going well.

Disciplining Children

Your role, with regards to the children, will be similar to a "third parent." As such, it is important for you to understand rules that relate to your Host Family's children, as well as the appropriate way to discipline each child. Apex Social Group recommends you proactively discuss rules and disciplining with your Host Family, including overall household rules, child-specific rules, their preferred methods of disciplining each child (time out, extra chores, loss of privileges, etc.), and off-limits discussions (e.g., religion, sex, etc.).

Note: Care Professionals are specifically prohibited from physically disciplining a child (e.g., spanking, shaking, striking, etc.) – under any circumstances. Even if your Host Family uses some form of physical punishment with their child, you should never do so!

Weekly Schedule, Meetings & Stipend

According to U.S. Department of State regulations, you are allowed to provide no more than 45 hours of childcare per week – and no more than 10 hours in any single day. You are not permitted to provide more than 45 hours per week of childcare – even if your Host Family is interested in paying you for additional hours for childcare.

Weekly Schedule

Your Host Family should provide you with a written schedule that includes your working hours and responsibilities for the week – ideally at least a week in advance. For many Host Families, the Care Professional's working hours change little each week. However, a Host Family may change your schedule throughout the year as needed so it is important to be flexible. Be sure to discuss with your Host Family when you would like to take your educational classes. Ideally you and your Host Family will work together to accommodate everyone's needs.

Weekly Meetings

Apex Social Group recommends Host Families set up regular weekly meetings as a part of their routine with their Care Professional. Weekly meetings, which do not need to be long or formal in nature, are a great time to check-in together, discuss the upcoming week's schedule, and review any challenges or issues. Regular weekly meetings encourage ongoing and open communication and help to avoid any "build up" around potential problems or misunderstandings.

Weekly Stipend

You should be paid your stipend each week on the same day. Please refer to your Service Agreement for more information on your weekly stipend.



Educational Component

The U.S. Department of State requires that all Care Professionals register and attend classes offered by an accredited U.S. post-secondary institution for not less than six semester hours of academic credit or its equivalent (60 classroom hours). This is a great opportunity to improve your English, meet new friends, and become a part of the community. Apex Social Group recommends you register for classes as soon as possible. Your Host Family is required to provide you with time to attend your classes, transportation to/from your classes (or to cover transportation costs), and an educational stipend of \$500 (for tuition, books or materials required for the course). Additional costs are the responsibility of the Care Professional.

Selecting a Class and Institution

Your ACD and Host Family will provide you with information about local class options. Please check with your ACD to make sure that the institution and coursework you select meets the U.S. Department of State guidelines.

The following educational institutions qualify: public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and adult education courses held at college/university campuses.

Note: Be aware that you will not likely qualify for in-state tuition fees, so classes at the local community college may offer a better value than classes at public or private colleges.

What is a Credit Unit?

A credit unit is the typical measurement for post-secondary work and varies from course to course. Generally speaking, a one-unit course typically consists of one hour of lecture time and approximately two hours of homework per week, for a semester-length course. A one-unit laboratory course typically consists of three hours in the classroom per week and no homework for a semester-length course.

Proof of Completion

In order to meet U.S. Department of State guidelines for the Care Professional program, you must have proof that you completed the educational requirement. In addition, Care Professionals who want to extend their year must show proof of having completed the educational requirement at least 60 days prior to the end of their 12-month program. To document proof of completion, Apex Social Group will provide you a form that you will need to complete. You will also need to obtain signatures from your instructors at the end of each semester or a certificate of completion from the school. You will receive information from Apex Social Group with instructions on how to complete and submit the form.

Volunteer Component

Volunteering offers a unique window into a country's social culture and is a great way to meet people, gain experience and have the opportunity to give back to your local community.

As part of Apex social's professional care program, we require that you do at least 20 hours of volunteer work during your stay. According to government figures, more than 60 million people in the U.S. (and more than 6 million people in Australia) have done some kind of unpaid volunteer work in the last year.

It's very likely that you will easily find meaningful volunteer opportunities in your local community. It's very common in the U.S. for American families to do volunteer work for their children's school and activities. Examples of volunteering are helping in your host child's classroom, getting involved with your host children's sports activities, helping out a local organization, etc. There are also websites that match you with specific, local projects based on your interests. Many of our social Care Professionals choose to volunteer with social organizations and institutions in their field – gaining additional experience in their careers while donating their time.

Apex Community Events & Host Family Day

The following information varies depending upon your location. Please contact your ACD for information regarding your area.

Local Apex Events

Apex Social Group's Area Local Community Liaisons will host monthly events to give you an opportunity to meet fellow Care Professionals and enjoy your new community together. Please contact your ACD for more information.

Host Family Day

The U.S. Department of State requires that all Host Families and Care Professionals attend a "Family Day" event, organized by Apex Social, during the course of the placement year. Your ACD will let you know about Host Family Day events happening in your area.

Paying Taxes

Care Professionals who come to the U.S. as part of the U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitors programs are required to pay taxes on their earnings. Apex Social recommends that you save approximately 10% of your weekly stipend in order to be prepared to pay taxes on your earnings. Apex Social Group will provide tax information resources to you so you are prepared to file your taxes by April 15th.



Travel Insurance & Health

The below section provides helpful background information regarding your insurance and health (including sick days and accidents). Please review carefully and contact your ACD if you have any questions.

Care Professional Insurance

All Care Professionals receive travel and accident insurance coverage from a third-party insurance company for the duration of the program. This insurance meets the minimum requirements of the U.S. Department of State. Apex Social recommends you note your insurance provider and their contact information, should you be involved in an emergency situation, and remind your Host Family to do the same. If you become ill and need medical care, schedule an appointment with a physician's office or urgent care facility. It is best not to visit a hospital emergency room unless it is a medical emergency. If you seek care at an emergency room and are not admitted to the hospital, you may be charged a high deductible.

Your Health

During the course of your program, you may get sick so it's important to prepare for the possibility. If you are unable to work because you are sick, your Host Family should provide you with time off to recuperate. This time is not considered vacation time and you must still receive your full stipend for the week. Ensure you have a copy of your insurance paperwork and know the closest hospital or medical facility. If you suffer from a long-term illness or injury, or are hospitalized, please contact your ACD immediately so Apex Social Group is informed and can help support you.

Vacation & Travel Guidelines

In accordance with U.S. Department of State regulations, you are entitled to a minimum of two weeks (10 days) paid vacation during the course of your 12-month stay in the U.S. In addition, all Care Professionals are granted a 30-day grace period at the end of their program during which time they may choose to travel in the U.S. Note – there are some limitations for Care Professionals who plan to travel outside the U.S. during their program. It is important to verify if your travel and accident insurance will cover a visit to your home country.

Care Professional Vacations

You and your Host Family should discuss your vacation plans in advance so they can make the appropriate alternative childcare arrangements. Care Professionals are entitled to 2 weeks (10 days) of vacation, which may be taken in segments or all at once (including saving all vacation time to the end of the year). All parties should mutually agree upon scheduling, which may require some compromise.

If you decide to participate in the extension program, The Department of State mandates that you are entitled to an additional five days paid vacation (for a six-month extension) or an additional 10 days paid vacation (for a nine-month or 12-month extension). At Apex Social Group, Care Professionals who extend for 12 months earn 15 days of vacation time.

Family Vacations

Some families take their Care Professionals with them on vacation – while others may not. This is entirely up to your Host Family. It is important to note that family vacations where you are caring for your Host Family’s children should not be considered part of your personal vacation time, nor are periods of time when your family goes out of town and you stay at home.

If your Host Family invites you on their vacation and you are expected to provide childcare during the trip, your Host Family is responsible for paying for your room and board (including a separate room for you) as well as your transportation costs. If you do not go with your Host Family on their vacation, they are still responsible for paying your weekly stipend. Many Host Families work with their Care Professionals to coordinate separate vacation schedules, but Host Families cannot require Care Professionals to take vacation at the same time that they are going on vacation.

Care Professional Travel

Generally speaking, Care Professionals are encouraged to remain in the U.S. during their program. However, depending upon the type of visa you have, you may be able to travel outside of the U.S., either with your Host Family or during your vacation time. ***It is very important that you not leave the country, even in the company of your Host Family, without contacting Apex Social Group first!***

- ***International Travel***

If you plan to leave and re-enter the U.S. (alone or with your Host Family) you must have your DS-2019 form signed by Apex Social Group. This applies to all international travel, including visits to your home country or short visits to Canada or Mexico. The DS-2019 form should be sent to Apex Social Group at least four weeks in advance, so that the form can be signed and returned. You must take your signed DS-2019 form with you when traveling abroad, as you will be required to present it when entering the U.S. again.

- ***Travel During 30-Day Grace Period***

Following your 12-month program, you are eligible for a 30-day grace period during which time you may travel within the continental U.S. as well as Alaska and Hawaii. Note – Care Professionals who leave the U.S. during the 30-day grace period will be denied re-entry as their initial 12-month visa will have expired (note – this includes visits to Canada and Mexico). Care Professionals are prohibited from working during this 30-day grace period.

- ***Travel During Extension Year***

During the extension year, you can only travel internationally if you receive a new visa from a U.S. embassy. Care Professional visas are typically only issued for 12 months and the visa is the key document that facilitates entry into the U.S. You can leave the country on an expired visa – but you can’t come back without a new visa. The DS-2019, which indicates the dates a Care Professional is allowed to stay in the U.S., will not grant you reentry into the U.S. if your visa is expired.

Making Friends & Socializing

Making new friends and socializing is important to your overall happiness and well-being! Below are a few suggestions for how to meet new people during your time in the U.S.

Host Family Connections

Talk to your Host Family and see if they have any connections with people your age that you can meet and get to know. There may be members of the extended family, adult children of neighbors, or connections through organizations like church, school or clubs.

Meetup Groups

Meetup (www.meetup.com) is an online network of local groups that meet in person all over the U.S. and around the world – there are thousands of groups in each state. Anyone can join a group and anyone can start their own group – it’s possible there are already some Care Professional groups formed! Most groups are arranged by activity or interest (e.g., cycling, book club, running, movie club, 20-somethings new to the city, etc.) and post about regular events, gatherings and activities.

Intramural Sports

Most U.S. cities and towns have intramural sports teams – casual sports teams open to the public. These often meet weekly and are usually made up of both men and women.

Other Care Professionals & Apex Alumni

In larger cities, Apex may have several Care Professionals working with Host Families. Your local ACD will let you know if there are other Care Professionals in your area. In addition, talk to Apex alumni who lived in your city or town – they may have some valuable suggestions.



PART FOUR:**COMMUNICATION &
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Good communication between you and your Host Family is vital to ensuring a happy household. And, good communication is especially important since you are communicating with someone who comes from a different culture. Regular, ongoing communication with your Host Family – everyday and during your weekly meetings – can help to mitigate many of the difficulties that can occur when people from two different cultures come together.

Communicating with Your Host Family

It is vital that you communicate regularly with your Host Family. When misunderstandings arise, talk about them right away. Some of the tips and strategies in the following section will help you to communicate effectively with your Host Family.

Maintain Regular Communication

Apex Social Group recommends regular, weekly meetings to check in with your Host Family. This is a great time to proactively bring up successes and challenges from the week. Maintaining a regular weekly meeting ensures ongoing communication – vital to a successful Care Professional/Host Family match.

Write Down Instructions

Be sure to write down any instructions your Host Family provides to you, especially if they only share the information with you verbally. This includes everything from schedule changes to vacation requests to adjustments to childcare responsibilities. If anything is unclear, confirm the information again to ensure there are no miscommunications.

Approaching Difficult Topics

Depending upon your personality type, it may be challenging for you to directly approach difficult topics (e.g., disagreements about curfews, last minute schedule changes, etc.) – but it is important. Set aside a time to discuss the difficult topic, frame it as an observation or feeling and provide context around your concern (e.g., “I’d like to discuss the frequent last minute schedule changes – while I understand these will happen from time to time, it is frustrating for me as it requires me to change my plans, etc.”).

Remember the Color Code

All Care Professionals and Host Families participate in the Color Code, which provides useful information about strengths and limitations as well as relationships with other colors. Be sure to review the information about both you and your Host Family, and see if you can discover some insights into the best way to communicate with each other.

Communicating with Family & Friends

Technology has made it easier than ever to stay in touch with family and friends in your home country.

Skype and WhatsApp are two great options for keeping in contact with friends and family back home. Skype can be used on computers, tablets and mobile phones while WhatsApp is for mobile phones only. Both services are free.

Especially at the beginning, it will be tempting to want to communicate with your natural family and friends very frequently. However, this can make feelings of homesickness worse and keep you from socializing in the U.S. Apex Social Group recommends limiting your communications to only 1-2 a week for the first month or two, so you have time to get adjusted to your life in the U.S.

Understanding Cultural Differences

Cultural differences include everything from stereotypes and communication styles associated with different groups of people to languages and values associated with different countries. Below are some suggestions to help understand cultural differences:

Expect Differences – Look for Similarities

Expect that your Host Family will have their own way of doing things. Some of these things may seem strange or even comical. Rather than judging these differences, ask your Host Family about them in an open and friendly way. They may not even realize their behaviors seem odd to you. Talk about your differences – but also seek out your similarities. At first, it may be hard to see them, but over time you'll realize you are more similar than you think.

Understand and Transcend – International Stereotypes

Different countries have different stereotypes associated with them – both positive and negative. For example, if you are a German Care Professional, some of the most common German stereotypes include being: organized, always on time, rude, unwelcoming, likes rules, hospitable, direct communicators, undiplomatic, emotionally distant, etc. While some of these attributes may fit you, others will not. One of your roles as a Care Professional is to help show your Host Family that not all people from your home country fit all of these stereotypes.

Understand – and Transcend – American Stereotypes

The word "American" often carries strong stereotypes in other countries, some of which are complimentary but some of which are not. Some of the most common American stereotypes include being: outgoing and friendly, extravagant or wasteful, informal, ignorant of other cultures, hard-working, overly concerned about personal appearance, loud and rude, overweight, in a hurry, and generous. Just as you will hope that your Host Family will see beyond the stereotypes associated with people from your country, they will hope that you can see beyond the stereotypes associated with American culture. Get to know your Host Family for who they are, not the stereotypes you may have imagined.

Eight Tips for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Communicating effectively across cultures requires some thought – as well as a genuine desire to understand as much as to be understood. Below are eight tips that will assist you in communicating effectively with your Host Family:

- **Write Things Down**

Be sure to write down important information so you can reference it at a later time – or ask your Host Family if they can provide you written instructions in addition to verbal instructions. This is especially important for phone numbers, addresses, directions or instructions. Having a visual aid can help to avoid potential miscommunications.

- **Be An Active Listener**

Being an active listener means listening to someone in a way that you'd like someone to listen to you. This includes maintaining eye contact, minimizing distractions, focusing on what they are saying, commenting appropriately, and not interrupting.

- **Ask Your Host Family To Speak Slowly**

Especially during the first few weeks, ask your Host Family to speak slower if you are having trouble understanding them.

- **Repeat Back Information**

If you aren't sure if you understood your Host Family, repeat what you heard them say, in your own words, for confirmation.

- **Use Gestures/Body Language**

A study from The University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) has shown that more than 90% of communication is non-verbal. Use gestures and body language to help get your message across, particularly if your Host Family doesn't seem to understand you. Remember, it may be the first time they've heard someone speak English with your particular accent and it will take time for them to understand everything.

- **Ask Questions**

Another way to ensure you've understood your Host Family is to ask questions. Be proactive and ask as many questions as necessary to clarify, so there are no misunderstandings.

- **Consider Similarities**

One of the most common mistakes Care Professionals make when they begin to engage with their Host Family is to notice and point out all of the things that are different between their cultures. Although this will likely be your immediate impulse, try to develop a habit of noticing everything you have in common with your Host Family. You will quickly find that you have far more in common than you think!

- **Be Respectful**

This is the single most important cross-cultural communication tip! At all times, behave and communicate in a respectful way. Remember that if you extend respect, your Host Family in turn will respect you!



Culture Shock & Adjustment Cycle

What is “culture shock?” Culture shock has been defined as the personal disorientation or distress someone might feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life – either due to immigration, travel to a new country, moving between social environments, or exposure to a set of unfamiliar attitudes. Culture shock is a normal and well-documented part of any long-term cultural exchange.

Note: The following information about culture shock has also been provided to your Host Family so that you both will know what to expect. Be patient with yourself and with your Host Family during the adjustment process. While there is no way to completely prevent culture shock, being aware of its signs and exhibiting empathy and patience will help to ease the transition.

Culture Shock

A few days or weeks after your arrival, you may notice that you begin to exhibit some uncharacteristic behaviors. You may seem sad, withdrawn or overly tired. You may also notice that you are having trouble sleeping, spending a lot of time in your room, or becoming overly preoccupied with your own health, safety or hygiene. All of these things (and more) can be symptoms of culture shock.

Culture shock is normal for Care Professionals. It is the emotional and behavioral reaction to living and working in another culture. Culture shock can feel like a roller coaster ride as the physical, emotional and mental highs and lows of relocation come in waves. What you are feeling is normal! All exchange participants will experience culture shock to varying degrees and for varying lengths of time. The best way to cope with these feelings is to try to keep an

open mind and consider each piece of new information as a learning experience and an opportunity to view the world from a new perspective.

Host Family Culture Shock

Believe it or not, your Host Family may also experience some mild symptoms of culture shock during the first days or weeks of your arrival. They may begin to question the “rightness” or “normalness” of routines and actions that they never really thought about, once they begin to see them through your eyes. They may experience some blend of curiosity and excitement about you (including your language and your culture) as well as a rejection of some of your ideas or ways of doing things. They may find themselves feeling defensive about their family’s traditions or routines – or even American culture or ways of doing things.

The Adjustment Cycle

Most people experiencing culture shock follow a similar adjustment cycle that includes six stages. We’ve outlined the stages below to help you better understand the culture shock you may be feeling.

- **Initial Excitement:** everything is new and interesting
- **Cultural Fatigue:** differences become obvious and feel uncomfortable – you become tired, both physically and mentally
- **Surface Adjustment:** you begin to understand the people and their ways
- **Hidden Problems:** while you fit in outwardly, you begin to question certain aspects of the culture and may feel homesick or feel frustrated with your Host Family and new friends
- **Fitting In:** you accept the culture, with its differences and similarities, and feel more or less comfortable with your new life
- **Going Home:** you have mixed feelings about going home, considering your adjustment to your new life, and wonder how this might affect you

Managing Issues & Conflicts

Even in the most perfectly matched Care Professional/Host Family households, conflicts will arise. But, by understanding potential problems and how to prevent them – as well as how to address problems when they do occur – you will be able to move past these in a way that is satisfying to both parties.

Preventing Problems

The best way to manage problems is to be proactive in preventing them. The below information will help you to minimize future issues between you and your Host Family and to understand areas where conflict is most likely to occur.

- **Maintain Open Lines of Communication**

Proactively engaging in ongoing communication with your Host Family is one of the best ways to prevent future problems. Don’t let issues fester – discuss them early and directly, before they begin to cause problems. Ask your Host Family if there are any challenges they are facing in your weekly meetings and bring up any concerns you have at the same time. Speak kindly and without judgment – seek first to understand and then to be understood.

- ***Develop a Relationship Based on Mutual Respect***

In a relationship with mutual respect, people will assume the best when they are confused about a situation or conversation and will likely ask questions to get clarification. Without mutual respect, both parties may assume the worst. By demonstrating respect for your Host Family, you will build their trust.

- ***Cultivate Empathy***

Putting yourself in your Host Family's shoes and looking at a situation from their perspective is another great way to prevent problems or to catch them in the early stages.

- ***Be Aware of Your Rights***

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (WWTBPA) of 2008 protects the legal rights of certain visa holders, including J-1 visa holders like you, against abuse and discrimination while visiting the U.S.

The Act ensures you have a right to the following:

- Being treated and paid fairly
- Not being held in a job against your will
- Keeping your passport and other identification document in your possession
- Reporting abuse without retaliation
- Requesting help from unions, immigrant and labor rights groups and other groups
- Seeking justice in the U.S. Courts

You will receive a link to the full Wilberforce pamphlet prior to your arrival in the U.S. To view the complete pamphlet, please visit: <http://Apex Social Group.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Wilberforce-Pamphlet-English-Online-Reading-Version-12-22-2014.pdf>

- ***Prevent Sexual Harassment***

It is important that you are treated with respect – both in your Host Family's household and in the community. Apex Social Group takes harassment in any form very seriously, particularly sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual attention or demands, in the form of physical contact, verbal communication, gestures, or written communication. If you are being harassed in any way, please contact Apex Social Group immediately.

- ***Be Aware of Potential Areas of Conflict***

Many Care Professional/Host Family issues center on a few key topics including:

- **Holidays** – You will receive four paid holidays during a 12-month placement. You and your Host Family will agree on the holidays in advance. All U.S. holidays are not automatically considered days off or time off for Care Professionals. Your Host Family may expect you to work on a particular holiday (e.g., Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Eve, Independence Day, etc.). Be sure to discuss holidays with your Host Family, so you have advance notice if you will be working. If there is a particular holiday you would like as a day off, you must discuss this with your Host Family. There is no guarantee that your request will be granted.

- **Curfews and Rules** – Curfew and rules discussions are often challenging, so many Care Professionals and Host Families avoid them – leading to future conflict when your expectations and your Host Family’s expectations are not the same. You may be used to living on your own and following a curfew and household rules will be new for you. Remember that you are joining a family and it’s important for both sides to take a balanced approach. Apex Social Group recommends that you discuss curfew expectations with your Host Family. We also recommend you talk to your Host Family if you don’t agree with some of their household rules – discussing these proactively and potentially coming to a compromise will help to avoid future conflicts.
- **Vacation Time** – Vacation time must be discussed and agreed upon between both parties and Apex Social Group recommends discussing vacation time early in the program. Care Professionals are entitled to 10 days of vacation time. If your Host Family wants to take you with them on vacation, you should discuss your work schedule and responsibilities so you know what to expect. Accompanying your Host Family on vacation can be a great opportunity to experience cultural exchange.
- **Car Use** – While some Host Families have an extra car for their Care Professional, most will share a vehicle with their Host Family. It is important to understand and respect your Host Family’s rules regarding car use – including when you can use the car, how far you can drive, if there are any off-limits locations, and who pays for gas.
- **Social Media** – Taking pictures and posting them online via social media sites is common practice around the world. However, before you post photos of your Host Family and their children online, ask your Host Family if this is OK with them. Some families don’t post photos of their children online (for safety/security purposes). Apex Social Group recommends that Care Professionals check in with their Host Families regarding their comfort level/rules around social media posts that involve family members (particularly children). Remember that it is never ok to share private Host Family details on social media or in other formats including texts or WhatsApp messages.
- **Socializing/Dating** – Care Professionals are encouraged to meet new people and make new friends during their time in the U.S. However, it is important to respect your Host Family’s household rules when it comes to friends and dating. For example, your Host Family may not be comfortable with your dates meeting you at their home and may prefer you meet elsewhere. Apex Social Group recommends you talk to your Host Family about rules regarding friends, dates and socializing.
- **Understanding Privileges vs. Requirements** – It is important you understand the difference between requirements and privileges. For example, your Host Family may give you a mobile phone to use during your time in the U.S., but it may not be the fancy iPhone you would prefer. Or, while you may have access to the family car, it may not be available every single time you want to use it.

- **Comparisons with other Care Professionals** – Every Care Professional’s experience in the U.S. will be different. Some may get fancier Christmas presents, larger bedrooms or the opportunity to travel with their Host Families – while others may not. Try not to compare your circumstances with those of other Care Professionals. Focus on the positive and unique aspects of your own Host Family!
- **General Misunderstandings** – One of the most common areas of potential conflict is general misunderstanding. While this can occur between any two individuals, it is often more common between individuals from another country or culture. Apex Social Group recommends Care Professionals carefully review the communications section (see section entitled “Communication & Cultural Differences”) to help avoid misunderstandings that may lead to conflict.

Grievance Procedures

Living and working in a new culture can be challenging and we encourage you to have patience as you adjust to your new environment. Difficulties and differences of opinion will arise but as long as you and your Host Family maintain open lines of communication, most difficulties can be resolved quickly.

While uncommon, there are times when problems may go beyond what can be resolved directly between a Care Professional and Host Family. If you are facing difficulties with your Host Family or an aspect of the program, it is important to contact your ACD for assistance.

Apex Social Group is always available to provide you with support and help assist you with any concerns. The below process outlines Apex Social Group’s grievance procedures when there are concerns between Care Professionals and Host Families:

Step One: Communicate with your Host Family

- If you are unhappy with any situation or event involving your Host Family, the first step is to communicate with them. There may be disagreements from time to time, but the most effective way to ensure these don’t repeat is to address them directly.

Step Two: Communicate with your Apex Care & Development Director (ACD)

- If the problem persists, you should talk to your ACD, so she is aware of the situation and can provide support and guidance.

Step Three: Communicate with the VP of Care & Development

- The Leader of the Care & Development team is available to assist you if you need additional or special support.

Apex Social Group wants you to be completely satisfied with our program and service. Please be sure to contact us if there is anything we can do to improve your program experience. Additionally, any emergency situation regarding your health, safety or welfare should be immediately reported to Apex Social Group by calling our 24/7 support line at 1-844-787-6566.

Placement Change

Apex Social Group will make every effort to provide Care Professionals and Host Families with the support they need to have a successful program. On occasion, there are situations where a placement isn't going well and the decision is made to end the placement. Apex Social Group expects that both the Care Professional and Host Family remain cooperative during a placement change. A Care Professional should never leave a Host Family's home without Apex Social Group's involvement. If a placement change is the best option, Apex Social Group works with the Care Professional to find a new Host Family where she can be comfortable and successful. Please refer to your Service Agreement for specific terms and conditions.



PART FIVE: **IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY**

While most Care Professionals experience a successful program with minimal problems, it is important for Care Professionals to be prepared in case of an emergency. Below are some common emergency situations and suggestions. In addition, in case of an emergency, it is very important that you contact Apex Social Group so we can assist you. When in doubt, please contact Apex Social Group at 844-787-6566.

Medical Emergency

If you or someone in your Host Family is experiencing a medical emergency, please go to the hospital or emergency room or dial 911. If you need medical treatment, but it is not an emergency, visit a clinic, urgent care center or doctor's office. Walk-in clinics are available in all cities and are a good alternative to hospitals which are often much more expensive. If possible, call your insurance company before seeing the doctor. Remember that you may need to pay for your doctor's visit at the time of the visit. If that is the case, you will receive applicable reimbursement later. Please contact Apex Social Group at 844-787-6566 if you or someone in your Host Family has experienced a serious medical emergency.

Financial Emergency

Before leaving for the U.S., proof of sufficient financial funds must be presented to the U.S. Embassy. If you are in financial trouble (e.g., due to stolen traveler's checks or cash), please contact your natural family. If you need funds wired to you from overseas, Western Union is an option. For more details, please see Western Union's website at www.westernunion.com.

Legal Emergency

If you have been arrested or detained, please contact Apex Social Group immediately. Depending upon the situation, we might advise you to talk to a lawyer. Please be aware that Apex Social Group cannot give any legal advice, but we will try to connect you with a legal expert. When you are arrested, you have the right to a single phone call, to refuse to answer any questions until you have talked to a lawyer, and to request an interpreter. Make sure you understand all U.S. laws – including minimum drinking age, drug laws, traffic laws and local/state laws – ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

Travel Emergency

Detailed information about traveling is included in the section entitled "Care Professional Vacation & Travel Guidelines," including travel limitations based on your visa. Be sure to review this section carefully. If you encounter an emergency while you are on vacation or traveling, in the U.S. or abroad, be sure to contact Apex Social Group immediately.

Lost or Stolen Documents

Although lost or stolen documents are not considered a true emergency, this will cause you some inconvenience. We advise you to make copies of your DS-2019 form, passport and Social Security card and keep them in a safe location that is separate from your originals. Having copies of important documents will make it easier to replace them. Please contact your Area Director if your documents are lost or stolen.

Useful Contact Information

Fill out the following sheet and keep it with you as you travel.

Apex Headquarters

Phone: 844-787-6566

Apex ACD

Name:

Home Phone:

Mobile Phone:

Email:

Apex Local Community Liaison

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Apex Customer Care

844-787-6566

customer care@apex-social.com

Host Family

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Skype:

Email:

PART SIX:**BUILDING YOUR CAREER
AT APEX SOCIAL**

As a Care Professional, you are in the unique position to build upon your skills and return home to your country with valuable experience that you can apply to your future career. There will be many opportunities for career building as a Care Professional including applying your skills and qualifications to make a positive impact on the children in your care, communicating in English, and successfully navigating the challenges of working and living in a foreign country and culture. The Care Professional program will afford you the opportunity to take classes and volunteer in your area of expertise. At Apex, we want you to have a successful year and are available to assist you in meeting your personal and professional goals!

Living and working as a Care Professional in the United States will be very rewarding! At the same time, providing childcare and living with a family can bring challenges and you will likely experience some concerns or frustrations during your year. We encourage you to keep the bigger picture in mind and be proud of all that you will accomplish! Sometimes we learn and grow the most when overcoming challenges. By doing an excellent job, your Host Family will be happy to provide you a letter of recommendation. In addition, you will be an important member of the Apex alumni club and build lifelong friendships and relationships.

Setting Professional and Personal Goals

We encourage you to keep a list of the professional and personal goals that you accomplish and start building on your resume and professional network. Your work experience as an Apex Care Professional will be the foundation of a very successful future career. On the next page, you will have the opportunity to think about your upcoming year and set some personal and professional goals. This is a great tool to share with your Area Director at your Orientation and use it to keep track of your successes and the things you have accomplished – both in your work with your Host Family and in your free time. Here are some examples of accomplishments to get you started:

My Care Professional Skills - Example

- Effectively communicated in English on a daily basis
- Demonstrated flexibility and the ability to adapt to new situations while living and working in the United States
- Demonstrated and utilized my professional skills (add details) to care for children 45 hours a week
- Learned and assisted with therapy (list specific accomplishments and examples)
- Taught children (list accomplishments and examples)
- Effectively managed a schedule
- Assisted with special needs care (add details)
- Gained volunteer experience (add details)
- Completed coursework in (add details)
- Demonstrated leadership in childcare management

Career Building Goal Worksheet

Name: _____

Profession: _____

Apex Program Dates: _____

Host Family: _____

Children's Names/ Ages: _____

Personal Goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Professional Goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Keep track of your successes this year and what you are proud of:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How being a Care Professional Makes a Difference

You will have many skills and awesome experiences to add to your CV upon completion of your Apex Social program. Take a look at what fellow Care Professionals shared about how the program made a difference in their life:

"I got to know new kinds of therapies and work together with therapists and families. Through that, I got a new view on the kids and how to work with them at home. I got to know a new culture and learned that you actually can choose your family."

"It changed me and made me grow with my two years. I gained self-confidence, improved my English, collected work experience, met new friends and saw a lot of things which impressed me."

"It made the kind of difference I thought would happen. Improved English, gained lots of experiences in many areas, changed myself in good ways, got to know the culture..."

"The time here enables me to see the world in a different perspective. I got educationally and culturally enriched and I definitely broadened my horizons. I know a lot more about the responsibilities that come with having kids and I got new ideas on how to raise kids. My time in the US will also have an influence on my future profession."

"I found a second family here, gained experience in my job and I'll never forget my travel experience here."

"Living in an unknown country makes the biggest difference in my life. I am getting more independent and self-confident. You are on your own without your family. You are meeting foreign/ unfamiliar people and places. Besides, you are working 45 hours per week and you are living at your work. Being a Care Professional is the best thing I could do for myself! (getting more independent, self-confident and gaining new experiences) Thank you!"

We look forward to hearing how the program makes a difference to you! At Apex Social, we are always available to support you in your success!



PART SEVEN: LIFE IN THE U.S.

This section includes useful information about life in the U.S., including everything from temperatures and transportation to shopping and small talk to cost of living and crime. For more information about the U.S., you may find it useful to purchase a guidebook for the city or state where you will be living. Options abound – visit your local bookstore, Amazon.com or LonelyPlanet.com to see what is available for your new home. Or, see what your local library has to offer.

Geography & Time Zones

The United States of America (also referred to as The United States, the States, USA, the US, or America) is the third-largest country in the world (geographically), just behind Russia and Canada. It has a population of 300+ million, a total of fifty states plus the District of Columbia (as well as an assortment of small territories), and shares borders with Canada (to the north) and Mexico (to the south).

The U.S. has 6 different time zones including: Eastern Standard Time (EST), Central Standard Time (CST), Mountain Standard Time (MST), Pacific Standard Time (PST), Alaskan Standard Time (AST) and Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time (HST). Most U.S. states follow “daylight savings” which means clocks are advanced one hour during summer months. Currently, daylight savings time starts on the second Sunday in March and ends on the first Sunday in November. U.S. children (and adults!) are reminded to “spring forward” and “fall back” to remember when to change the clocks. During daylight savings, time zones names are altered slightly (e.g., Eastern Standard Time (EST) becomes Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), etc.). The website www.timeanddate.com is useful for calculating time zones around the world.

Climate, Weather and Temperatures

Due to its size, latitude and geographic features the U.S. has a range of climates and microclimates – from tropical (Hawaii) to subarctic (Alaska) and everything in between. The Internet offers a variety of websites with information about climate and weather, most notably www.weather.com. Temperature in the U.S. is measured in degrees Fahrenheit. The table below includes some conversions from Celsius into Fahrenheit. More detailed conversation information can be found online and most mobile phones offer automatic conversions.

Converting Celsius to Fahrenheit

- From Celsius to Fahrenheit: Multiply the °C temperature by 1.8. Then add 32. This is the temperature in °F.
- From Fahrenheit to Celsius: Subtract 32 from the °F temperature. Then divide by 9. Then multiply by 5. This is the temperature in °C.

°Celsius	°Fahrenheit
-10	14
0	32
10	50
20	68
30	86
40	104
50	122

Language & Ethnic Groups

While the U.S. does not have an official language, its primary language is English. Spanish is the second most common language in the country. The U.S. is racially and ethnically diverse and its Census Bureau recognizes six ethnic and racial categories: White American, Black or African American, Native American and Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and people of two or more races. In addition, the Census Bureau also classifies Americans as “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino” (which means Hispanic and Latino Americans are a racially diverse ethnic group). White Americans make up the racial majority of the U.S., African Americans are the largest racial minority, and Hispanic and Latino Americans are the largest ethnic minority.

Banks, Currency & Cost of Living

Most Americans use ATMs to deposit and withdraw money, though some still visit bank and cash checks. ATMs are frequently located outside of banks and available 24 hours a day. Banking hours are limited and most banks are only open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Though some banks have limited banking hours on Saturday morning, most banks are closed on the weekends.

The U.S. dollar is the official currency of the U.S. and comes in both paper bills and coins. The symbol (\$) or “USD” refers to the U.S. dollar. The paper bills have values of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$50, and \$100 and the coins have values of 1 cent (a penny), 5 cents (a nickel), 10 cents (a dime), and 25 cents (a quarter). Americans often refer to the currency as “bucks” (or “a buck”). For the most current international exchange rates and a currency converter tool visit www.xe.com.

Cost of living in the U.S. varies considerably. As with most countries, the cost of living will be higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Large metropolitan areas such as New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Atlanta, San Diego, San Jose, and Washington D.C. are some of the most expensive cities in the U.S.



U.S. Holidays & Other Important Dates

The most commonly observed holidays in the U.S. are the U.S. federal holidays. The U.S. federal government observes these holidays but cannot enforce them. Each state has jurisdiction over their holidays, and it is also at the discretion of each company, organization, corporation and university to make their own choices on whether to observe these holidays. Generally speaking, the holidays that are the most universally observed across the U.S. include New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Holiday	Date
New Year's Day	January 1
Martin Luther King Day	Third Monday in January
President's Day	Third Monday in February
Memorial Day	Last Monday in May
Independence Day	July 4
Labor Day	First Monday in September
Columbus Day	Second Monday in October
Veteran's Day	Second Monday in November
Thanksgiving Day	Fourth Thursday in November
Christmas Day	December 25

Note: As a participant in the Apex Social program, you are entitled to four paid holidays during your 12-month program. You do not automatically have the above dates as non-working holidays as your Host Family may need you to work. Discuss time off during the holidays with your Host Family.

Other important dates and celebrations in the U.S. are listed below:

Important Date/ Celebration	Date
Inauguration Day	January 20 (Every Four Years)
Groundhog Day	February 2
Valentine's Day	February 14
Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday)	The Day Before Ash Wednesday (varies)
Daylight Savings Time Begins	Early March (varies)
St. Patrick's Day	March 17
April Fool's Day	April 1
Tax Day	April 15
Cinco de Mayo	May 5
Mother's Day	Second Sunday in May
Father's Day	Third Sunday in June
Halloween	October 31
Daylight Savings Time Ends	Early Novemeber (varies)
Election Day	First Tuesday on/after November 2
Black Friday	Day After Thanksgiving

U.S. Politics

The U.S. is a federal constitutional republic led by the President of the United States. The President, Congress and judiciary (court system) share powers reserved to the national government and the federal government shares sovereignty with the state governments. This is why laws may vary from state to state. The U.S. has two main political parties – the Democrats and the Republicans. There are also some smaller third parties including: the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Constitution Party. It is generally not considered polite to ask an American about their political views or to discuss politics in general except with close friends. Politics, in general, are considered a private and controversial subject for Americans.

U.S. Library System

The U.S. has an extensive system of local public libraries that lend books, e-books, DVD movies, music, magazines and more. They also have computer stations and community-related programs such as book clubs and movie screenings. Lenders must have a library card that can be obtained from the local library by showing proof of residency (a driver's license with a local address is usually sufficient – but check with your local library for specific requirements). Most libraries provide library cards at no charge and borrowing materials is free for a period of several weeks (varies depending upon the library).

Restaurants & Eating Out

Americans love to “eat out” at restaurants and studies have shown that most Americans eat out between 4-5 meals per week. Gathering at a restaurant or café is a social affair and may be part of a regular tradition (e.g., Friday pizza night).

Categories of Restaurants

Most U.S. cities and even smaller towns have an assortment of restaurants ranging from fast food to fine dining. Usually the most inexpensive options are casual, “fast food” establishments such as McDonalds, Baja Fresh, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Dominos – to name just a few. Most offer drive-thru or take-out orders and tend to focus on a particular type of food (burger, pizza, chicken, tacos, etc.). Fine dining establishments, the most expensive restaurants, provide a full-service, sit-down dining experience and are usually reserved for special occasions. Restaurants in the middle are often called “family restaurants” and can range from chains (such as Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Outback Steakhouse, The Cheesecake Factory) to individual family-run establishments that may focus on anything from typical American cuisine to a particular ethnic food. While most family restaurants offer sit down service, some offer take-out and others offer all-you-can-eat buffets for one set price.

Ethnic Variety

Restaurant cuisine in the U.S. is greatly influenced by the country's different cultures and populations. Especially in larger cities you can find a variety of cuisines including Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Burmese, Italian, Mediterranean, Mexican, Brazilian, Greek, German, French, Irish, even Mongolian!

Meal Times

While restaurant opening hours vary, generally speaking breakfast is available between 6 and 11 a.m., lunch is served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and dinner from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Fast food

restaurants are generally open all day (some 24 hours per day) as are many mid-range establishments. Most fine dining restaurants are only open for a few hours at lunch and then in the evenings. Families with children tend to eat out earlier than those without children, often going to dinner at 5 or 6 p.m. in order to accommodate bedtimes. In larger cities, going out for dinner around 7 p.m. is a popular time, but be aware that many restaurant kitchens stop preparing food by 9 or 10 p.m.

Reservations

Reservations are often required for fine dining establishments and may also be accepted at some family restaurants. For popular restaurants without reservations, it is common to wait up to one hour for a table, especially on the weekends or during peak hours (usually 6-8 p.m. for dinner). Going early (5:30 or 6 p.m.) or going late (8:30 or 9 p.m.) can help you evade the crowds.

Water, Drinks and Alcohol

American restaurants do not charge for water and in many cases it is immediately brought to your table. However, be aware that this is almost always tap water (which is safe to drink in the U.S.). If you would like mineral water or sparkling mineral water, you must order this or mention it specifically to your waiter. Some fine dining restaurants will automatically provide you with bottled mineral water (which you will be charged for) unless you specifically ask for tap water. Many family restaurants offer free refills on certain drinks (most often sodas but sometimes iced tea or lemonade). Alcoholic beverages are not available at fast food restaurants but are in most other restaurants. You will be asked to show ID to prove that you are over 21, before being served an alcoholic beverage.

Turning Tables

Unlike most European restaurants, where a group may stay at their table throughout the evening, some popular restaurants expect to “turn tables” at least once or twice during the night. Turning tables means serving more than one group of people at a particular table during the course of the evening.

Portion Size

American restaurants are known for their extremely large portions – this is especially common in family restaurants and chain restaurants but less so in fine dining establishments. Note - it is socially acceptable, even in fine dining establishments, to ask your waiter to give you your leftover food so you can eat it later. Often your waiter will ask you if you’d like your leftovers wrapped up to take with you (sometimes called a “doggie bag”).

Tips

Tipping your server is expected (and in some cases required) outside of fast food restaurants. Waiters work for less than minimum wage in most restaurants and therefore tips (also known as gratuities) are an important part of their overall income. The usual tip for good service is 15-20%. Some people tip less if they were unsatisfied with their service, but it is rare to leave no tip at all. Some restaurants will automatically include a gratuity charge between 15-20%, particularly for large groups (more than 4-5 people). Your bill will reference if a tip has already been included.

Payment Methods

All restaurants will accept cash as payment and most will also accept credit cards. Some will also accept payment in traveler's checks. Some smaller restaurants may be cash only – ask your waiter before you order if you are not sure.



Shopping

Shopping is fundamental to American life. Americans are known as big shoppers and American stores sell a shockingly broad assortment of items, especially compared to other countries. For some, shopping is less focused on need than on entertainment or distraction. For example, the term “retail therapy” means going shopping as a way to cope with a bad day or after learning disappointing news and the term “window shopping” means going shopping without plans to buy anything – just to see what is available. It is perfectly ok to browse in a store without buying anything.

Shopping Malls/Centers

Going to the shopping mall or shopping center can be a full day affair. Most shopping malls have a variety of small shops including clothing, jewelry, makeup, shoes, housewares, food and others that are anchored with one or more large department stores (Macy's, Bloomingdales, etc.). Most have food courts and movie theaters and many have scheduled events (everything from fashion shows to concerts). Some malls may even have indoor playgrounds or spas. While most malls have set open/close times, individual stores (particularly large department stores) may open sooner or have longer hours during the holiday season or special sales.

Grocery Stores/Supermarkets

Most cities have numerous grocery stores (also called supermarkets) and operating hours vary – including some stores that are open 24 hours a day. Most grocery stores are “one stop shops” – which means you can purchase everything from fruits and vegetables to meat to bakery items to toiletries under the same roof. Most stores now sell organic groceries and some also sell specialty health food items. Prepared food is also common in many larger grocery stores – from fully cooked roasted chickens to salad and sandwich bars to full dinners. Most grocery stores offer free membership cards (or club cards) that allow customers to take advantage of sales or receive extra discounts. Your Host Family will likely have a membership card but you can easily obtain one for yourself by asking a store employee.

Online Shopping

Online shopping is increasingly common in the U.S. Amazon.com is the largest online-only shopping site but there are many others. Most department stores and clothing stores also sell items through their websites. Groceries can also be bought online and delivered.

Sales & Discounts

At most stores, prices are often deeply discounted at particular times of year – including the end of a season (end-of-summer, after Christmas, etc.) as well as during particular holidays (Labor Day and Memorial Day sales are especially common). In addition, some stores appear to be having sales of some kind all the time! Additional discount opportunities are also frequently possible – for example, many stores offer in store and online coupons on their websites or discounts for signing up for emails or catalogs. Most stores keep their sales items toward the back of the store.

The price tags on goods in U.S. stores do not reflect the item’s final price. In most cases, a sales tax, ranging from 2.9% to 11.5% depending on state and region, will be added to the price shown on the tag when you check out.

U.S. Mail & Shipping

The mail service in the United States is considered to be one of the most reliable and competent mail services in the world. Operated by an independent establishment of the executive branch of the U.S. government, the United States Postal Service (USPS) operates more than thousands of post offices in the country and delivers mail to every household and business from Monday through Saturday – excluding national holidays. Postal hours vary but are usually 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Some post offices have Saturday morning hours, but many are closed on the weekend. While packages must be sent from a post office location, letters with the correct postage can be mailed via any USPS mailbox (identifiable by the blue paint, the USPS logo and the mail pick-up timetable). For information on the correct postage amount, visit the website of the United States Postal Service.

In addition to the USPS, there are also various other carriers that offer mail and shipping services throughout the US and the world. Companies such as DHL, FedEx, and UPS specialize in expedited shipping and are priced at a premium. These companies have physical locations in numerous cities, as well as websites that allow for an array of services to be completed online.

While stamps can be purchased at vending machines, commercial retail outlets, banks, credit unions, and Automated Postal Centers, it is important to be aware that any outlet not operated by the USPS will place a surcharge on stamps.

Sports

Sports play a fundamental role in daily life in the U.S. both as an activity and as entertainment.

Youth Sports

Children typically start playing team sports such as T-ball (baseball for kids) or soccer at the age of 3 or 4 years old. This continues throughout elementary, middle and high school, to varying degrees, where sports are taken very seriously. Popular high school sports include football (American football), basketball, baseball and soccer, as well as volleyball, lacrosse, field hockey, wrestling, swimming, tennis, golf, and track and field. Sports are quite competitive and teams from one school compete with teams from another school, usually ending with a championship game of the two best teams. In smaller towns, it is not uncommon for much of the town to turn out to a Friday night high school football or basketball game and for there to be friendly rivalries between the teams.

Professional and College Sports

Americans love to attend sporting matches and also to watch sports on television – particularly men’s football, basketball, and baseball, three of the most popular sports in the country. These sports – at the college and professional level – draw tremendous numbers of dedicated fans and are important social events for many people. For example, a college or professional football game can be a daylong social event that includes a pre-game “tailgate” party – basically a barbeque in the parking lot – followed by the actual game. The most famous sports-related gathering in the U.S. is the Super Bowl – the championship game for professional football. This is a national event that takes place in January or February with much of the U.S. watching on television. Many Americans organize Super Bowl parties and consume an endless amount of typical football “finger food” such as hot dogs, nachos, hamburger, chips and dips, beer and soda during the game.

Alcohol, Smoking & Drugs

U.S. laws on drinking alcohol, smoking and taking drugs are important to understand and in some cases, vary from state to state. Be sure you are aware of the overall laws in the U.S. and the particular laws for your state.

Alcohol Use

The legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21 and Americans are not as open and relaxed with alcohol as many European countries. If you are not age 21 or older, you may not drink or purchase alcohol in the U.S. Laws regarding underage drinking are severe and may include suspension of your driver’s license for at least a year. If you are age 21 and older and plan to drink, be sure to designate one person as a “designated driver” – someone who will agree to stay sober for the entire night so you have a safe ride home. Or, make other arrangements (e.g., Uber, taxi, etc.). Do not drive if you have been drinking and do not get into a car with someone who has been drinking and plans to drive. U.S. laws regarding drinking and driving are especially severe and may include jail time in addition to fines and the suspension of your license.

Smoking

Smoking in the U.S. is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 – and most vendors require a photo ID before they will sell you cigarettes. Even though the Marlboro Man originated in the U.S, smoking is less socially acceptable now than it has ever been before and most Americans do not smoke. Smoking is prohibited in most public places including office buildings, schools, movie theaters, airplanes and other forms of transportation, shops and grocery stores. In addition, many restaurants and bars no longer allow smoking (this varies from state to state) and require people who smoke outside to be a certain number of feet from the entrance to the building. Many Americans have strong anti-smoking feelings given the known medical consequences of second-hand smoke.

Apex Social Group is a non-smoking program and your Host Family may become very upset if you smoke. You should avoid smoking during your Care Professional year. Remember that even social smoking can bring the presence of smoke into your Host Family home.

Drug Usage

With only a few exceptions, U.S. law strictly prohibits controlled substances (drugs). For example, while the use, sale and possession of marijuana (cannabis) is illegal under federal law in the U.S., some states have created exemptions for medical use as well as decriminalized non-medical use. Care Professionals are not allowed to partake of controlled substances during their time in the U.S. and Apex Social Group is a non-smoking program.



Small Talk

You might be surprised by the casual nature of American conversation when you first experience it. Americans almost always introduce themselves by their first name, even in business settings. It is unusual to hear someone introduced with his or her full name and title. Most people shake hands when they meet for the first time – hugging or kissing someone that is not a close friend is not widely accepted in American culture.

Americans always ask, “How are you?” or a similar phrase in passing. The most common and socially acceptable answer to such a question is “I am fine – and how are you?” Unless you are talking to a close friend, this question is asked out of politeness. They are not actually interested in hearing how you are feeling. In fact, by giving any other answer than “I am fine” you might even create confusion with a stranger, as he or she did not expect you to go into further detail.

Additionally, Americans are usually very friendly and curious people. Do not be surprised if a stranger on the airplane, at a bus station, or in the supermarket line engages you in a conversation by asking numerous questions about your job, your family, and your life. While in most cases people are just being friendly, do not feel pressure to engage in a conversation if you get a strange feeling from that person. Trust your gut instinct and use caution in providing strangers with personal information. Simply excuse yourself in a friendly manner from the conversation.

“Thank you” and “Excuse me” are two of the most frequently used phrases in American conversation. Both of them are frequently used out of politeness and are relatively uncommon in this context in other cultures. Americans tend to thank everyone for everything: don’t be surprised if the cashier in the supermarket thanks you after you have paid or a passenger in the metro thanks the driver before exiting the train. You will hear “Excuse me” most commonly after someone has cleared their throat or sneezed, or when someone is passing by and might potentially bump into you.

Compliments are rather widespread in American conversation. People openly comment on hairstyles, cars, homes, and even on children. Americans proudly present themselves and their possessions and always appreciate your attention to these details, as well as your compliments. When you receive a compliment, it is polite to simply acknowledge it and thank the other person, instead of denying it (as is often done in other cultures).

Last, but not least, note that Americans are proud people. Be careful in criticizing Americans in respect to politics or their way of life no matter how justified you feel in this matter. Your comments may be perceived as rude and intrusive. With that in mind, use common sense and good judgment in your remarks and always consider the feelings of your conversational partner, as this is a courtesy in any culture or foreign country.

Crime

It’s important to make safe choices while abroad. Always be aware of your surroundings and trust your gut instinct if something feels strange to you. Avoid walking by yourself at night unless you are sure of the neighborhood. Have a friend walk you to your car or make sure you

park in a well-lit area. Be aware of pickpockets, particularly in crowded areas such as public transportation, museums, festivals and popular tourist sites. Talk to your Host Family or Area Director if you are uncertain about the safety of an area.

Transportation

Distances in the U.S. are vast. In the time you can cross multiple countries in Europe, you may still be in the same state in the U.S. (this is particularly true in California). While Americans rely heavily on their cars and driving – more so than other countries – the U.S. also has systems of public transportation, long distance buses and trains, and an assortment of airlines that crisscross the country.

Cars

Cars are as common in the U.S. as bicycles and pedestrians are in most other parts of the world. The average American family owns at least one car, if not two – while some families may have even more. Far from an extravagance, in most parts of the U.S., it would be almost impossible to live without a car. Only a handful of the largest U.S. cities have highly developed public transportation systems that would make life without a car feasible. Unless you are living in one of these cities, driving a car will likely be part of your daily routine.

Renting a Car

Renting a car in the U.S. is relatively easy as there are numerous car rental agencies throughout the country. One caveat – generally, you must be at least 25 years old to rent a car in the U.S. Some rental car agencies may rent to you if you are younger (over 21), but will likely charge you an extra daily fee.

Rental car agencies are common at airports, in city center locations, and in areas frequented by tourists. One-way rentals are possible but may incur an extra fee. Unlike Europe, most U.S. cars at rental car agencies come with automatic transmissions. Most rental cars can only be used in the U.S. (no trips to Canada or Mexico). Each person driving must be listed on the rental car agreement. Various insurance options are offered at the time of reservation or pick up. These are additional fees and can be expensive - but are a good idea unless your credit card insurance offers you coverage. Check to be sure.

Some of the most common car rental agencies in the U.S. are: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Hertz and National. Rental cars may also be booked online through travel sites. It is not necessary to pay when making a reservation but many car rental companies offer special pricing online or provide discounts if you pay online when you make your reservation. Only pay up front if you are 100% sure you will use the reservation – these types of reservations are non-refundable. Payment by credit card is usually required.

In addition, some U.S. cities offer car-sharing services which allow for short-term rental of vehicles.

Public Transportation

In the U.S., public transportation systems are not as developed as they are in some other countries around the world. It is important to be aware that most rural cities provide limited

public transportation, if any at all. In areas where public transportation is non-existent, it is advisable to organize a car. Major metropolitan areas and some other large cities, however, have extensive and relatively reliable public transportation systems that include buses, trains, subways and even cable cars! Each city operates a website with detailed information pertaining to their public transportation system. Those sites can generally be easily found via Google or through the local tourist office. Your Area Director should also be able to provide you information on local public transportation.

Cities with highly developed public transportation include New York City; Washington, D.C.; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; San Francisco, CA; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Atlanta, Georgia. Depending upon where you live in other cities, there may be limited public transportation that is useful – this is true in cities such as Los Angeles, CA and San Diego, CA, as well as others.

Long-Distance Buses

The U.S. has a variety of long-distance buses that provide nationwide service. Traveling by bus in the U.S. is one of the most economical options for cross-country travel – and often far less expensive than trains, even for the same routes. Tickets can be purchased online or at bus terminal stations, which are often located in city centers. Booking ahead is important during busy travel times (holidays, weekends, etc.) and can provide you with major discounts. Various websites exist that can compare transportation costs across companies (and even between buses and trains for the same routes).

Greyhound is the most popular long distance bus service but there are others, including discounted buses that run on popular routes and have highly discounted tickets. Amenities vary, but many buses provide video entertainment and some even have Wi-Fi. Check online for luggage guidelines and limitations. Most bus companies are not responsible for lost or stolen items, so be sure to lock your luggage and take valuables onboard with you.

Long-Distance Trains

While the U.S. does have a highly developed passenger train system, it is not as comprehensive as most European countries. In most cases, traveling by train is more expensive than traveling by bus and requires more planning. Amtrak's train routes cover the entire U.S. and make stops in most major cities. Tickets can be purchased online (with a credit card) or at train stations (credit card or cash). Tickets can be purchased in advance and there are often discounts for early purchase. Amtrak offers limited student discounts on single journeys, but has special discounts on rail passes for extensive travel in the U.S. Sleeping accommodations are available (with a surcharge).

Air Travel

The U.S. is well served by an assortment of major and minor airlines, including a few discount airlines with limited service. With sufficient advance purchase, flights can be cheaper than train travel on many routes. Due to the events of September 11, 2001, screening at U.S. airports can be a time-consuming activity. Make sure to allow yourself sufficient time to go through security. You must arrive and be checked in at least one hour in advance for a domestic flight and at least 2 hours in advance for an international flight. During peak travel time, it is wise to allow for extra time.

Accommodation

The U.S. offers an assortment of accommodation options for travelers – from inexpensive youth hostels to five star hotels. Making reservations is vital for bigger cities or during popular travel times (holiday weekends, etc.). Booking online is the most popular way to make a reservation and there are a variety of websites and services that can help and also offer discounted stays by comparing offers across multiple sites. Accommodation costs are per room, not per person – with the exception of youth hostels – and most standard hotel rooms in the U.S. have two full or queen sized beds. Some hotels offer discounts for students, members of the military or those with an auto club membership (AAA). Check-in times are usually mid to late afternoon and checkout times are usually late morning – but these vary from hotel to hotel. If you will be arriving late at night you may want to call the hotel to confirm your arrival. All but the smallest, family run motels usually have someone available at the front desk 24/7. Youth hostels usually have their own specific guidelines – confirm with them directly.

Airbnb is another popular option for accommodation and is available across the U.S. and internationally. Individuals can rent a room or an entire apartment or home from the owner, often paying less than they would for a comparable hotel room.



PART EIGHT: DISCOVER A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES WITH APEX SOCIAL

When you join Apex as a Care Professional, you are welcomed to our global community for a lifetime. Apex has many exciting opportunities beyond your first year in the United States, including extending your program, working with the Apex Career Center, becoming a Care Professional in Australia and repeating the Care Professional program.

Extending Your Professional Exchange Program

The duration of the Care Professional exchange program is 12 months (one year). But, if you want to extend your program, you may apply for a six, nine or 12-month extension. As a Care Professional, extending your program can be a wonderful opportunity to continue to build on your international work experience for future job opportunities. Take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity to work abroad as a social Care Professional. You can see more of the country and visit places you might not have had the chance to travel to during your first year. Plus you will have the opportunity to continue your educational component and take new and exciting classes and further improve your English skills

Care Professionals may extend with their current Host Family or with a new Host Family.

Continuing with your current Host Family has many benefits, including:

- Deepening your relationship with your Host Family
- Spending more time with current friends
- Further explore the city/area you live in

Extending with a new Host Family has many benefits, including:

- Getting to know a new Host Family
- Experiencing life in a different city/area
- Meeting new friends



As a valued member of the Apex Social family, when you extend your stay in the US for an additional 6, 9 or 12 months, you get to enjoy exclusive benefits designed especially for you!

Below are some benefits you can receive if you choose to extend your experience:

12 MONTH EXTENSION	9 MONTH EXTENSION	6 MONTH EXTENSION
Travel home to visit your family and friends and renew your visa	-	-
\$200 Educational Stipend	-	-
\$1000 American Express Travel Voucher	\$500 American Express Travel Voucher	\$300 American Express Travel Voucher
VIP Package to Career Center - €250 value	VIP Package to Career Center - €250 value	VIP Package to Career Center - €250 value
Free Surf Lesson - \$150 value	Free Surf Lesson - \$150 value	Free Surf Lesson - \$150 value
Invitation to apply for an Internship at the Curaçao Dolphin Therapy Center	-	-

12 MONTH EXTENSION DETAILS

- ***Travel home to visit your family and friends and renew your visa.*** Apex Social will reimburse you up to \$800 for a round-trip international flight to your home country.
- ***Receive an extra \$200 Educational Stipend*** to use for the courses of your choice. The stipend is available after your Host Family contribution of \$500.
- ***Receive a \$1,000 American Express Travel Voucher*** to create an amazing experience during your travel month. Explore the US with your travel voucher that can be used anywhere that accepts American Express in the US.*
- ***An invitation to apply for a 3-month Curaçao Dolphin Therapy Center Internship (a.k.a. CDTC).***

- The CDTC is the leading dolphin assisted therapy center in the world, offering a unique and effective therapy program in a beautiful and inspiring Caribbean destination. An international team of therapists and psychologists, well trained in their field, work together with the CDTC's therapy dolphins to support patients 3 years of age and older. CDTC's unique therapy concept reflects the latest research in the field, and focuses on an outcome-oriented rehabilitation program that is customized to meet the individual needs of each patient.

- As a therapy assistant, you will work together with therapists of different professions to leverage these amazing animals in a unique therapy setting. With only a limited number of positions available every year, this is a very special opportunity!

9 MONTH EXTENSION DETAILS

- **Receive a \$500 American Express Travel Voucher** to use during your travel month. Plan your travel adventure using your voucher anywhere that accepts American Express in the US.*

6 MONTH EXTENSION DETAILS

- **Receive a \$300 American Express Travel Voucher** to use during your travel month. Make the most of your travels by using your voucher anywhere that accepts American Express in the US.*

In addition, all Apex Social 2nd Year Care Professionals will receive:

- ✓ **A VIP package with the Apex Career Center that includes the following services:**
 - Two personal career coaching sessions to help you define and accomplish your goals
 - Help with your CV/résumé and LinkedIn profile
- ✓ **The option to redeem a free surf lesson with professional surfer Rocky McKinnon, of McKinnon Surf and SUP Lessons, in Huntington Beach, CA.**

We invite you to continue your Apex Social journey and deepen your professional skills, gain more international experience and enjoy further travel. We hope you find the extension benefits will enhance your experience! As always, Apex Social is here to help you unlock your potential!

All Care Professionals who are in good standing may apply for a program extension. Your Regional Director will contact you about 6 months after your arrival to provide information about the extension program. If you are interested in learning more about the extension program, you can also contact your Regional Director to set up an appointment.

Please note:

All Care Professionals interested in extending, must complete their educational requirement by the 10th month of their program and submit evidence in order for Apex Social Group to apply for your extension with the U.S. Department of State. Extension applications must be submitted 60 days prior to your program end date.

Returning to Your Home Country

Your experience in the U.S. will go by very quickly – more quickly than you can imagine! You will remember the first day you met your Host Family and it will be hard to believe that you will soon be returning to your home country. The below information will guide you in your departure.

Departure Logistics

Apex Social Group will guide you through departure logistics, including booking your return flight. You will have the opportunity to travel during a 30-day grace period. Since each Care Professional has a 30-day grace period following the end of the program, your departure date may not be the day after your program ends. Apex Social Group will email you a few months before the end of your program with more information about choosing your departure date.

Thirty-Day Travel Period

Care Professionals are not permitted to work during the 30-day grace period following the program. This 30-day time period provides you the opportunity to travel around the U.S. before you return to your home country. For additional information about the 30-day grace period see the section entitled “Care Professional Vacation & Travel Guidelines.”

Transition Period

You will likely experience mixed feelings during the last few weeks of the program – as will your Host Family. While you may be ready for your next adventure, you will likely be very sad to be leaving your family. And, your Host Family will likely be feeling the same. Your host children may be quite attached to you, so it is important to help them through the transition period. Perhaps you can plan for future Skype calls, trade email addresses, and send them a postcard from your travels.

No matter how much you prepare, saying goodbye to your Host Family will be an emotional time. Many Care Professionals keep in touch with their Host Families long after the program ends, via email, WhatsApp, Skype calls, photos, birthday cards, holiday communications – even visits! This is a testament to the positive and long-term cross-cultural bonds created by the Care Professional exchange program.

Remember to ask your Host Family for a letter of recommendation. The letter should contain information on your skills, abilities, job performance, accomplishments, and duration of your engagement with your Host Family. This letter of recommendation will be useful to your future career and you can add a copy of it to future applications.



Apex Social Career Center

The Apex Social Career Center is available to help you successfully transition back to your home country and leverage your experience abroad to find your dream job or next adventure! We offer personalized career coaching to help you market yourself to stand out among other applicants. The Apex Career Center team will partner with you to explore career opportunities after completing your time abroad and will help refer you to a new job or further university studies. Finding a job without any extra work through research or applying so you can completely focus on your time abroad and still prepare your next career step, amazing isn't it?

The Career Center Team will be in touch with you before your program ends to introduce themselves and get to know you and your future goals. From there, they will partner with you to edit your resume and LinkedIn page, assist you with preparing your job application, provide interview coaching, arrange job interviews and help preparing for them as well as showing you how to ask for references that set you apart from other candidates. The Career Center team will assist you with referrals to job opportunities that fit your vision and create an individual return plan with you. And after returning home, they will continue to stay in close touch to assist you every step of the way.

Apex Social Alumni Community

After finishing your participation in the program and your time abroad you will automatically become a part of the Apex Social Alumni Community. Stay in contact with us, participate in meet ups, get updates and to know what's new at Apex Social after your time abroad and connect with other people who have the same passion as you: Helping people through teaching, nursing or therapy.

Repeating the Program

All Care Professional participants are required to return to their home countries after completion of the program. Qualified Care Professionals are permitted to participate in the Care Professional program again – but only after two years of residence outside of the United States following the end date of their initial exchange visitor program. In addition, former holders of a J-1 visa may be subject to the two-year foreign residence requirement of Section 212(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. A person subject to the two-year foreign residence requirement may not be eligible to apply for certain other visa categories for a period of at least two years after completion of the exchange visitor program. For additional information, please visit the website of your local U.S. embassy or consulate.

Become a Care Professional in Australia with Apex

After successful completion of one or two years as a Care Professional in the U.S., you may not be ready for your adventures to end. Apex offers the opportunity to participate in our Australian Program to all US program participants. If you would like to learn more about traveling to Australia at the end of your experience in the U.S., please let us know. This is a great chance to add to your professional experience while traveling and experiencing new cultures under the safety and care of a trusted organization.

Appendix

This appendix contains important reference documents regarding the U.S. Department of State Care Professional program as well as Apex Social Group's specific program. These documents may be useful during the course of the program. Please contact us if you have any questions. The following documents or links to the documents are included in this section:

- The U.S. Department of State Welcome Letter
- The Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure (Provided by the U.S. Department of State)
- Apex Social Group's Care Professional Service Agreement
- Apex Social Group's Childcare Agreement
- U.S. Department of State Program Regulations

The U.S. Department of State Welcome Letter



United States Department of State

***Bureau of Educational and Cultural
Affairs Washington, DC 20522***

January 8, 2019

Dear Au Pair:

Congratulations on your decision to become an au pair on the Exchange Visitor Program! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, I want you to know that your decision to come to the United States is important to us. We want your stay to be a positive and memorable experience as you build connections that will last a lifetime.

As an au pair, you are part of a U.S. Department of State cultural exchange program. Like thousands of au pairs from around the world, will have the opportunity to share your language, culture, and customs with your American Host Family and your host community. Your participation in this program fosters a greater understanding between our countries.

You are a valued guest in the United States, and we want you to succeed in this program. Your goal should be to learn as much as you can about American customs, values, and culture and to build strong relationships with your Host Family and new friends. You will be living with a Host Family that may have different rules for their children and a different way of life from what you are used to, so keeping an open mind will be important to your success.

You and your Host Family have agreed to follow the program rules that govern the au pair exchange program. We hope you have taken the time to review the program rules carefully and that you understand your rights and responsibilities. Your work should never exceed 10 hours of childcare a day and 45 hours of childcare a week. Your Host Family should also make sure your schedule allows you to take at least six credit hours of academic coursework. Coursework, as well as enjoying cultural activities are an important part of your exchange program. If you have any questions or do not understand your rights and responsibilities, please contact your U.S. sponsor.

Your U.S. sponsor is your primary point of contact throughout your stay in the United States, and you should contact them with any issues. Your sponsor is identified on your Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Program (J-1) Status. If you have any questions about your exchange program, if you need assistance of any kind while you are here, if you feel your rights are being violated, or if something just does not feel right to you, please contact your U.S. sponsor. It is your sponsor's responsibility to help you with any issues, needs, or concerns you may have.

Your U.S. sponsor should have given you materials on your rights as a temporary worker in the United States, as well as an emergency telephone contact number in your program orientation materials. This telephone number should be available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, if you have concerns or issues that your U.S. sponsor has not resolved, or you find you cannot reach your sponsor, please contact the Department of State through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline (1-866-283-9090), which is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or for less time sensitive issues via e-mail at JVisas@state.gov. Moreover, because your safety is of the utmost importance to us, the Department of State has prepared information to make sure you can always get help if you ever need it. Please review the information in the following link before you depart your home country: <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/rights-protections-temporary-workers.html>

As an au pair on the Exchange Visitor Program, you are now part of the alumni network of over one million current and former exchange participants. We welcome you to join the International Exchange alumni website – a place where past and present U.S. exchange program participants find tools to advance their communities and our world. Membership to this exclusive online community grants access to: grant opportunities; professional development resources; exclusive video webchats with VIPs; and 20,000 online magazines and newspapers. Members can also: network with fellow alumni around the world; find the latest research in your field; develop plans for your alumni association, or find an association to join; and read alumni success stories, perspectives, and ideas. To join please visit: <https://alumni.state.gov/>

We are pleased that you made the decision to participate in the Exchange Visitor Program, and I hope you enjoy your stay in the United States.

Sincerely,



Director, Policy & Program Support
for Private Sector Exchange

The Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure
(Provided by the U.S. Department of State)



The Exchange Visitor Program
WELCOME BROCHURE

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
United States Department of State

The Department of State welcomes you to the United States. We are pleased to receive you as an exchange visitor. As an Exchange Visitor Program participant, you will acquire an experience in the United States, and as an ambassador of your country you will help educate the American people about your home country and culture.

This brochure will help you understand the purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program, provide you with information on contacting the Department of State, and introduce you to some of the major requirements of the Exchange Visitor Program regulations.

THE EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE administers the Exchange Visitor Program under the provisions of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended. The Act promotes mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange. The Exchange Visitor Program provides foreign nationals opportunities to participate in exchange programs in the United States with the expectation that on completion of their exchange program, they will return home to share their experiences.

Sponsors – The U.S. Department of State designates U.S. organizations such as government agencies, academic institutions, educational and cultural organizations, and corporations to administer exchange visitor programs. These organizations are known as sponsors. Sponsors screen and select exchange visitors to participate in their programs based on the regulations governing the exchange activity and stated in 22 CFR Part 62. Sponsors provide exchange visitors pre-arrival information, an orientation, and monitor activities throughout their exchange program. Sponsors offer or identify cross-cultural activities that will expose exchange visitors to American society, culture, and institutions. You are encouraged to participate in activities that provide them with an opportunity to share their language, culture, and history with Americans.

Responsible Officers – Sponsors appoint individuals as responsible officers and alternate responsible officers to advise and assist exchange visitors. These officers issue the Certificate of Eligibility (Form DS-2019), and conduct official communications with the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on your behalf. Your sponsor's role is to help you manage your program. If problems arise or you have questions, your sponsor is there

to help you. Should you have any questions about the regulations or any aspect of your exchange program, your initial and primary contact is your sponsor. Unless provided specific contact information by your sponsor you should contact the person whose name and telephone number can be found on your Form DS-2019.

Exchange Visitor – An exchange visitor is a foreign national selected by a sponsor to participate in an exchange visitor program and who is seeking to enter or has entered the United States temporarily on a J-1 visa.

Spouse and dependents - Some categories of the Exchange Visitor Program permit a spouse and/or unmarried children, under 21 years of age, to accompany an exchange visitor to the United States. These individuals may apply for J-2 visas with the permission of your sponsor.

REGULATIONS – RULES

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU understand and abide by the Exchange Visitor Program regulations, U.S. laws and sponsor rules. Regular contact with your sponsor will help you keep current with any change which may affect your J-1 visa status.

Some requirements of the Federal regulations and where to find them are indicated below.

Register with your sponsor – Your Form DS-2019 was created in a computerized system known as the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This System is administered by the Department of Homeland Security and is used to collect and maintain information on the current status of non-immigrants and their dependents in the sponsor's program during their stay in the United States.

When you arrive in the United States, you must contact your sponsor to ensure that your data in SEVIS is accurate and updated. Failing to maintain your status could result in serious consequences and may affect your ability to remain in or return to the United States.

Activities and Program Provisions – You entered the United States in a specific program category, and are required to engage in that category and the activity listed on your Form DS-2019. You must comply with the specific program provisions of the regulations relating to your exchange category.

Insurance – You are required to have medical insurance in effect for yourself (J-1), your spouse and any dependents (J-2) for the duration of your program. Some sponsors provide the required insurance for their exchange visitors. Other sponsors may allow you to make your own arrangements or may help to identify insurance carriers. Consult with your responsible officer before the start of your program.

(a) Minimum Insurance Coverage – Insurance shall cover: (1) medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per person per accident or illness; (2) repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000; and (3) expenses associated with medical evacuation in the amount of \$50,000.

(b) **Additional Terms** – A policy secured to fulfill the insurance requirements shall not have a deductible that exceeds \$500 per accident or illness, and must meet other standards specified in the regulations.

(c) **Maintenance of Insurance** – **Willful failure on your part to maintain the required insurance throughout your stay in the United States will result in the termination of your exchange program.**

Maintenance of Valid Program Status – You are required to have a valid and unexpired Form DS-2019. Sponsors may terminate an exchange visitor’s program for violating U.S. laws, Exchange Visitor Program regulations, or the sponsor’s rules governing their particular program.

Required Notifications to Sponsors – You must immediately inform your sponsor if you change your address (residence) or telephone number, or complete or withdraw from your exchange visitor program early. Doing so assists your sponsor in complying with their notification and reporting requirements to the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. Failure to keep your sponsor informed could result in the termination of your program status.

Current Regulations – The Exchange Visitor Program regulations are located in the Code of Federal Regulations, (22 CFR, Part 62) and can be found at the J-1 Visa website: <http://j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/current/regulations-compliance/>.

Contacting the Department of State – The Exchange Visitor Program is administered under the oversight of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Private Sector Exchange, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State
State Annex SA-5, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20522-0505

Report Abuse or Exploitation - if you are mistreated and/or your rights are violated, and your sponsor is not providing the help you need, contact the Department of State for Assistance.

J-1 Visa Emergency Hotline: 1-866-283-9090.*

This line is for use by exchange visitors and third parties in the case of urgent situations. *A Department of State representative is available 24 hours a day.

Regular Communications or questions:

jvisas@state.gov. This e-mail address is to communicate non-emergency issues, questions, and concerns.

Apex Social Group Care Professional Service Agreement

You will receive a signed electronic copy of your Apex Social Group Care Professional Service Agreement.

Apex Social Group Child Care Agreement

You will receive a signed electronic copy of your Childcare Agreement.

U.S. Department of State Program Regulations

You can read the U.S. Department of State Program Regulations online here:

[http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=39698d6bb6f23c75a8e51080bf21e32c&node=22:1.0.1.7.35.2.1.12&rgn=div8)

[SID=39698d6bb6f23c75a8e51080bf21e32c&node=22:1.0.1.7.35.2.1.12&rgn=div8](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=39698d6bb6f23c75a8e51080bf21e32c&node=22:1.0.1.7.35.2.1.12&rgn=div8)

Note: information in this guide is subject to change without notice. Questions or concerns should be directed to Apex Social Group Headquarters.

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