



Information about the Sutherland-Lakewood Exchange Program

Introduction

The Sutherland-Lakewood Student Exchange Program is organised by the Sutherland-Lakewood Sister City Committee Inc. It is one part of the Sister City Agreement between the Sutherland Shire and Lakewood City, Colorado, USA. The exchange is organised by volunteers from the Sutherland Shire, who are members of the Sister City Committee and many are former exchange students and / or the parents of former exchange students.

Lakewood City is an outer suburb of Denver the capital of Colorado. Lakewood and the Sutherland Shire have roughly similar populations and both have a strong relationship with their environment. Sutherland is surrounded by beaches and national parks, and Lakewood is in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Sutherland has a strong surfing and beach culture and Lakewood has a strong skiing and mountaineering culture.

This exchange is a reciprocal exchange, which means that an Australian student is paired with an American student and goes to live with the American family for six months, and then the partner comes to live with the Australian family for the next six months.

Aims

1. As with all sister city programs, this exchange is designed to promote peace and understanding at an international and intercommunity level as well as within the community, through person to person communication.
2. The exchange is an educational exchange. It provides students with an opportunity to study in a foreign country.
3. It is a cultural exchange. To provide students with an experience of a foreign culture.
4. To promote goodwill between the communities of Sutherland and Lakewood.

Selection

To be selected you must be a suitable candidate and you must be able to provide a suitable home for an American Student for six months. The number of American students and Australian students must be the same. That means there has to be a selection process.

The selection process, involves your application, satisfactory completion of the NSW Working With Children Check for all family members 18 years and older, meetings, references, an interview and a home visit. A committee will judge your suitability for the exchange using the following criteria. You will need to be able to demonstrate your suitability to the committee.

Unfortunately some suitable applicants may miss out, if there are not an equal number of suitable applicants in America.



Student Criteria

There are a few things which you must satisfy to qualify for the program. It is essential that applicants:

1. Live in the Sutherland Shire or Helensburgh and go to school in Sutherland Shire with no known plan to move prior to the completion of the Higher School Certificate.
2. Are studying in Year 10 in the year of travel.
3. Are prepared to host an American Student in your home during the six months from January to July, upon your return to Australia.
4. Meet the minimum educational requirements of Jeffco School Board in Lakewood (i.e. at least average academic achievement. This has been equated to a "C average" for the new school reporting system.)
5. Commit to completing Year 12 on return to Australia.
6. Demonstrate an ability and determination to maintain or improve on current school performance.

It is Desirable that applicants possess:

1. Effective communication skills
2. Appropriate maturity and social skills
3. Flexibility
4. Resilience
5. Willingness to participate with enthusiasm
6. Problem solving skills
7. Trustworthiness

Family Criteria

It is Essential that the applicant's family is able to provide:

1. A safe and satisfactory environment for an American student for six months. Safety implies:
 - Satisfactory completion of the NSW WWCC (Working With Children Check) 18 years +
 - Suitable home (Must be hygienic, the student must have their own bed, and have adequate space for privacy and school work).
2. A stable family unit (including the presence of an effective parent having the ability to make effective decisions on parenting).
3. An ability to afford the costs of the program.

It is Desirable that the applicant's family has:

1. Hospitality and the ability to assimilate a new person into the family.
2. Effective communication.
3. Tolerance.
4. A willingness of all family members to participate in the exchange.
5. Parental flexibility including:
 - the ability to accommodate a variety of changing situations
 - willingness to engage in cultural differences and challenges
 - the ability to negotiate new rules when a situation requires it



The Selection Process

The formal selection process begins after the closing date for applications in mid-February and is typically finalised in mid to late March and announced in April.

The Selection Committee evaluates the applications and assesses the applicants and their families at a series of activities including:

- Selection Breakfast
- Home Visits
- Applicant's Picnic
- Mother's Meeting
- Interviews
- Final BBQ

The committee will gather information relating to the criteria listed above, check referees, and after due consideration, make a selection of suitable applicants. If you have not met the essential requirements you will be notified immediately. Once the suitable applicants are identified, the Australian numbers will be compared to the American numbers and a final selection will be made. Applicants will be notified as soon as possible whether they have been selected or not.

How the Exchange Works

Each year a number of Sutherland Shire students (and their families) are selected and paired with students and families from Lakewood City. There are a number of suburbs surrounding Lakewood which are also involved in the exchange. They are often called cities, but they are really like our suburbs. Some of them are Golden, Arvada, Littleton, Wheat Ridge, Lakewood, Morrison, and Evergreen. Have a look at the Suthlak website <http://www.suthlak.com> and you will see some of the present and past students and which suburbs they have lived in.

- The exchange is an educational exchange. Students attend the same school as their exchange partner. School results are important and must be maintained whilst students are overseas. This is the same for both the Australian and American students.
- The exchange is a family exchange. Students live with a family in America and the American student comes and lives with the student's Australian family. The host family takes responsibility for the exchange student in their care. The student becomes a part of the family and relationships often remain for life.
- There are sometimes problems and issue for students. They are away from home for Christmas and important family events, so homesickness may become an issue. Sometimes students have difficulty adjusting to living with a new family. Support is provided via the host families and experienced coordinators.



- This exchange is different to most exchanges. There is a strong network of support for the students and the family. There are coordinators in both Australia and America and previous exchange families perform as support liaison for the families and students. Students are also linked with previous exchange students to help them out.
- There is a requirement for involvement by exchange families in:
 - Fundraising
 - Supporting other exchange families during the exchange year
 - Supporting other exchange families as liaison families in the following exchange year
 - Attending all meetings, functions and events as set out by the coordinators
- Students are firstly selected and then paired with a student from America based on the information provided in the applications and gathered during the selection process. The number of Australian students and American students must be the same at the time of selection.
- In pairing, an attempt is made to place each selected student with the best fitting family and partner. It is not possible to accommodate individual requests, but an attempt is made by the selectors to make the best pairing possible.
- A Pairings BBQ is held in April to let each student know who their partner is and to swap the information provided in their applications. A 'Potluck Dinner' is held in Lakewood at the same time and initial contact between the students is made the same day.
- A period of approximately 100 days (from selection to departure) is taken up with preparation and fund raising.
- Regular meetings are held at which the coordinators facilitate the necessary documents and administration, a parent committee is formed to organise fund raising initiatives.
- The students must successfully complete a Youth Leadership Toastmasters Course. This is arranged by the Sutherland-Lakewood Sister City Committee.
- Passports, Visas, airline tickets, and school requirements (such as health forms for America and Year 10 Exam exemptions here) are organised in this time and the students are given instructions and survival skills.
- Australian students fly out to the USA as a group during the third week in July. They are unaccompanied and are met at Denver airport by the American families and coordinators.
- They are hosted in the USA until early January of the following year.
- On their return departure the students are accompanied to Los Angeles by the US coordinators for a short stay before flying (unaccompanied) to Sydney as a group.
- Approximately one week later the US students fly out to Australia and stay till early July.
- There are a number of group events during both the USA and Australian halves of the exchange. They include camping weekends, road trips, snow weekend, and a variety of other events. Exchange families are expected to participate in many of these events.



Costs

The costs have been estimated based on previous exchanges. They are approximate only and have been provided only as a rough guide for you to decide whether you can afford the program. Please note that rapidly changing exchange rates, global financial crisis, and fluctuating fuel costs may have large effects (in either direction) on the final costs. A detailed budget is prepared during the planning for each exchange group and our aim is stay within the budget if possible.

The Selection committee will only be seeking an assurance that you can afford the program, not how you intend to fund it. The committee cannot help with funding except by offering advice gathered from the experiences of previous groups. Fundraising takes place prior to the students leaving. The final cost to be borne by you depends on how much money is raised by the group's fundraising initiatives. Recent groups have raised anywhere from \$2000 to \$7000 per student.

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| 1. Administrative Expenses | | |
| a. Program Administration Fee (due after selection) | | \$160 |
| b. Refundable Bond | | \$1,000 |
| (refunded with interest at completion of successful exchange) | | |
| 2. USA Expenses | | |
| a. Airfares, uniform, insurance, visa, ground trips | | \$7,500 |
| (Los Angeles, Grand Canyon, ski trip etc) | | |
| b. Personal spending | | Depends on you |
| 3. Australian Expenses | | |
| a. Family camping weekend | | \$450 |
| b. Extra family member for 6 months | | Depends on you |

Sister City Committee

The Australian side of the exchange is organised by the Sutherland-Lakewood Sister City Committee. It is supported by the Sutherland Shire Council, and students are considered as ambassadors of Sutherland Shire whilst overseas. There will be several official functions involving the Mayors of Lakewood and Sutherland. We ask you to support the Sutherland-Lakewood Sister City Committee – visitors are welcome to our monthly meetings.



What Next?

This exchange has provided a wonderful cultural and educational experience for over 35 years. The people who have benefited from this exchange are not just the students but also the families and friends that the students make in America and Australia. The Sutherland Lakewood Exchange Program is unique, and has won a number of awards in both Australia and the USA.

We realise that this is a large amount of information to absorb and we understand that you may still have unanswered questions. We welcome questions about the exchange program, please feel free to ask. More information is available on our website <http://www.suthlak.com> or alternatively please contact our Student Coordinator or President.

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Once you have decided that you might be a suitable candidate it’s time to read the rest of the documents and start filling out the application forms to begin the selection process.