



BEN'S RANCH

f o u n d a t i o n

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of teen am I going to get? How serious is their illness?

Our medical advisory committee has created a screening process, which allows us to approve teens suffering with early stage or mental health issues, such as depression, some cases of bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, etc. No teen who poses a known threat to themselves or others, or have been diagnosed with more severe conditions will be approved. In addition, while some of our participants may have turned to alcohol or drugs, we exclude those known to have a serious drug or alcohol problem. Finally, our teens must have voiced a general willingness to participate. For some, they will be thrilled at the opportunity. For others, they may be resigned to it. In each event, we hope they will grow more comfortable as they get to know you and experience life on a farm or ranch.

What if I have problems?

For each host family, a supervising team is formed, which includes the teen's referring mental health professional, our Clinical Director, the parents or guardian and you. This team will help you handle any questions or judgement calls, and determine — with your help — the length of stay, etc. We require that each teen participant see — or meet by electronic video connection — with a mental health professional on a regular basis. This may require your help in driving the teen to and from a professional located near your home. Our staff will be responsible for arranging this relationship. Finally, all host families such as yours can terminate the visit at any time and send the teen home. This is strictly a voluntary program and is only possible with your complete and constant comfort and welcome participation.

I have no training — just like the idea of helping?

Our program requires modest orientation at the beginning. And, if selected, we will provide adequate orientation, tools and active and ongoing support for you and your family to make this a joyful and satisfying experience for all. We have gleaned best practices from the world of foster parenting, Big Brothers-Big Sisters and other successful programs, such as Safe Families for Children.

Are we liable if a teen is injured during their visit or if they run away, leave the premises, break a law in our community, etc.?

We know life on the farm is inherently dangerous at times, and we'll take every step to protect you from liability. Our training and supervision and insurance will provide solid protections. We encourage you to closely follow the rules and guidance we will share and refine with your help. In today's legal environment, individuals have the right to take legal action against any party involved in a matter they believe causes them harm, and we cannot completely protect against all possible scenarios. However, we will "endorse" you and your property on our liability policy, and the liability release form signed by our participants' family members or guardians, combined with typical common law protections make the risks comparable to hosting a foreign student, guest or serving as a foster parent. Finally, we will be happy to consult with our counsel and check your state laws, which often offer explicit additional protections.

What locations and types of farms and ranches are acceptable for program?

We welcome hosts from farms and ranches located anywhere in the country, as long as they provide a backdrop for an engaging, interesting and positive experience for our teens. Ideally, a host farm or ranch will have some livestock. Horses are always popular, but not required. Fruit, vegetable and nut farms, wineries, dude/guest ranches, therapeutic riding centers, stables, horse training facilities are all great fits. During their stay, we want and expect our teens to provide as much help with chores as your children would do growing up on your farm. So our teens can learn, develop a work ethic and remain engaged, we recommend they be included in as much safe activity and chores as possible, including manual labor, learning new skills, helping with animals, running errands with an adult, mechanics, repairs and maintenance, feeding, cleaning stalls, baling hay, etc.

What if the teen refuses to work or help with chores?

Our teens will be told that they will be expected to provide as much help as they would if they were growing up on a farm or ranch. However, ultimately, their labor is voluntary. If they consistently resist doing their fair share of chores and being constructive and helpful, you may choose to talk to them about ending their stay early, or you may simply notify us as a part of the supervision and feedback and together we will engage the teen through counseling or decide to terminate the stay. We are also exploring ways we can pay our teens some modest hourly wages for their labor, above and beyond common chores, to stimulate work ethic and reward hard work. If we can finalize this plan and fund it, we would reimburse you for paying the teen, or we will arrange to pay them ourselves.

Am I supposed to entertain them?

Just treat them as you would your own children at that age. Any mentoring, training and encouragement you can give them to find new interests, develop new skills and enjoy their experience will be valuable to them. In general, treat them as you would a visiting niece or nephew for the summer. That might include a movie on Friday night or a chance for them to join you for a visit to a nearby park, recreational opportunity or other fun experiences. For many of these teens, a trip to a fishing pond, local rodeo or 4-H fair may be their first.

How do they get back and forth? Will they have spending money?

Their parents or guardians, as well as our staff, will make travel arrangements to and from your location. In some circumstances, we may ask you to meet them at the airport to pick up and drop them off there again at the end of their stay. We will coordinate with you on their access to telephones, spending money and further restrictions on their hours, travel, etc. In general, we will prohibit visits to your home by their existing friends and limit visits by their family.

How much supervision is expected?

We want this experience to be as relaxed, enjoyable and natural as possible. However, for their safety, we do expect constant contact and supervision of the teen during their stay. They will not enjoy the freedom to come and go from your farm or ranch, and in very rare circumstances will they have the privilege to drive a vehicle. In some rare cases, they might be allowed to drive your truck or car to run errands for you, attend an approved event or join members of the family in an approved outing. However, their day-to-day routine will be one that is directly supervised by you and your designees on the farm and ranch. Close monitoring, an active schedule of activity and chores, and a strict requirement that the teen sleep overnight each night in the family quarters will protect everyone involved and reduce the chance of abuse, issues and misunderstandings.

Will they have driver's license?

Our teens are aged 15-18, therefore some may have a license in their home state. However, their rights to drive will be highly restricted during their stay, and to a large degree, be governed by your judgement as to the value of having them drive farm trucks, equipment and so forth in the natural course of day-to-day life on your farm or ranch. Allowing a teen to use your vehicles to leave the location for social life in town, for example, will be prohibited or require a chaperone. More information will be provided during training.

Will I need to pay them for work and if not, how does that work with labor laws etc.?

At this point, their labor on the farm will be voluntary and unpaid. However, as mentioned above, we would like to develop a way to pay the teens for some labor to reward hard work. Your costs should be limited to room, board and any entertainment you want to offer, such as a dinner out, movies, small gifts, etc. If we approve a program, or if you favor pay, it would be modest and highly regulated. This and other stipends we may offer them, or their parents may provide, would be designed to cover their entertainment and necessary costs, such as clothing and entertainment. In no event are you responsible to pay for wages without reimbursement.

Will they be documented citizens?

Yes, or those with appropriate credentials such as a guest visa or green card.

What if their friends want to visit them?

We will discourage repeated visits by family, except for visit for teens who you agree to host for an extended stay. We will prohibit visits by peers and friends, and encourage you to turn away uninvited peers from the community or from the teen's home area.

What if their family shows up?

Our orientation and team supervision will encourage few, if any, visits to your farm, and only when approved and scheduled carefully. We will work to place teens on farms and ranches located far enough from their homes to discourage unexpected and frequent visits. If a family visit to your farm or ranch is approved, we will coordinate with you carefully to arrange hotel accommodations, should adequate guest quarters be unavailable.

APPLICATION PROCESS FOR HOST FAMILIES

