



HOST HOME MANUAL

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Introduction



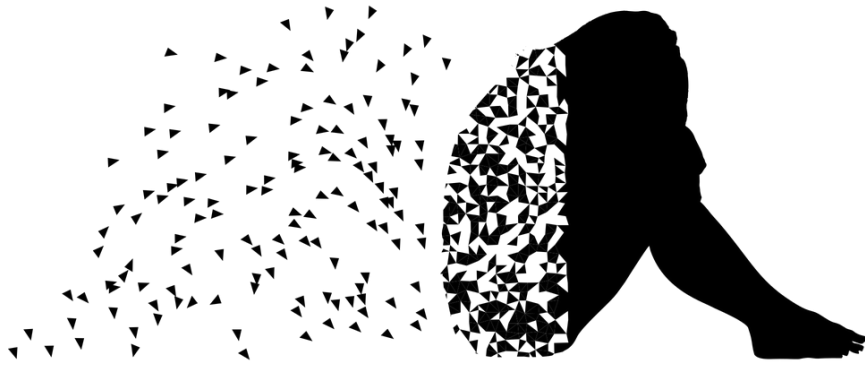
Interim Family Homes, or host homes, are part of a model approved by the New York State Office for Children and Families (OCFS) to provide temporary crisis shelter for youth who are homeless or have run away. Host homes allows youth to remain in a family setting while in crisis and enables youth to maintain connections with key supportive figures, experience safety in a familiar environment, and avoid institutionalization and further trauma. The host home model is frequently used in rural counties where the demand for emergency shelter does not meet that of larger cities and allows communities to provide a safety net to vulnerable youth without the prohibitive cost of a 24/7 staffed shelter.

This manual provides a practical overview of information about providing placement for Runaway and Homeless Youth. Implicit throughout this manual are the values and attitudes that characterize host home volunteers:

- ★ Respect for each youth’s dignity and individuality
- ★ Capacity to empathize with a youth’s struggles and challenges
- ★ Belief in the value of ongoing education to best support youth
- ★ Acceptance and knowledge of the impacts that life experiences have on a youth’s feelings and behavior, especially according to age and stage of development

Open Doors is grateful for the dedicated volunteers that collaborate with program staff to provide safe and comforting spaces for the struggling youth in our community.





Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in Tompkins County

Unfortunately, the experiences of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) go largely unseen, especially in Tompkins County. The most recent data on RHY youth in Tompkins County comes from the 2019 *Independent Living Survey Project*, a study coming from the collaboration of the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, Cornell University, and the staff and young adult participants in the Youth Outreach program of The Learning Web.

The report contains the voices of 144 youth, ages 25 and under, talking about their experiences with leaving home, facing housing instability, and couch surfing in Ithaca and the surrounding areas. The information in the *Independent Living Survey* has been used to inform programming decisions of housing and human services providers in the County and for planning next steps. In the study, 53% of youth surveyed reported changing housing between 1-5 times in the past month and 23% of youth surveyed reported 6-10 times (2019). Only eighteen respondents in the entire sample had not changed housing or living circumstances in the past month (Powers et al., 2019). A significant amount of youth, despite reporting to be living at a parent's house, also reported to be staying other places – these youth may stay with a parent one night but get kicked out the next (Powers et al., 2019). Youth provide various reasons for how or why they left home. The survey depicts that 35% of youth left home due to conflict, 22% ran away, 20% were thrown out, and 11% listed “other” (2019). Amongst the “other” responses was entering the foster care system, experiencing sexual harassment from parent/guardian, and being evicted (Powers et al., 2019).

When identifying antecedents to a youth's departure from their family, respondents in the survey reported, on average, that they were 14-years-old when things at home began to get challenging and that they were 9-years-old when they first needed to find other places to stay because they couldn't, or didn't want to, go home (2019).

Looking at the entire State of New York, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)'s 2020 *RHY Annual Report* shows that residential RHY programs admitted 5,478 individual Runaway and Homeless Youth that year (2020). RHY providers identified the most pressing service needs to include conflict resolution between youth and their parents/guardians, food, and learning and expanding independent living/life skills (The New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2020).

Additionally, the *RHY Annual Report* shows that non-residential programs reported serving approximately 4,700 youth through drop-in centers or case management services (2020). Non-residential services for runaway and homeless youth also include street outreach, provisions to help meet basic vocational, educational, and



of these statistics only measure the receive help – many RHY youth are for assistance.
Historically, Open Doors staff people – including those designated (PINS) – leave home only as a last symptom of underlying problems. interventions and provide mediation assist with improving communication, help reduce ongoing episodes of Open Doors staff link youth and families in addressing trauma, mental health affecting family safety and cohesion. reunification under safe and viable circumstances. Open Doors understands that every youth and family’s situation is unique, and strives to maintain an affirming, inclusive, and empowering space for every individual. Staff provide assistance to youth in finding safe, longer-term housing when they are unable or unwilling to return home.

needs, medical and mental health supports, employment support, and hotlines (The New Family Services, 2020). Keep in mind that all RHY youth who were able to find and unable to locate help or resist asking

have found that troubled young as Persons In Need of Supervision resort, and running away is largely a Program staff implement short-term and counseling to youth and families to problem-solving, and resolving conflicts to runaways and homelessness. Many times, with ongoing therapeutic services to assist struggles, substance use, and other issues Staff always attempt to work towards family

References

- Jane Powers, Ph.D., Cornell University, Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, The Learning Web, Young Adult Participants in The Learning Web’s Youth Outreach Program, Tompkins County Youth Services Department. (2019). *Independent Living Survey Project Summary of Findings: Identifying and Undertanding the Needs of Homeless Youth in Tompkins County, New York*. Tompkins County. <https://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/youth/2019%20Independent%20Living%20Survey%205-WEB%20VERSION.pdf>
- The New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2020). *Runaway and Homeless Youth Annual Report*. NYS OCFS. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/rhy/assets/reports/RHY-Annual-Report-2020.pdf>

A Note About LGBTQ+ Youth

The experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning youth highlight the need for education, training, and resources for working with this population. Many LGBTQ+ youth face neglect or abuse from their families of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. One study found that over 30% of LGBTQ+ youth reported suffering physical violence at the hands of a family member after coming out. As a result of lack of acceptance and abuse in the home and at school, a disproportionate number of youth living on the streets are LGBTQ+. The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services estimates that between 20-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+. Many LGBTQ+ youth — 26% according to one study — are forced to leave their families of origin as a result of conflicts with their parents regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGB young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse, compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection. 33.2% of transgender youth have attempted suicide.

- ★ Do not assume the youth's sexual or gender identity based on dress, mannerisms, or other observable details
- ★ Respect the youth's need to keep their sexual or gender identity private
- ★ Don't be surprised if the youth chooses to come out to you. Host home volunteers can often serve as "practice" for difficult conversations the youth may need to have with their own family
- ★ Deal with feelings first. Many LGBTQ youth feel alone, afraid, and guilty. You can assist by listening, thus allowing them to release feelings and thoughts that are often in conflict

Staff Contact Information

Open Doors Warmline

24/7 Access
to On-Call Staff

607-301-3002



Staff

Gibrian Hagood	Youth Advocate	607-882-4316	ghagood@fcsith.org
Haley Newman	Youth Advocate	607-882-4362	hnewman@fcsith.org
Nadie Phoenix	Team Leader/ Crisis Therapist	607-592-7502	nphoenix@fcsith.org
Mike Ellis	Director of YOS	607-239-7845	mellis@fcsith.org

About Open Doors



The Open Doors program of Family & Children's Service of Ithaca is funded primarily by the Tompkins County Youth Department through a combination of designated state and county funds. Open Doors works with youth (up to age 21) in Tompkins County who have run away from home, are experiencing homelessness, or are facing housing instability. The program provides various confidential, trauma-informed services to support youth and families and prioritizes clients' safety and wellbeing.

Open Doors understands that every youth and family's situation is unique, and strives to maintain an affirming, inclusive, safe, and empowering space for each individual. Staff will help youth reunite with their families or assist them in finding safe housing in another family setting when it may not be safe to return home.

There are two main components to the program:

Outreach/Consultation

- ★ Warmline access for service providers, school staff, families, and youth for consultation and information
- ★ Short interventions with youth to ensure basic need resources are met – food, shelter, hygiene items, etc.
- ★ Targeted outreach to youth and families at risk or experiencing runaway and homelessness issues

Case Management/Temporary Housing

- ★ Short term case management and crisis management focused on goals and stability
- ★ Mediation and family therapy
- ★ Referrals to ongoing services
- ★ Youth development activities and groups
- ★ Temporary shelter placement in volunteer host homes



About Host Home Placement

If host home placement is the appropriate choice, Open Doors staff will review existing host home availability and determine the host home considered to be the best fit for the youth. This fit is determined by location of presenting youth, current school district, and previously determined host family parameters. Staff will then call to ask if the host home is able to place the youth and provide information about the youth in need. If it is not convenient for the host home at that time, host homes should feel free to let staff know.

Open Doors staff will go over the program rules and expectations with the youth. Upon entering the host home, the staff member, youth, and host home will discuss the contract further and discuss any rules particular to that home to be added. It is generally good practice to keep these rules close to the same rules of any children living in the home. Open Doors will keep a copy of the contract signed by all parties, and the host home and youth will each be given a copy.

Open Doors does not expect host homes to handle crises alone. Staff are accessible 24/7 on an on-call rotation and host home volunteers are strongly encouraged to call any time there are questions or concerns.

Remember...

- ★ This is a time of crisis for the youth. Rigid rules with no flexibility could result in additional tension and frustration for the youth
- ★ Give the youth clear feedback
- ★ Placements are temporary – no more than 30 days
- ★ The primary goal of the program is reunification of the youth and family whenever possible and safe

Host Home Requirements and Certification Process

Qualifications

- ★ 21 years of age or older
- ★ Able to provide a safe environment and understand the unique needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth
- ★ Able to provide a private sleeping area for the youth (no more than 2 youth of the same gender per sleeping area)
- ★ Able to provide a closet, dresser, or other storage area for youth's personal possessions
- ★ Able to provide a bathroom and laundry facilities in sanitary condition

General Expectations

- ★ Involve youth in family activities
- ★ Respect for the privacy and confidentiality of the youth and family
- ★ Prohibit neglect, maltreatment, physical, and psychological abuse of the youth
- ★ Provide 3 nutritious meals a day
- ★ Permit and support youth to have reasonable visits with friends and family
- ★ Permit the youth to make phone calls
- ★ Support and encourage the youth to participate in recreational and community activities
- ★ Provide supervision of the youth
- ★ Properly secure and store any firearms to prevent access to them by the youth

Application

Interested candidates will complete an application packet, which includes:

- ★ Information regarding any prior certification issued to the candidates for the purpose of boarding youth, by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)
- ★ A sworn statement from each member of the household who is 18 years or older, stating whether the individual has ever been convicted of a crime and confirming that everything on the application is true
- ★ Married individuals should file one application packet but separate supporting documents where indicated
- ★ Host home candidates and all adult household members shall be screened through the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment.
- ★ A statement from physician noting overall health status and stating the individual is free from communicable diseases.

Home Study

The Open Doors Team Leader will conduct a comprehensive home study including:

- ★ Review of information provided in the application
- ★ Two interviews of the candidates (one interview in the home with all household members)
- ★ Inspection of the home based on the following criteria:
 - ✓ Safety and cleanliness
 - ✓ Physical structure and size
 - ✓ Ability to accommodate youth
 - ✓ Location and neighbourhood
 - ✓ Proposed sleeping arrangements for youth

Training

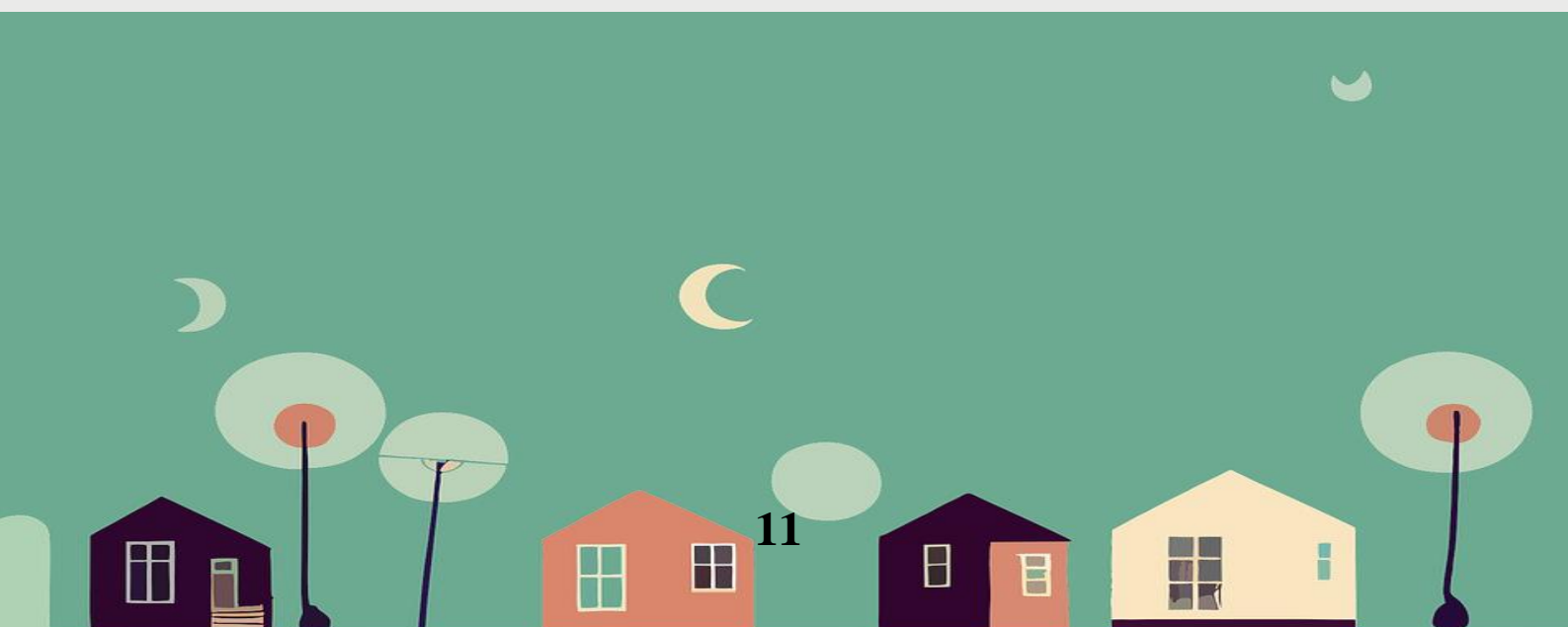
Within six months of certification, the Open Doors Team Leader will arrange training for Host Homes. A minimum of four hours of training will be provided to Host Homes each year of certification. Training will include education on relevant topics, such as adolescent behavior, communication skills, the juvenile justice system, drug use and behavior, crisis management, physical/sexual/emotional abuse, and symptoms and effects of trauma on youth.

Reimbursement

Some expenses may be reimbursed by Open Doors. For reimbursement, Host Homes should:

1. Obtain prior approval from Open Doors Team Leader for the purchase
2. Use F&CS's tax-exempt form
3. Provide the receipt, signed by the youth or Host Home, to program staff

A small daily stipend is offered to Host Homes for each night a youth spends in the home. The stipend is not meant to cover the full cost of caring for the youth; it is meant to ameliorate any potential financial burden on Host Homes.



Records and Reports

Every year, the Program Director must provide OCFS an annual report regarding the status of each Host Home based on the compiled record for each home. This includes:

1. A copy of the application packet, home study report, summary of interviews, orientation documentation, and reference checks
2. Original operating certificate issued by OCFS
3. A copy of any other operating certificate currently held by the Host Home
4. A list and assessment of each youth's stay in the home including a summary of the pre-discharge interview with the youth and interview with Host Home after the discharge
5. Documentation of training provided to the Host Home
6. Copies of all written and verbal correspondence with the Host Home (such as emails, evaluations forms, concerns, complaints, etc.)
7. An evaluation of the family's continued ability to provide services to runaway and homeless youth and continue collaborating with Open Doors

Confidentiality

It is extremely important that personal information about the youth and their family is held in the strictest confidence. The full name of the youth residing in a Host Home should not be shared with anyone. In instances when Host Home providers may see someone they know, introduce the youth by first name and as a friend that is staying with you. Open Doors staff and Host Home volunteers are legally bound not to release information to anyone outside of the program without specific written consent from the client.

The only two exceptions to this policy are:

- ★ If the youth has a medical emergency
- ★ If a report of child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment needs to be made regarding the youth (including any subsequent communication with appropriate state or local official)

Additionally, Host Home names and addresses are also kept confidential. This rule is discussed with all youth prior to being placed in a host home. Should family members of the youth find out and show up at the location of a host home, Host Homes should first contact the police and then Open Doors staff. The incident should be treated as if they were a stranger – do not allow them into your home.

Mandated Reporting

Host home volunteers are deemed mandated reporters of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment by OCFS. If a youth discloses to you that they have experienced an abusive or neglectful situation, you are required to make a report. Host home volunteers should notify Open Doors staff first if they have concerns about abuse or neglect of a youth in their care. Open Doors staff are available to help navigate the situation.

New York Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) Mandated Reporter Hotline: 800-635-1522

Host home volunteers are also deemed mandated reporters of institutional abuse or neglect. If you believe that a youth has suffered abuse or neglect while in the care of another host home or by agency staff, you are required to make report.

New York State Justice Center: 855-373-2122

WHAT TO EXPECT...

Youth Placement Procedure

When a runaway or homeless youth requests shelter, an Open Doors staff member will meet with the youth to determine whether a host home is appropriate. Before considering a host home, staff assist youth with processing their situation, brainstorming other family members or family friends they could potentially stay with, and/or making referrals to other programs if necessary.

Staff consider various factors when determining placement in a host home for a youth, including the youth's characteristics and needs, where the youth attends school, and host home characteristics and preferences. Staff will try to place youth in a host home within the youth's home district. When this is not possible, school districts are required to provide transportation for the youth.

Once it is determined that a host home is needed, the following procedure will occur:

- 1) Staff will conduct an intake assessment with the youth. During this time, staff will review a contract with the youth which outlines expectations and rules. The youth must agree to have their parents/guardians contacted by Open Doors within twenty-four hours of their placement in a host home, and the youth must agree to mediation of their situation with Open Doors staff and their family.
- 2) Staff will call a prospective host home to ascertain availability. If space is available, staff will bring the youth to the host home. Once there the youth, staff, and host home volunteers will review goals and expectations and finalize the youth contract.
- 3) Staff will complete a clothing checklist at the time of placement.
- 4) Staff will remain at the host home until the youth begins to feel comfortable (about an hour).
- 5) Prior to the youth discharging from the host home, a discharge conference will be held to evaluate successes and challenges.
- 6) Following discharge, a follow-up interview will be held with host home volunteers to assess the youth's stay. This interview may be done face-to-face, via email, or by phone.

Open Doors Staff Involvement

When a youth is placed in a host home, staff will call the host home volunteers daily to check-in and see if there are any questions or concerns. Staff will also speak with the youth to make sure they are satisfied with their placement. Staff and the youth will meet at least once a week or more to work on the youth's reunification plan with their family.

Host home volunteers will be asked to complete an evaluation of the youth to assess attitudes and behaviors. These evaluations will ask about the youth's relationship and behaviors with others, attitudes toward authority and discipline, level of participation in activities around the home and community, emotional adjustment and maturity, etc.

Youth will also be asked to complete evaluations of the host home and the program. These evaluations will ask how everything is going in the home, if program staff have been helpful, if the youth is making progress on their goals, etc.

Open Doors staff will contact host home volunteers for a follow-up interview following the end of each placement. Staff will also meet with host home volunteers at any time during the youth's placement in your home, should the need arise.

Staff On-Call Policy: When a youth is in the care of host home volunteers, staff are available 24/7 via an on-call rotation. During business hours, attempt to contact the youth's Youth Advocate first, then the Open Doors Team Leader, then the Director of Youth & Outreach Services. Examples of situations when you should contact us are:

- The youth is experiencing extreme distress or exhibiting concerning behaviors such as threatening to harm themselves or others
- A youth safety cannot be maintained in the home
- Supervision is unable to be provided to the youth
- The youth has left the home without permission
- The youth is experiencing a medical emergency
- The youth is under the influence of alcohol or substances
- Any situation that host home volunteers are unsure how to handle



Other Policies

Cell Phones

Most youth have a personal cell phone. Open Doors staff will assess whether the youth's access to their personal cell phone may be a safety/confidentiality concern; in which case, youth may be offered a temporary program cell phone. Host home volunteers should feel free to make rules about appropriate cell phone use. If there are concerns about a youth's cell phone use, concerns should be discussed with staff. Host home volunteers should not attempt to confiscate a youth's phone.

Discipline

When a youth is placed in a host home, Open Doors staff review a behavior contract with the youth. The contract covers general expectations around behavior and responsibilities while in a host home. It is appropriate for you to add responsibilities or expectations similar to those of your own children if applicable (i.e. everyone does their own laundry, or no cell phones during meals, etc.) If you are having trouble with a youth adhering to the behavior contract, please contact the Open Doors staff. If a youth cannot abide by the behavior contract, they may not be appropriate for host home placement and staff will work with them to find alternate housing. *Under no circumstances should you use physical discipline (hitting, spanking), confiscate the youth's possessions, or restrict access to basic needs such as food, bathrooms, etc.* Remember these youth have experienced trauma and they are likely to be highly reactive to a perceived threat, whether real or fantasy.

Family of the Youth

It is program policy that host home volunteers never engage with the youth's parents/guardians. Host homes provide a respite service for the youth and are not responsible for mediation between the youth and their family. However, the youth's parents are still responsible for making certain decisions. Staff will discuss situations with parents as they arise, and communicate permission and/or concerns to host home volunteers as needed.

Once the youth discharges, host home volunteers must refrain from contacting the youth and/or their family. If a youth makes contact with the host home volunteers after discharge, Open Doors staff need to be notified.

Insurance

It is recommended that all host home volunteers retain homeowners/renters insurance for protection against any damages from a youth's behavior, such as accidents, acting out, or theft. Most insurance companies require that a police report is provided prior to covering a loss. Youth placed in host homes are never allowed to drive host home volunteers' motor vehicles.

Medical Concerns

- ★ Host home volunteers may only provide medication (including over-the-counter medication) to youth after confirming with staff
- ★ Host home volunteers will be advised of available past medical history or concerns of youth they will be caring for. When a youth is placed in a host home, staff should always be kept up-to-date of the youth's health status
- ★ If emergency medical care is needed:
 1. Call 911
 2. Call Open Doors staff
 3. Make a plan where staff will meet you and the youth
 4. Staff will contact the youth's parents/guardians – host home volunteers are not to sign any forms at the hospital

Money

Host home volunteers may not provide with youth with spending money or school lunch money. Open Doors staff will arrange for the free lunch program to be available for the youth or host home volunteers may pack a lunch for the youth to take to school. If the youth needs money for any reason, notify staff – staff will work out an arrangements with the youth or the youth's parents/guardians. Additionally, host home volunteers must never provide cigarettes, vaping materials, or alcohol to youth.

Religious Practices

Each youth placed by the Open Doors program has the right to practice their religion. Staff will facilitate and provide transportation when needed.

Supervision

The Open Doors program is mandated to ensure youth are supervised at all times while placed in a host home. It is the responsibility of host home volunteers to remain with the youth at all times when they are placed in the home and not at school. When supervision is not possible, staff will provide alternative arrangements.

Travel

If host home volunteers would like to take a youth placed in the home out-of-state, Open Doors staff require advance notice to obtain the permission and signature of the youth's parents/guardians. The details of the trip including address, contact phone numbers, length of stay, and expected date of return will need to be provided to staff.

For more information about Open Doors, visit fcsith.org/Open Doors