

So, You're Considering the Ulster Project?

A Guide to What Host Families Can Expect

Thank you for considering the Ulster Project for your teen. Should s/he be accepted, your teen will join over 500 from the Arlington area since the Arlington Project's first summer in 1994.

Why do families participate?

Northern Irish families participate because they believe in tolerance and want their children to grow up in a country markedly different from the way N. I. has been. American families participate because they believe in the Ulster Project mission, but also because we have come to find out that participation profoundly changes the U. S. teens. Parents often report a noticeable increase in their teens' self-confidence. The teens have the opportunity to worship in traditions that may be new to them, they do extensive community service, much of which involves helping children, they participate in "Times of Discovery" during which they discuss issues that are on their minds, and they make friends with teens from another country, an experience that broadens their horizons. Many U. S. teens and their parents report that the Ulster Project month was life-changing.

You, as a parent, may find that you become incredibly attached to your "Irish son or daughter", and form strong friendships with other Ulster Project families. On the last day, parent tears almost match those of the teens!

History of the Project

Without going into a great deal of historical data, the Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland have been at odds for centuries. The tensions stem from England sending Protestant settlers from England and Scotland into N. I. (Ulster) hundreds of years ago. The native, mostly Catholic, population felt that they were being discriminated against. These feelings came to a head in 1968, the year generally given as the beginning of the "Troubles", the N. I. term for about 30 years of escalating violence that resulted in over 3000 deaths and lasting resentment, fear and suspicion that remains even today.

In 1974, Canon Kerry Waterstone founded the Ulster Project. (More about Kerry and his achievements may be found on the Ulster Project-Arlington website (www.upatx.com). Kerry believed that if he could send Catholic and Protestant teens 14-16 years old from N. I. to the neutral ground of America, those teens would be old enough to have adult opinions but yet be young enough to be open to changing those opinions. He felt that these teens could live with American teens of roughly the same age, with similar interests and of the same gender and religious background, and the N. I. teens could form relationships and friendships. How right he was!

Today the Ulster Project is conducted in 18 cities across the U. S. Since 1974, not a single Ulster Project participant is known to have joined one of the paramilitary groups at the center of N. I. violence.

Structure of Ulster Project-Arlington

The Arlington project lasts for approximately 30 days each summer. The N. I. teens arrive with 2 adult counselors sometime in the last week of June and leave in the last week of July. Arlington accepts 16 N. I. teens: 4 Catholic boys, 4 Protestant boys, 4 Catholic girls, 4 Protestant girls, so we look each year for a corresponding group of Americans. During the month, the group of 32 teens, 2 N. I. counselors and 2 U. S. counselors is together virtually every day, participating in one or more activities each day! This intense togetherness leads to an exceptional level of bonding, not only among the N. I. teens, but among all the teens.

How would my teen be chosen?

The first step is to complete and submit the application packet, located in the Forms section of the UP-A website. An interview will be scheduled with you as parents, and a separate interview will be scheduled at the same time with your teen. These interviews are meant to be an exchange of information, so please ask any and all questions! Generally, the interviews are scheduled in January or February of the year in which your teen wants to participate. A representative of the Ulster Project will also come out to your home to see that there is room for the Irish teen to

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have his/her own bed. The Irish teen does NOT have to have his/her own bedroom, just a bed. Once the interviews are completed, a committee of Ulster Project leaders and volunteers compare the U. S. applications with the N. I. apps. The committee tries to determine which U. S. applicants make the closest matches to the N. I. teens who have been chosen to come to Arlington. By the way, the Northern Irish teens undergo a thorough process before they are chosen to come to America, and each is selected for leadership potential, a critical part of eligibility for the N. I. teens.

Generally, all applicants will be notified in March as to whether they have been accepted. Each U. S. family will receive a copy of their N. I. teen's application packet, a set of family pictures and contact information. The N. I. teens will receive a similar packet. We encourage the U. S. families to contact the N. I. families as soon as possible to introduce themselves. In this age of Facebook, Skype and email, it takes no time at all before all the teens are regularly contacting each other!

What is expected of my family?

We take teen safety very seriously. Every adult in a host family home must complete a criminal background check and successfully complete a teen safety class. If your teen drives, s/he may not drive while the N. I. teen is in the car. The U. S. family is responsible for all meals when the teens are at home, sack lunches on certain days, an occasional potluck dish, and must be able to either drop off and pick up their teens for every activity, or arrange carpooling with other parents. By the way, every year we have many families in which both parents work, and car pools are the norm, not the exception. Also, many previous families report that they "hit the drive-through" more frequently than normal because of UP activities scheduling.

There are 4-6 pre-arrival meetings in April and May that parents and teens are expected to attend. These give an opportunity for U. S. parents to meet and for the U. S. teens to start bonding as a group. In addition, important information about the Project is given during these meetings, and UP leaders are there to answer any questions.

Most importantly of all, your teen will spend an amazing, unforgettable month with 31 new friends. Because of this, your teen MUST completely clear his or her calendar for the time that the N. I. teens are here. There can be no summer school, no family vacations, no church camps, no sports camps or games. Your teen's friends may not attend Ulster Project events. Many families schedule family vacations before or after the N. I. teens are here, and others consider the Ulster Project month a fun "staycation" for the whole family. Your teen must devote himself/herself completely to the Ulster Project. It will be worth it!

The Ulster Project pays for ALL SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES for both the N. I. and U. S. teens. All travel expenses and admissions fees, as well as many lunches are paid for. Each teen receives a maroon and a gray Ulster Project t-shirt as well as an Ulster Project polo shirt. But there are certain expenses that parents will encounter. Please know that these items are "optional"; but we would be less than honest if we didn't mention that peer pressure may be something you will have to consider.

The Ulster Project, as part of the Project calendar, often schedules a couple of "family optional" activities. These include a dinner, theater evening, musical event, etc for which we have arranged discounted prices. The costs for these vary and total costs depend on how many family members attend. You will be informed of these events before the Project starts, and you can decide whether or not you want to participate.

As a remembrance of the month, the Ulster Project recommends that each family make a scrapbook for their own teen and their Irish teen. Hundreds of pictures will be available on the UP website to help with this. Some parents are scrapbookers, and enjoy making a scrapbook. Other parents prefer using one of the online services that make a picture book for you. There are many ways to approach this, and costs vary.

There are other things that are optional that are not initiated by the Ulster Project, but have become traditional things to do. We will sit down as a group and decide how we can best limit these expenses. This is what the cost has been.

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| Group photos of the teens (optional): | about \$20 |
| DVD's of the Celebration talent show and month's activities (optional): | about \$30 |
| Gifts for UP leaders (optional): | about \$10 |
| Gifts you may want to send back with your N. I. teen (optional): | Varies |
| Extra t-shirts for the teens so you can avoid washing! (optional): | \$10 each |
| Polo shirts for parents (optional): | \$30 each |

Each Project includes a "family weekend". This weekend generally starts sometime Friday and ends Monday morning close to the middle of the Project. It is put in the Project because families have told us that they want some free time with their teens. Each family uses this in a different way. Some visit relatives who want to get to know the N. I. teen, some go to an attraction in Texas or beyond and many stay at home taking it easy, maybe letting the teen do a little shopping and just being together.

You, as parents, can expect to be busy during the Project. In addition to drop off and pick up, we include a number of activities to which parents are invited. We encourage you to attend these events.

In addition to this, your teen may beg and plead to go to Northern Ireland the year after the Project to visit his/her friends. Many, but not all, teens do this, and they often travel together or go with their families. This is NOT a part of the Ulster Project, which is one way only.

Finally, we expect that you will treat your N. I. teen as a member of the family. The same rules apply that apply to your own teen. The N. I. teen should be expected to do chores, just as yours is.

What if we have problems?

Problems are rare, but they can happen. Most frequently, we see homesickness as an issue, or the N. I. teen is having trouble adjusting to U. S. food. Whatever might arise, you are not alone. Each Project has experienced parents who serve as host family counselors. You can contact them at any time, and they will help you work through any issue.

If your N. I. teen needs medical attention, several Arlington doctors and dentists are on call to help. There will be no cost to you.

What if we have more questions now?

Here are the names and contact info for several parents from the most recent Project. They have agreed to give you the parents' view of what it is to host a teen in the Ulster Project.

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| Jennifer Dinger | 817-239-6671 |
| Brian Dinger | 817-907-9464 |
| Julie Gersch | 972-342-3765 |
| David and Jodeen Lee | 817-468-5432 |
| Theresa Orand | 817-233-6043 |
| Craig Orand | 817-239-4363 |

We hope you will give prayerful consideration to becoming an Ulster Project host family. You will be participating in an important ecumenical peace initiative, and you may well be giving your teen the summer of a lifetime!

Ken Simon
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