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Creating Vital AFS Returnee Organizations

Speeches compendium:

USA : Mandy Barber

Japan: Noriko Fujisawa

Denmark : Klaus Faartoft

France : Maximilien Marxer

USA: Mandy Barber

By Mandy Barber Manager, Alumni Relations mbarber@afsusa.org

Alumni Relations at AFS-USA

Though it has had active regional chapters in the past, the US has never had a concerted effort to engage alumni across the country. At AFS-USA, alumni encompasses not just recent returnees, but returnees of all ages, current and former host families, current and former sending families, and volunteers. An Alumni Relations effort was launched in summer 2014 to craft a broader alumni presence in the US, to engage these constituencies at a national scale.

This work began through networking within the AFS network and with external peers in the Alumni Relations field. A series of focus groups, as well as an all-encompassing survey to all AFS-USA constituents have helped shed light on the feelings of our constituents within the network, as well as the types of benefits and communications our alumni really want.

While a personal experience is vital to alumni success, a virtual platform is important not only to connect constituents across an expansive country, but to connect with the AFS world at large. Our research has given the resounding feedback that our constituents will join an online community only if it's internationally focused. As a result, we are working closely with AFS INT to expand on that international connectivity within its proprietary platform World Café.

Some of the specific build-outs in formulation for World Café include:

- Enhanced "Find an AFSer" Directory
- An International job and internship board
- Networking Opportunities to include a searchable directory and virtual networking sessions by interest area through webinars, groups, and blogs
- Mentoring opportunities through searchable directory and enhanced messaging

Realizing that a key component to alumni engagement is the personal, social experience, we have (and are developing) several opportunities to continue and expand those opportunities:

- Alumni Celebrations: These fundraising cocktails occur twice a year in rotating locations. Our next event will be to celebrate the AFS Centennial in New York City on December 4, and in the spring we will gather again in Washington, DC.
- Networking: We will begin to host local networking and social gatherings around the country to connect alumni of all ages in a more casual, relaxed setting.

- Reunion: We are developing resources to help alumni plan and host their own reunions throughout the country, as well as the opportunity to take part in a reunion or service trip abroad.

AFS-USA's youngest alumni are engaged through an exciting menu of opportunities through the "Returnee Initiative" that help to ease their reverse culture shock as they readjust to life in their home country and move into college and career. Some of these opportunities include:

- Returnee Welcome Home Events: Informal gatherings held locally to allow returnees to share their stories and network with other AFSers in their local community or college.
- Returnee Rewards: An incentive-based program that encourages returnees to give presentations in their local communities and schools to help spread the word about AFS
- Returnee Photo Contest: One of several social media campaigns throughout the year, allowing returnees to share their favorite photos from their experience with AFS for an opportunity to win prizes
- Returnee Leadership Summit: A training opportunity for outstanding young returnee volunteer leaders at AFS-USA
- Returnee Blog: A returnee-edited blog allowing AFSers to share their own stories
- Returnee Webinars: Periodic webinars on a variety of topics including "How to highlight AFS on your resume"
- Returnee Internships: AFS-USA offers several internships on a semester basis to recent returnees to help with programmatic and administrative projects with AFS-USA
- One of personalized experiences with an international basis that connects our most recent returnees with those more experienced in life and career while creating a meaningful affiliation with AFS.

For more information:

Mandy Barber Manager, Alumni Relations mbarber@afsusa.org | +1 (646) 751-2026

Casey McAlpin Returnee Relations Specialist cmcalpin@afsusa.org | +1 (646) 751-2176

Japan: Noriko Fujisawa

*By Noriko Fujisawa, Manager, Public Relations, AFS Intercultural Programs,
noriko.fujisawa@afs.org*

Returnees Relations in Japan

I'm very pleased to introduce maintaining a relationship with returnees in Japan.

First, as other partners may have, we have a friendship Society. They organize lecture meetings few times a year, new years' party, and charity concert. This network only works in big-city like Tokyo and members are mainly senior, but in late years it take a new approach like career seminar for student volunteers. That is the good activity beyond generations.

Second, We have a volunteer captain for each year And participant from 1950s to early 1980s has a mailing list in each group. So there is a strong connection regularly. Some groups make donations and set up scholarships for hosting students. (for Students from developing countries)

From the late 1980s onward, it seems lack a strong connection among same-year returnee. I think it is reflection of diversifying of destination and stop making an alumni list book. As for list book, it is unavoidable by the privacy protection laws.

As alternated, we focused internet communication and launched own SNS site (Social Network Service) called "AFS-Ring" in 2006. In this site users can communicate not only same-year returnees, but also other-years and other destinations, host families, volunteers. There were many community group and uses enjoyed it.

But few years later some problems occurred. We have to maintain and version up the system by ourselves, it cost too much. And AFS-Ring was closed-site that invitation based. That is good point and weak point of this site.

If Users have account of other SNS, they choose open-site. Because they can contact with other friends not only AFSers. There is no need to sign up again.

Around that time Facebook was getting popular in Japan so we decided to close the site last year.

Now we use Facebook mainly. We post article everyday with wide variety for keep users from being bored. Experiences of recent returnees, interviews of big-name returnees, chapter activity, recruitment information, videos and suchlike. These contents lead to our homepage.

It seems that there is intense interest in articles of newspaper and TV appearance of returnees. It would be a good opportunity to know whether it is an AFSer. Facebook is a good tool for maintaining a relationship with returnees as well for public relations.

Finally, I would like to introduce a new group that formed just recently. In Japan most students choose to go to university in Japan, so when wish to go to other country's university it is great deal of trouble to gather information. Returnees who enrolled at U.S. or other country's university form a group and start helping younger members. This voluntary action is essence of AFS, pure and simple. This is non-traditional style of student volunteers' organization. Because they are not in Japan usually.

Through this case, I could learn that there are many ways of volunteer activity, there are many possibilities in returnees.

We have to think out of the box. It would be challenge for us.

Denmark: Klaus Faartoft

By Klaus Faartoft, chairman, AFS Alumni DK, klaus@faartoft.dk

Who is AFS Alumni DK?

The Danish AFS Alumni organization was founded in 2002 and has at present 130 members. The chairperson of AFS Interkultur (the national AFS organization in Denmark) is an ex officio member of the board, though AFS Alumni works independently of the national organization. The focus of AFS Alumni is to provide experience, knowledge and network for alumni members and AFS Interkultur, the national AFS organization.

Since 2002, AFS Alumni DK has granted two annual scholarships to Danish AFS exchange students. In return, the students send 'travel reports' during their stay abroad, which are published on the alumni website as an opportunity for alumni members to see whom they support by their membership. Alumni also offers an annual grant to a volunteer, who has been outstanding in his/her work for AFS Interkultur in one of the local chapters.

Activities

AFS Alumni DK has had a broad spectrum of activities over the years. Outings to concerts, theatres, museums etc., 'brown bag' meetings with returnees as speakers covering a variety of topics of current interest - activities that always include time and space for socializing.

Some members have established a historic archive for AFS Denmark covering the period 1957-2012. Likewise a Returnee database has been developed with data of Danish returnees from 1950-1991. The database has proved useful when gathering information for the AFS International Alumni Ambassadors list, requests for contacts to 'lost' returnees for reunions etc. In connection with the 50th anniversary of AFS in Denmark and the 10th anniversary of AFS Alumni, alumni edited two publications that focused on developments and results in both organizations.

Collaboration with the AFS Interkultur Denmark

AFS Alumni works independently of the national AFS organization, but supports and cooperates with the national organization whenever possible. In recent years increasingly so. AFS Alumni DK members have offered their expertise in legal as well as political issues to the national organization and AFS Alumni Board members have participated in general assemblies and in information seminars for recent returnees offering the long perspective on an exchange. We offer a dual membership to AFS Interkultur members at a very low fee. Our annual budget is €7.000.

Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

AFS returnees have the potential to become a national, if not a global resource for promoting agendas of cross cultural understanding and human rights. Many returnees have reached a position in life and society from where they wish and can promote such ideas. A strong national as well as global AFS returnee or alumni network/association is therefore an asset to the AFS organization as a whole.

Some returnees do not engage in AFS volunteer work, but still wish to keep in contact with the organization and the values it represents. Below we outline possible strategies for returnees at different stages in their lives.

What is in it for me? (Becoming a member of an AFS Alumni association)

Age group:

- **17-25** You may use the AFS experience and Alumni network as a stepping stone for a future career.
- **26-40** You may use older Alumni members as mentors in your search for a job.
- **41-45** You may become parents or hosts of exchange students
- **46+** You may use your AFS experience in your professional network as well as being an active alumnus.

A strategic objective for the entire AFS community could be to invite returnees to become an AFS alumnus member, the day they return. A parallel to what is being offered by universities and colleges worldwide. AFS alumni networks are an opportunity we cannot afford to ignore.

France: Maximilien Marxer

By Maximilien Marxer, chairman, Cercle des amis AFS, postmaster@cercleafs.fr

What makes AFS so special to all of us?

Its rich, collective history.

First there were the ambulance drivers, who we can liken to the very first exchange students: Leaving their homes because of an idea, and returning home fundamentally changed for it.

Now we have had exchange students leaving every year since 1946, 1919, let's say even 1914! Who carry with them the living legacy of those ambulance drivers and their shared idea.

We all know that AFS Returnees undergo a profound change during their year abroad with AFS. They leave their country with a culture A, to go and learn about culture B only to return home with culture C.

That culture C, that awareness and share experience, is the idea that we, as Returnees, all have in common.

A hundred years on, this is our big opportunity to talk about, and to think about, the role of the Returnees after they have returned home and how they can make a contribution to the organization at an international level.

We usually view Returnees as a part of our "Fundraising" strategy... and that is for me, a big mistake!

When we first thought about creating an alumni organization here in France, the first challenge was the redaction of the bylaws. It was quite an ordeal, but to make long story short here's what we came up with:

We carefully considered the goals that such an organization should have in order to be of the greatest service to its members and AFS as a whole. We finally found 3 key words to help define our purpose:

The First :

To Reunite... the AFS returnees (and friends, and host families).

This was no small feat because for the last 50 years, AFS France (and I think most of the partners in the world) have not kept in touch with their Returnees, updated their contact information, etc.

Finding someone who was in AFS was a coincidence, to run into someone from your year a small miracle.

We discovered that for the most part, any record of returnees was incomplete, or worse, outdated. (This meant - No address, no telephone, and if there was an email, it was no longer useful.)

That's why we focus everyday on finding AFS returnees. A small group of volunteers meet every week, and our general secretary, Françoise Perraud, tries to track down all of our lost Returnees one by one using whatever tools she can Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc...

Every event is an opportunity to reconnect with returnees for AFS.

And every event is an opportunity for Returnees to reconnect with AFS also... !

That brings me to our next goal

To Remember

This key word is fundamental. As G. Orwell once wrote : "if we want to know where we want to go, we have to know where we come from".

We are living in a great moment in time: we have the chance to celebrate with AFS it's hundredth anniversary, we have the chance to speak about it's accomplished past and its promising future. But after this week is over and we all go home, I fear that little by little, the memory of where this organization started is slowly disappearing.

I applaud AFS's evolution over the past century into a student exchange program which promotes peace and intercultural learning. I have seen how AFS pays tribute to the memory of the American ambulance drivers and embodies the message that we should be promoting to the young boys and girls who will be leaving on their AFS year of tomorrow.

All the more reason to continue telling our young boys and girls where AFS started a hundred years ago, so that in a hundred years time, the boys and girls will still understand what those brave ambulance drivers did and how their idea of peace was born out of a situation of war.

Finally, we believe that our mission is

To Support

A strong network of AFS Returnees means a very valuable network for AFS as a whole.

That's the reason why we must get more and more alumni organizations around the world, « working together and talking together »...

In its mission to continue their educational objectives and open up opportunities to even more people, AFS faces many financial and administrative constraints which cannot permit it do everything it would like to do.

That is why Such organizations as Le Cercle des amis AFS, AFS Alumni DK, and other likeminded associations can allow Returnees to get together, to help remember our story and share our collective memory.

We can build a network of support that could be of immeasurable benefit to AFS and its efforts for many years to come.

I hope this year's world congress, this «Returnee Day» and our discussion mark the beginning of a new chapter for returnees around the world, coming together to share, like those ambulance drivers did a hundred years ago, in one idea.