



Welcome and thank you for your interest in Sisu's Host Home Project!

Host Homes is a community and volunteer-based response to addressing youth homelessness. This project is made possible by connecting adults willing to open their homes to young people who need resources and support. Hosts provide a safe environment for young people to find stability and prepare for their next steps.

We know from research that youth experiencing homelessness are best supported when they are able to remain in the communities where they are comfortable, have friends or family, attend school, and go to work. For this reason, the goal of our host home programs is to recruit, screen, and provide support to trusted adults who are willing to open their homes to young people experiencing homelessness or unstable housing.

Being a host is a powerful and unique experience, and it is far from easy. The commitment you are willing to make in order to be a host volunteer is an intense one, as is that of a youth who is moving into a host home. We fully believe that this can be an empowering and gratifying experience for all involved and thank you for taking the time to learn more.

The Sisu team is committed to keeping you informed, clearly communicating expectations, being upfront and honest about decisions made regarding your application, listening to your concerns and feedback, respecting your input, and providing ongoing support and training.

Please carefully review the information in this packet. It includes the application and training overview, eligibility requirements, a Host application, frequently asked questions, and a list of things to consider before getting started. Once we receive the returned packet from you, we will read your application, start the background checks, and set up a time for an initial interview.

Again, thank you so much for wanting to be a part of Sisu's Host Homes project. It is only through the generosity, spirit of solidarity, and commitment of folks like you that we are able to offer safe and affirming homes to youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Bradley
Executive Director, Sisu Youth Services
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APPLICATION & TRAINING OVERVIEW

1. Potential Host Home Applicant(s) will complete the application and receive an informational phone interview from the Host Home Coordinator.
2. The Host Home Coordinator will perform a background check and send reference requests.
3. Host Home Applicant(s) will attend a 4-hour training session and complete a self-paced online training through the ODMHSAS Training Institute
4. The coordinator will schedule a home inspection (checklist found on page 5)
5. Applicants complete the online training and a short orientation with the Host Home Coordinator.
6. The coordinator will schedule a meeting with the Host and the Youth to discuss the following:
 - Release of Liability waivers signed
 - Review goals, expectations, etc.
 - Confirm shared house rules and discuss communication strategies
 - Youth move-in date is determined and lease agreement signed (can be set on same night as the meeting)
7. The coordinator provides regular support to Hosts while the Youth works with case management services.



ELIGIBILITY AND EXPECTATIONS FOR HOSTS

All applicants should:

1. Have an extra bedroom (providing privacy) for the youth
2. Be at least 25 years old
3. Have lived in Oklahoma for at least a year
4. Live in the greater Metro area (Less than an hour away from Sisu Youth Services)
5. Complete the application form, providing any relevant information
6. Have renter/homeowner's insurance, providing a file copy if requested
7. Provide three references (personal)
8. Authorize and pass background checks which include:
 - Public Records (i.e. arrest reports)
 - National sexual offender registry database
9. Complete the initial training session
10. Complete a question-and-answer meeting with the program manager and an advisor.

The above criteria need to be successfully completed in order for an applicant to be qualified as a Host. Applicants need to demonstrate a strong commitment to work with the youth to build a healthy and trusting relationship, an ability to provide a safe, decent, sanitary, stable and supportive environment, and consistently demonstrate skills necessary to meet program objectives.

All applicants must be willing to adhere to all Program Guidelines and Expectations. If selected, applicants and others in the household must be willing to ask for assistance in difficult situations. Applicants and members of the household must have no sexual contact or any other sexual activity with or around the youth placed in their home.

Participation of applicants may be terminated at any point in the process if the Host Home Coordinator feels the applicant is unable/not ready to be a host volunteer.



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

What are the rules of your home?

Think about sharing your living space with a young person you don't know very well. Think about the rules and expectations that will be important for that person to know (i.e. no visitors after 10 pm). The youth moving in will also have rules of their own (i.e. knock before you enter).

What are your expectations of the youth while they live with you?

The Host Home Projects an opportunity for the youth to live in a stable environment while they work on self-determined goals (i.e. attending/finishing high school, getting their GED, securing a job, learning a skill or trade, saving money, paying rent). The youth and their case manager will develop a plan with clear goals that everyone formally agrees to (the youth, the hosts, the case manager, and the Host Home Coordinator). What expectations do you have for sharing your home with a youth who has different political or religious ideologies than you? If the youth is school-aged, do you have an expectation that they should be attending classes?

What is your financial commitment to this youth?

You will be responsible for providing food for this youth for the duration of their stay. You can often expect your utility and groceries bills to go up and we can provide up to a \$250 monthly stipend to help offset this cost. Aside from providing food and a safe home, you will not be responsible for other expenses. The case manager and Host Home Coordinator will work with you on setting appropriate boundaries around expenses. This project budget also includes a Client Positive Youth Development Fund that can be used to help support clients in hobbies, skill-building, volunteering, field trips, and other activities they choose to help them find opportunities they enjoy while building connections within their community.

Is your living space ready for a young person?

The youth must have their own room or private space. That room/space should be clean when the youth moves in. Make sure that your smoke alarms work and that you have accessible fire extinguishers. If you have alcohol in the house, it should be kept in a safe place where the youth is less likely to have access to it.

Are you open to sharing your home with 2SLGBTQ+ youth?

You would need to get acquainted with 2SLGBTQ+ youth issues and explore your own feelings about sexual orientation and gender identity and learn to be able to talk about and deal with those issues. Even many people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual don't necessarily have much awareness about transgender issues.

Have you explored (personally or otherwise) issues such as white privilege and racism?

The majority of hosts in existing host home programs are white, whereas many of the youth experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma are people of color. If you are white, it is extremely

important that you become very aware of race, racism, and white privilege and the implications of living with that privilege. Talking about this will be part of the training.



Are you willing to put in some time to create a nurturing relationship with a youth?

Developing a trusting relationship with a young person may take some time and hard work. This may require you to be an active participant in that young person's life (i.e. driving them places, helping with schoolwork, meeting with case managers).

Are you capable of living with a youth who may be working through difficult issues?

You need to be conscious that the young people who participate in the host home program will come from all sorts of backgrounds and have lived through all sorts of experiences. Some have been abused, some are in recovery for substance use, and some have never had a healthy adult-youth relationship. These issues will also be discussed during the training.

HOME INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Does the applicant's home have:

Running water and a working hot water tank

Electricity

Consistent access to food

Heat/air

Private living space for the youth to sleep

Bed for youth

Space for their belongings

Homeowners/Renters Insurance

Fire Extinguisher

Smoke and carbon monoxide detector

First aid kit



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who do Host Homes serve?

Sisu currently provides Host Home supports to youth ages 15-17 who are experiencing homelessness but do not meet DHS criteria to enter custody and young adults ages 18-24 who are experiencing homelessness of any form.

Where are Sisu Host Homes available?

Host Homes are primarily available in the OKC metropolitan area at this time. To be an eligible host, you must live no more than 45 minutes away from the downtown OKC area.

Do I have to host a youth under 18?

Sisu will only ask Host volunteers to do what is most comfortable for them, and as such – you are able to opt-in or out of what age groups you do not feel comfortable hosting.

If I am hosting someone under the age of 18, what do I need to know?

All youth under the age of 18 have been screened by DHS to determine if they meet the criteria to be put in custody and all attempts to engage legal guardians prior to being placed in Host Homes. When possible, if a legal guardian cannot allow youth to return home – they will sign a waiver to allow their child to be in Host Homes for a set amount of time. Host Home volunteers **DO NOT** become their legal guardians nor do they work towards any manner of adoption or long-term placement of the youth without consulting the program coordinator and DHS representatives.

How are youth selected?

Host Homes is not for every youth experiencing homelessness. We hope to utilize this as part of a continuum of shelter options for youth in this situation. Youth eligible for Host Homes have to already be actively working with an approved Sisu case management program, have a certain level of maturity and stability demonstrated prior to referral, and agree to all program requirements.

Do we host youth with children of their own?

At this time we are open to Host Homes that are able to accommodate a youth and their child – additional training and discussions will have to be had in those scenarios.



** If you have a history of being a certified foster parent and can provide recommendation letters, you are eligible to be a host home volunteer with expedited credentialing.*

What is the process for becoming a Host Home?

In order to become a fully credentialed Host Home through Sisu you must do the following:

1. Complete the Host Home volunteer application and an OSBI background check for EVERY person over 18 living in the household.
2. Complete an informal interview with the Host Home Coordinator or program representatives
3. Complete the Sisu orientation training the online training and a short orientation (to be scheduled by the program coordinator)

What if I have something on my background check?

Sisu strives to be as diverse and flexible as possible. Certain legal histories will be considered on a case-by-case basis. You are **NOT** eligible to be a Host Home volunteer if you have had any sexually based offenses in your lifetime.

Does being a host home come with pay?

Host Homes are primarily a “volunteer” based program, however, we are able to assist hosts that request it with pre-set, nonnegotiable, monthly stipends to offset the cost of food and utility usage in the home. This amount is not enough to replace any household income by any means and should only be planned to be used to supplement and help the youth meet basic needs. If you do not wish to utilize the stipend – you can opt-out.

Am I able to claim the youth as dependent on my taxes?

No. Hosted youth do not qualify as dependents and therefore are not able to be claimed for tax purposes.

What if I live in an apartment?

Host Homes can be houses, apartments, trailer/mobile homes, or townhomes. As long as they meet the criteria to be suitable for human habitation and pass the home safety checklist.

What if I have a spare room but no furniture?

Host Home volunteers are able to request help getting spare bedrooms they intend to use for hosting youth furnished by requesting help from the Host Home Coordinator. We may not always find full furnishings but we will do our best.

Do I have to provide transportation for the youth I am hosting?

Sisu tries hard to only ask their volunteers to do what is most comfortable for them. Transportation assistance is provided to all Host Home youth when possible and a Host volunteer helping that youth is at their own discretion. We do note that if you are hosting a minor, you may be asked to assist with getting them to certain important locations from time to time.



What do I have to do with the youth while they are in my home?

The youth in Host Home programs will already be connected to and working with a case management team to help them achieve action steps towards their goal of independent living or long-term stability. The Hosts are mainly asked to create a positive home-like environment for them during this time. You can have the youth be assigned chores, take them on outings, teach them to cook, clean, etc. at your own discretion (and mutually agreed upon by the youth).

What resources are available for hosts?

Youth who participate in Host Homes will have access to Sisu's existing programs including our Drop-In Center, education and employment coordination, weekly grocery deliveries, and life skills classes. Should youth need services outside of Sisu's programs, Case Managers will facilitate appointments and referrals with appropriate agencies. Case Managers and host families will work together to decide the best methods of transportation to these services. Sisu also has a program to provide free EMBARK city bus passes to youth.

What rules do the youth have to follow to be in Host Homes?

The host and youth will meet with either their case manager or the Host Home Coordinator to discuss their own house rules and expectations, as well as the program expectations. You will have the opportunity to set your own non-negotiable house rules as well as discuss house rules that the youth may need more flexibility on.

How long do Host Home placements last?

Host homes are designed to be a shelter alternative versus a housing program. Placements typically last approximately 6 months but can last up to 24 months. Respite Hosts can expect placements lasting up to 4 weeks.