

HOST

John & Fiona Earle

On 18th April HOST celebrated its 20th birthday by giving a party in the magnificent Locarno Suite at the Foreign Office. We went, and met other hosts from all over the British Isles.

HOST is a charity that arranges visits where international students become guests in British homes. Thousands of hosts and students have benefited. Many have developed strong friendships that last for years.

Hosts invite international students to their homes as guests, usually for a weekend or a day, occasionally or regularly to suit their lifestyles. This allows students from around the world to experience British culture at first hand and be made to feel welcome during their stay in the UK. Hosting gives you that chance to practise your language skills and to learn about other traditions and customs in a mutual exchange.

In 2006 alone over 3,500 students from 98 countries requested a HOST visit. There are approximately 1700 volunteer hosts across the UK, with the majority offering invitations once or twice a year. Expenses can be claimed.

Hosting is fun and of mutual interest. Before Christmas, Sabine from Marseille came to us. She is studying Hydrology in London for a Master's degree. Dorothy came at the same time. She has mixed parentage, Korean and American, and was spending three months in London studying international ill health.

In March Aref, a Palestinian working in Syria for UNIFEM promoting women's rights, came along. We took him around with us, showed him Hertford on a Saturday market morning, brought him to church, took him to a pub near Cambridge (roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and English beer) and walked around some of the Cambridge colleges. He had no idea that a place like Cambridge existed – he had not left London.

Our next visitor, in June, will be an Iraqi doctor studying foetal medicine. This is an important meeting. We read today (*Sunday Telegraph* quoted in *This Week*) that one in four Iraqis has had a family member murdered since the US-led invasion. We know that our troops are being killed in Iraq. When he rang us to wish us a Happy Easter and to confirm dates for his visit, we said how glad we were that he is in the UK. It is safer.



HOST can only cater for a small proportion of all overseas students. Year on year, more students apply to visit a family, but not sufficient families (single people, couples too) are offering to be hosts to meet the current demand; yet, judging by the way that some of our guests in the past have kept in touch for several years, the visit matters to them. Some have returned to visit us. For most it is the only time that they have lived in an English home. For some it is the only time that they see England, as opposed to their University and University City.

The organisation could do with some more people willing to be hosts here in Hertford, especially as we are so near London. If you would like to be involved or want more information then please talk to us and we will put you in touch with Trina Golland in Hatfield, who is the local organiser. Alternatively you can make contact directly with the HOST office in London 020 7254 3039 www.hostuk.org