

“So you want to be a Teaching Parent?”
A candid dialogue of Frequently Asked Questions between
Prospective Teaching Parents and
The Executive Director of Boys and Girls Country
Revised 11/2011

Over the past 40 years, we have had the privilege of working with many fabulous Teaching Parents, (singles and couples), in the Boys and Girls Country child care ministry. If you are thinking about this wonderful area as a career, we applaud you! For those new to the child care field, it is the hardest work and the best job you will ever have! For those who are already in the field, and thinking of changing your service location, you already know that the most important determinant of your success is whether or not you “fit” with the organization and whether that organization “fits” with you.

In the dialogue below, we have attempted to address some of the most frequently asked questions at Boys and Girls Country - and our response to those questions. We hope this initial “conversation” will help you as you ponder your decision.

SPIRITUAL

Teaching Parent: Are you a Christian organization?

Executive Director: Yes. Teaching Parents and the children they raise here attend local churches (several denominations) and church attendance is a requirement on Sundays. Residents in the cottages are also actively involved in their church youth group.

Teaching Parent: Are you affiliated with a particular denomination?

Executive Director: No. As an organization, we are non-denominational, accepting and loving all people - residents and staff - wherever they are in their spiritual journey. The theological diversity of our staff and the diversity of our residents is one of our greatest joys and strengths, one of our biggest challenges, and one of our biggest opportunities to grow in our faith.

Teaching Parent: Does each Teaching Parent couple get to pick the church their cottage attends?

Executive Director: Yes and no. When new Teaching Parents arrive, they are required to attend the cottage church where residents are involved. Only if a cottage needs a new church based on the changing spiritual needs of that cottage, is a change recommended. Then the entire cottage family visits several churches in order to make their decision as a family. Once the choice is made, regardless if there is a change in staff members, the cottage is committed to this church for several years. This enables the children who live in the cottage to become a part of the church community and experience stability in their “church home” as they grow in their faith walk.

RESIDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Teaching Parent: Why are the children placed with you?

Executive Director: The majority of our residents come to live with us when their guardians (parents, grand-parents or legal guardians) ask for help. There is typically a crisis in the family; crises may involve divorce, desertion or abandonment, drugs and alcohol, mental illness, abuse or neglect, physical illness, the death of a parent, or other family problems.

Teaching Parent: What is the profile of the children who live there?

Executive Director: Children ages 5 to age 19 live on campus. Boys and Girls Country is a long term placement. Our data indicates that the longer a child stays at Boys and Girls Country, the better their long term success. Children are of average intelligence, able to attend public school, and must be capable of living in an open, community setting.

Teaching Parent: Do parents or families have to pay?

Executive Director: Guardians and families are asked to contribute toward a child's care based on their income and size of family; however, no child is ever turned away because their family cannot pay for their care. Admission to Boys and Girls Country is based on need, not financial resources.

Teaching Parent: How many children are on your campus?
Executive Director: Boys and Girls Country can serve a total of 88 children at any one time -- 48 boys and 40 girls. They live in eleven cottages (8 children each).

There is also a College and Career Program, and a separate College and Career campus for those residents who have graduated from high school and for whom we remain financially and emotionally responsible. Immediately after high school graduation, graduates enter the College and Career Program, attend college, go into the military, or attend technical school/training programs. Until they are fully launched into a successful adult life, they have "a bed to come home to" at Boys and Girls Country.

Teaching Parent: How long may children stay at the Home?
Executive Director: We are a place for kids to grow up. Children who stay the longest are typically the most successful. On average, our residents stay three to four years; however, many residents grow up with us and are a part of our College and Career family, and then our alumni family. Many alumni "come home to visit" while on military leave or to share news of a new baby or a new job. Like all parents, we take the long view; we want to be involved in children's lives from the moment they arrive until they are young adults and able to "do life" successfully on their own.

TEACHING PARENTS

Teaching Parent: Who are the most successful Teaching Parents at Boys and Girls Country?
Executive Director: We have spent a lot of time trying to profile our successful teaching parents, however, that one profile still eludes us. The truth is that our successful teaching parents come from many walks of life, are different ages, and have totally different personalities.

In an attempt to profile our employees, we developed "Ten Characteristics" of the most successful Boys and Girls Country employees, in any of our jobs here. The Ten Characteristics are: Compassion, Professionalism, Good Ethical and Moral Character, Excellent Communication Skills, Positive Attitude, Team Orientation, Integrity, Dedication/Dependability, Creativity, and Endurance.

If you have these qualities, you've got the foundation.

Teaching Parent: Do Teaching Parents have children of their own?
Executive Director: Yes. We believe that people who want to work with children most often have children of their own. Many couples come to Boys and Girls Country when their children are already in college or successful young adults. We accept applications from prospective teaching parent couples who have from one to three children. Ideally, children are age 5 or older. We use the term "ideally" because it is much harder for a houseparent couple with younger children to meet the demands of the job. Having said that, we will tell you that we have worked with many excellent houseparent couples, including some presently, who have younger children and who fulfill their roles in a remarkable way.

Having children of their own does not change the number of children placed in the cottage. Eight resident children live with the teaching parent family, regardless of how large the teaching parent family may be. Our families have 10 to 13 members living in their cottage.

Teaching Parent: What is the schedule for a Teaching Parent?
Executive Director: Teaching Parents work eight days on, and four days off. Shift work or hourly work is not available for the Teacher Parenting position at Boys and Girls Country. We are a family model. We are looking for 24 hour parents -- people who are present when kids go to bed, and who get up with their children in time for breakfast before school starts.

We are committed to making sure that our Teaching Parents have time off for rest and recuperation. The four days off are routinely scheduled and only in very unusual circumstances would Teaching Parents be asked to work (for extra pay of course) on their days off. There are a few things that are mandatory whether you are working or on duty,

such as the annual Spring Festival on a Saturday in April or May, or the annual Children's Awards Banquet, but these events are rare. We know that living in a cottage produces stress that only rest, sleep, and a fresh perspective – away from the cottage – can remedy and rejuvenate, and we want to make sure you get just that!

PETS

Teaching Parent: May Teaching Parents bring pets?
Executive Director: Yes. We allow teaching parent families to bring pets. This has been one of our hardest decisions. Due to the cleanliness standards when 10-14 people live together, and the fact that many children have allergies to pets, we cannot allow pets in the living area of the home, just your apartment. The exception to this rule is made for fish -- which several children and staff have owned. Snakes, lizards, spiders, and critters of this kind will not be permitted.

STAFF CHILDREN

Teaching Parent: May Teaching Parents home school their own children?
Executive Director: Yes.

Teaching Parent: What is it like for my child to live there and how will he/she be treated?
Executive Director: Of course there are ups and downs, but overall most staff children love living at Boys and Girls Country. Many older staff kids feel they are part of their family. Others just enjoy the activities and the opportunities they receive here.

NEW FAMILIES

Teaching Parent: Do you advise newlyweds to consider becoming Teaching Parents?
Executive Director: It depends and varies from couple to couple.

SINGLE TEACHING PARENTS

Teaching Parent: Is everyone a couple? Didn't you say something about Single Teaching Parent?
Executive Director: Yes. Our Home uses a model that has the teaching parent couple and a designated single teaching parent living in the cottage full-time. The Single Teaching Parent gets to know and parent the eight children when the Teaching Parent couple takes their four days off. The Single also works a schedule of eight days on and four days off. Singles work as support to another Single Teaching Parent on the second four days, and take responsibility for eight additional children.

Singles are typically college graduates who are seeking experience working with children, or they may be older singles who have raised their own children and want to keep raising others. There is no one profile. Singles have the challenge of working a schedule that is different than many of their non-residential friends, and may initially struggle with isolation. It is common for single staff working here to form a strong bond of friendship. The Single Teaching Parent is a valuable third and sometimes fourth member of the Cottage Parenting team, and is often able to reach a child that no one else can reach.

TRAINING

Teaching Parent: What kind of training do you provide?
Executive Director: We have been told that we provide the best of all training! We provide a paid 3 to 4 week Pre-Service Training Program that includes basics such as First Aid and CPR, but also training that is specific to Boys and Girls Country. This includes Non-Violent Crisis Intervention and our Boys and Girls Country Model.

During this training period, you are introduced to every employee at Boys and Girls Country, and you have an opportunity to experience the campus culture in many different cottages. We invest in our new Teaching Parents during the first month to give them all the skills, tips, resources, and relationships which they will use in future years to raise our children. We look for, and we invest in long term career Teaching Parents.

The Teaching Parent model includes using every opportunity to present a Christian, loving family life wherein the Teaching Parents use "teachable moments" to explain, correct, or to

lead in such a way that each child begins to learn appropriate responses and behaviors. Activities are planned by the family; menus and meal preparations are planned and carried out by the cottage families; and, how budgets are spent is determined by the family.

COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

Teaching Parent: What benefits do you provide?

Executive Director: We provide medical, dental, and vision insurance. We offer long term disability, life insurance, and a 403(b) retirement plan, to which employees may contribute immediately upon employment, and to which Boys and Girls Country begins to contribute after one year of employment. We also have generous vacation/sick leave, direct deposit, and annual length of service recognition and bonuses.

Teaching Parents living quarters were renovated a few years ago to address space, privacy, and storage needs. In addition to housing, Teaching Parents also receive commissary privileges and personal auto maintenance at a reduced cost (after six months employment.)

Teaching Director: How is compensation determined?

Executive Director: Compensation is determined by a combination of local and national salary surveys. It is then applied to the educational and experiential background of each candidate. Room and board are also provided.

LIVING QUARTERS

Teaching Parent: Tell me more about the Teaching Parent apartments.

Executive Director: The cottages are approximately 5000 square feet, with Teaching Parent couple and Single Teaching Parent quarters attached, but separate from each other. Teaching Parent couples have 3 or 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, as well as living and kitchen areas. Single Teaching Parents have 1 large bedroom and bath.

FUNDING

Teaching Parent: How are you funded and is your funding stable?

Executive Director: Boys and Girls Country is almost 100% privately funded from the greater Houston community. The Executive Director and Development Department work with individuals, businesses, foundations, churches, and civic groups to enlist their volunteer and financial support. A forty-member board of directors is active in raising money. Some donors make monthly contributions and others contribute at special times of the year. 85% of the annual operating budget comes from contributions or special events.

Guardians and families are also asked to contribute toward a child's care based on their income and size of family; however, no child is ever turned away because their family cannot pay for their care. Admission to Boys and Girls Country is based on need, not financial resources.

DECISION TIME

Teaching Parent: How will I ever decide if this is the lifestyle for me?

Executive Director: The only way to decide if you belong at Boys and Girls Country is to talk to us by phone first, and then come for a visit. You have to "touch it, feel it, live it," and get to know us. We invite you to share our life for two or three days. We are brutally honest about what is good and bad about living in this environment -- and about our strengths and our flaws as a community. We are also candid about our challenges -- whatever they may be at the moment.

FINAL COMMENTS

Executive Director: It has been a joy for us to share our collective thoughts about teaching-parenting. If you are looking for a ministry-oriented, mission-based approach to raise fabulous children come to Boys and Girls Country! Miracles happen for children here every day, and I invite you to join us to be a part of the miracle-making!