

# Annual Report 2017

by Suzanne Weigelt, Chair of the Board

**„You must be the change you wish to see in the world.“  
Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)**

This quotation addresses every one of us. Our organization is not just a business, our purpose isn't merely to have as many people as possible on exchange programs; it actually works the other way around: youth exchange is our **means** to change the world into a more just and peaceful place. And here Gandhi speaks to all of us volunteers, to the staff and the host families. Every one of us must believe in our impact (small though the individual one may be); only by **living our values** can we contribute to reaching our goal of a better world.

This isn't just idle philosophy, I find it important that we, at least once a year, remember why we are here; in spite of all the change, our raison d'être remains unchanged.

## **Volunteers first!**

2017 was declared **Year of the Volunteers**. They have always been important for us, but last year, the Board made a special effort of putting our volunteers first. We view ourselves as a volunteer organization; currently, we have around 1100 people contributing their time to AFS. Some functions involve occasional, brief tasks; others demand regular, year-round attention. Every year, a couple of hundred returnees come back from their exchange, a seemingly huge number of potential new volunteers. However, we haven't been able to draw on this resource optimally so far, alas!

## **Handing back responsibilities**

Over the past few years, functions that used to be filled by the chapters have gradually moved to paid staff. Maybe this shift meant that some of the work could be managed more efficiently; but at the same time it became more expensive, and a lot of responsibility was taken away from the young people.

So, from 2017 on, we intend to be a strongly volunteer-driven organization again, giving back some key functions to the volunteers:

- We have newly defined and described all volunteer functions.
- A 13-page Training Concept for the volunteers has been developed by a workgroup from the SPoT (Swiss Pool of Trainers) and staff, and is being tested this year. It will be presented at the GA.
- Possible AFS volunteer „careers“ are depicted in the Volunteer Life Cycles: Certain functions are suitable for young, others for experienced volunteers, and some can be combined.



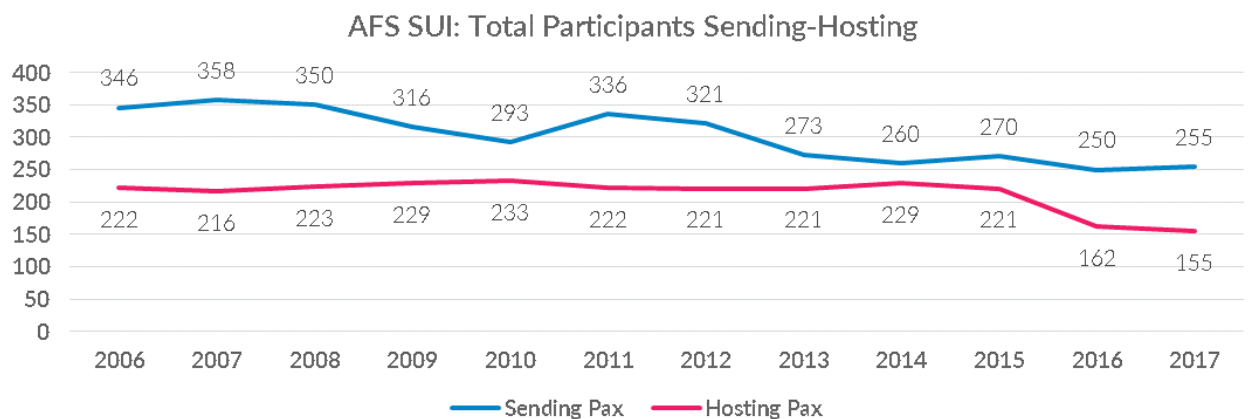
## Finding host families – together we can do it!

We want all AFSers and all our stakeholders to perceive AFS primarily as a volunteer organization; devoted, as explained above, to further a more just and peaceful world. The staff is a facilitator to reach that goal, by providing meaningful youth exchange programs.

That is and has been essential as long as AFS as an exchange organization has existed. This sets us apart from mere language-driven and for-profit outfitters. But, unfortunately, they grow and we don't, or not as much as we'd like to. One of our biggest challenges remains finding host families. It is not only a costly and energy consuming enterprise for the dedicated people working late hours at the phone, it also makes more sense to recruit host families at the source: where an exchange has just taken place. Therefore, we have started to hand part of the host family search back to the volunteers in the chapters. Just think: If every newly returned participant pledged to find one host family or one sending student, and if half of them succeeded within two years, we would be growing not only in numbers (which means coming closer to fulfilling our mission), but also financially, allowing us to continue investing in the volunteers and the quality of our programs.

## Stability & growth

The past year was a busy year, a challenging year, a hard year, and a successful and fun year. All is true, depending on what you focus on. From the point of view of stability, which was one of our Board Priorities, the outcome is quite mixed. Thanks to a more transparent financial analysis, we were able to closely monitor our expenses, investments and incomes. Controlled management of the planned and approved investments of half a million CHF allowed us to close the year CHF 60'000 better than the budgeted net loss.



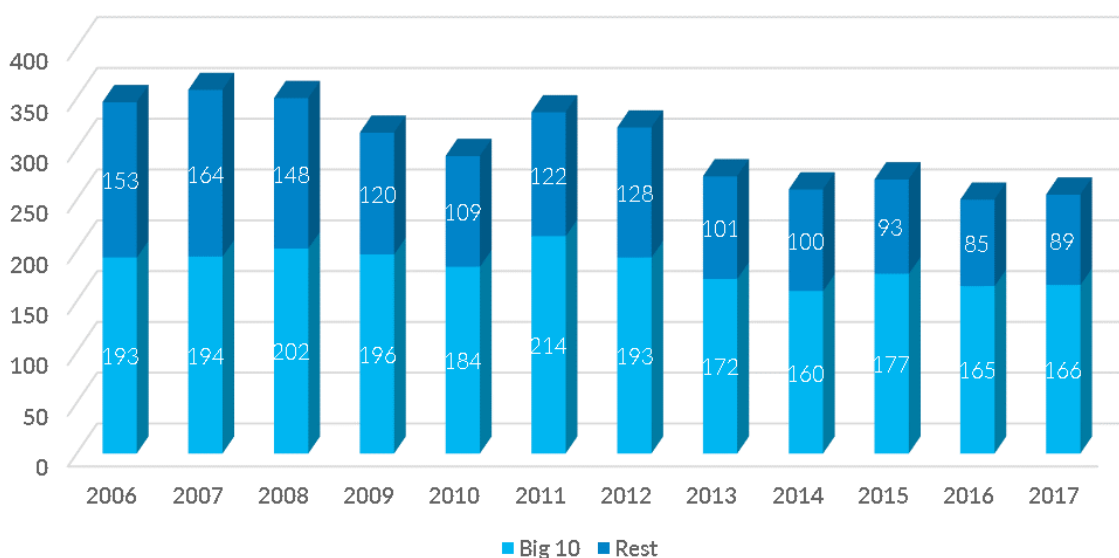
As for the total sending numbers, our major source of income, they didn't rise quite as much as hoped for, but at least we were able to achieve a turnaround. The same trend appears to continue for 2018: except for two countries, the USA and GB (due to the „Trump effect“, where the young people boycott the US - the same is happening in other EU countries; and stopping the program in England for quality reasons; „growth with quality“ doesn't mean growth at all costs), our sending numbers have gone up. These generally positive signals are silver linings on the horizon: They indicate that the measures taken and the investments of the past two years are slowly taking hold. On the other hand, staff numbers, and therefore staff costs, were too high compared to the student numbers (our anticipation of fast rising participant numbers due to better marketing was too optimistic). We were forced to reorganize and reduce the staff. Thanks to the restructuring of processes in the past two years, we were able to do this without lowering quality. Nevertheless, we hope that these measures will only be temporary!

## Financial Health

We were striving for a “black zero” budget for 2018; yet, when the total participant numbers showed a sinking tendency, we had to accept the fact that we need another year of patience to achieve this goal. Luc will explain in more detail how the negative budget came about, but I can already assure you that we have enough reserves for another budgeted net loss; that we are still a financially healthy organization, also by the standards of AFS International. Our investments in volunteers have been put to good use, and we will and can continue to invest and thus strengthen our volunteer base.

Naturally, we would have liked the results and forecast to look better, but the market is still very competitive. The for-profit organizations are growing - positively put: the market for foreign exchange exists. But those organizations don't host (still a cost-driver with us, because of the host family search), and they only send to countries where „school languages“ are spoken. Do we want to compete with them? Do we need to compete with that business model? No and no! Luckily, we are mission-driven, and our main goal isn't to make money. We function in a great worldwide network and our aim is to foster peace and a more just world. Every student we send will increase the potential for more responsible and active citizens who will engage in actions that are in accordance with our mission. This is what is important; it's what we believe in and what we've been doing, together with the Network, for many decades.

SUI Sending Analysis: Big 10 vs. Rest



## 2017 Highlights

- **Modernized website & print materials:** All our marketing material has gone through a redesign last year. We are proud of our new web appearance, the ACROSS, and the brochures and manuals, all in line with the international corporate identity. We have intensified Social Media Marketing (Facebook, Instagram), aimed at host families and participants. These are all results of our marketing efforts.
- **Inquiry process:** The newly defined standard procedure is more efficient and customer-friendly, another achievement of the marketing team.
- **Vision:** The Board, at its retreat in November, took a step back to rethink what we are and what we want to be. The Vision for AFS Switzerland wasn't up-to-date and far from sexy, as some of our volunteers had been criticizing. We came up with a short, catchy, and ambitious slogan for our new Vision: „AFS is THE place for intercultural experience and expertise.“
- **ICL:** Intercultural Learning is a means to an end, the end being to form responsible, active citizens. It is what happens when one is exposed to AFS, to our exchange programs, but it is also an integral part of all volunteer trainings. It is crucial that all of us - volunteers, staff and participants - have not only experienced ICL, but that we also have some formal knowledge of ICL. As of 2017, the whole staff is at least at Level W (What Every AFSer Should Know about ICL), and all Board Members will have either a GCC (Global Competence Certificate by sentio) or a Level W by mid-2018. More details on this subject will be presented at the GA.
- We are working on a **Revival of the Chapter Ticino:** A workshop with interested volunteers took place in July where options were discussed in a positive atmosphere and high spirits. As a first step, we have put one of our interns on the task of translations. Website and print materials will be ready in Italian by 2019.
- We increased the **geographical diversity** in Hosting to 48 countries (2016: 45), and in Sending to 42 (2016: 37). But the destinations aren't evenly distributed, since our ten main Hosting partners hosted more than 50% of our students, the USA remaining the biggest one by far.
- **sentio:** Here, the variety lies not only in the destinations and the program content, but also in the length. The most popu-

lar one was the Semester program. The distribution of the 32 sentio participants is as follows: YP 4; Semester 15; Trimester 6; Short Programs 7.

- **AFS.Business:** We continue our efforts to open up our programs to young people who start their career with an apprenticeship. In order to do so we collaborate closely with companies. In 2017, we sent 10 participants in the second pilot of the SVV (Schweiz. Versicherungsverband) on a year program and 5 participants from a big bank on a trimester internship program in Poland.
- There is still a very high demand for **English speaking countries**. We are trying to keep up with this demand by constantly offering new possibilities; in a field where competition is extremely high and where not all partners meet our quality standards. For this reason we are stopping our collaboration with our current exchange partner, but have found a promising new partner for England, Wales and Scotland as of summer 2018. Besides our overseas English speaking countries, Ireland is a reliable partner in Europe.
- **GA 2017 in Vevey:** Held at the well-situated Salle del Castillo, on the shores of Lac Léman, with beautiful weather, and 59 voting members. Prior to the statutory General Assembly, the Board explained the financials in greater detail to interested parties and was open to Q&A. One highlight was the very interesting speech of AFS SUI member and Vice-President of AFS International Urs von Arx. Farewells and due thanks were given to Board Member Evelyne Suter, who unfortunately couldn't be present. Shady Ashong is the newly elected Board member and was warmly welcomed.
- Last, but not least: **New International Network Strategy:** At last year's Network Meeting in Ghana, the exciting new Network Strategy 2018-2022 was endorsed by the pleased member organizations. The strategy is based on a well-founded analysis of the status quo and the situation on the market. It proposes several concrete projects that will allow us to grow and reposition ourselves on the market. Should you be interested to hear more about the Network Strategy, either contact the office, or attend the GA, where I will present the highlights of the Strategy.

**Thank you for your interest and your support! Together, we will make a difference!**

Suzanne Weigelt, Niederhasli, March 2018

If you have questions regarding this annual report, do not hesitate to contact Suzanne Weigelt, Chair of the Board (suzanne.weigelt@afs.ch) or Partner Director Luc Estapé (044 218 19 19, luc.estape@afs.ch)