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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Contest #4 Winner: Sure to Make You Smile

Anosha's 90 hours of community service have given her so many opportunities. Why do volunteers matter? "Volunteering teaches you how be compassionate, how to spread smiles, spread happiness, spread love," she says. "It teaches you to make small changes in the world around you to make a big difference."

—Anosha (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Campana family (WI)

Play Ball!

For me, spring means something new. That is how I decided to try softball. At first I was a little scared to go to the practice. Girls have been doing this sport for years, and I never even heard about it. After my first practice, I realized how much I liked it and how naturally it comes to me. Coaches and teammates showed huge support and continued helping me going through all the rules and details of the game!

It has been two games so far, and we won both of them! We have a lot more, and I am going to do my best. This is so exciting to have a wonderful team and coaches, to try a totally new sport, and to fall in love with it!

Don't count the days, make the days count. Try something new when you have a chance, and have a unique experience!

—Kristina (FLEX, Russia), hosted by the Vehrenkamp family (WI)

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Kristina rounds first base and heads for second!

Hoppy Easter!

Easter egg hunts, decorating eggs, candy, finding gift baskets, enjoying the moment with loved ones, and being grateful to God is how Easter defined itself for me, with a religious context as well. My first Easter has claimed its place as one of the best festivals of my life in the USA. To give me a deep idea of what Easter is, my host parents took me to church, hid eggs in the backyard for me and my sisters to find, gave us clues to where our gift baskets were hidden, and of course, provided us with materials to decorate eggs! I didn't even know Easter was a festival, but I experienced it now, and I couldn't be more grateful for that!

—Ghanwa (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Shields family (PA)

Ghanwa displays her beautifully decorated Easter eggs.

The Great Outdoors

Deception Pass and Whidbey Island are some of the prettiest places I have ever been. We set up the tent, walked along the beach, roasted some Halal marshmallows over the fire to make S'mores, and played games—such fun! But then came night. I had laughed and made fun of my mom for packing so many sleeping bags, but it wasn't enough! It rained and got so cold that I finally crawled into the car. Oh, that car seat was so warm and comfortable. We did not stay for a second night!

It was a memorable trip for me, but they say you learn something new every time. I learned not to make fun of my mom when she takes sleeping bags!

—Behram (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Kerr family (WA)

Behram (left), along with Aya (YES, Egypt) and Fatima (YES, Pakistan) *before* nightfall...

Inas with her host dad Tom and host brother Damon at the pueblo.

America's "Ancient" History

My family and I visited Wapatki National Monument with the remains of the 800-year-old pueblo. There were two interesting things near the pueblo. One was a court where people used to play a kind of basketball. Most amazing was the blow hole, a very rare geological feature where a hole in the earth blows air straight up out of the ground, like a powerful fan. It's caused by the pressure difference between the underground caverns and the outside. Visitors put scarves or hats above the blow hole, and they were lifted straight up into the air.

I learned that native peoples had a special culture before the Europeans came. I was impressed with their homes and their ability to survive in such harsh lands. My school has many Native Americans. It was great to learn more about the history of their culture.

—Inas (YES, Lebanon), hosted by the Seelhammer-Marcinko family (AZ)

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A Pakistani Voice on the *Voice of America*

In February I got an offer from the *Voice of America*, asking if I would be interested to come on air and talk about my exchange experience in America and how exchange programs promote cultural harmony to bridge the gaps among different nations.

A program called Zindagi 360 recorded the interview for the *Voice of America*, and it was broadcast in Pakistan in March. We talked about how PAX and YES have enabled two people from two completely different parts of world to come together and form a family that lives under the same roof. After the discussion, I also made roti (traditional Pakistani bread) with my host mom; this was also shown in the interview. My local coordinator Meredith Safford also stayed with me most of the time to boost up my confidence.

This is truly a milestone in my life, and I wouldn't have been able to achieve it without being an exchange student acting as a cultural ambassador for Pakistan in the U.S. I'm so honored to be a part of PAX, and thinking of how close I am to going back to my homeland brings tears to my eyes.

—Mubashra (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Romano family (MD)

Sitting next to her host mom Diana Romano, Mubashra (left) does a double take, hardly believing she is representing Pakistan on the *Voice of America*!

April Fools!

After a day filled with April Fools' Day jokes at school, Kite from Thailand and Martin from Spain were absolutely sure the tennis coach was joking when he sent the team out to the courts carrying shovels. But after a record-breaking winter, shoveling was actually how they had to start the tennis season!

—Kris Hales (NH), community coordinator

Martin and Kite know those are shovels—not tennis racquets—in their hands!

Greetings from a PAX Alum

I'm an alumnus exchange student from the year of 2009-2010, which I spent with the wonderful Patti family in Chambersburg, PA, with significant support from my coordinator Laura Rose Puckett. Today, I'm a lawyer at Ukraine's top corporate finance law firm, Avellum Partners. The exchange experience was a big impetus for me, both in personal and professional development. It honed my English skills, introduced me to American culture and values, and broadened my global perspective. Ever since I returned to Ukraine in 2010, my exchange experience helped me enter Ukraine's top university and then get a job with a top law firm. So please consider hosting an exchange student, or maybe a couple. It just might change their future lives back home.

—Orest (FLEX, Ukraine), PAX alumnus

Orest knows his exchange experience helped him become the successful professional he is today!

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On the Home Front

Two Students are Better than One!

As we wind down the year, we are well aware that the departure date for our students to begin their journeys back home is coming near. It has been a year of trials, learning, a few frustrations, but mostly a year jam packed full of experiences and memories.

This past summer, we accepted a young man from Czech Republic named Petr as our student and also decided to serve as a short-term, welcome family to Paula from Brazil. She was here just two weeks when we knew she would be staying. We didn't want to let her go, and she wanted to stay—so stay she did!

Paula and Petr with the sea turtles in Hawaii—one of their many adventures!

This year we traveled 12,264 round trip miles with Petr and Paula, visiting family in San Antonio and experiencing the Alamo and the River Walk, touring Fort Hood in Killeen, all in Texas. We also visited Mall of America and Wisconsin Dells twice, and spent a December weekend in Chicago. We traveled to the Island of Oahu, Hawaii. There, we toured the Dole plantation, attended a luau, took in a whale watching tour, checked out the North Shore Pipeline, stopped to see some sea turtles, and of course visited the famous Waikiki Beach.

Thank you PAX for giving us this opportunity! Our family has grown in ways we wouldn't have expected.

—James and Cindy Crebo (WI),
host parents of Petr (Czech Republic) and Paula (Brazil)

D.J. put Mozambique on the map for all who attended a local cultural fair.

Sharing His World

Meet Djorkaelff (D.J. for short) from Mozambique. As a PAX foreign exchange student, he attended a cultural fair in Lebanon, MO, representing his country. All day long, many visitors stopped by his booth asking him questions about Mozambique. Some did not even know where his country was located, so just showing them on the map helped them better understand the geography. He talked about the industry, transportation, religion, currency, language, and about the capital city of Maputo, where he lives.

Coming to live on 40 acres of woods in rural Stoutland, MO—population 194—was a huge cultural shock for him since he comes from a city with a million people. He has experienced so much here in Missouri with the American/Missourian culture and is excited to take back to his country some of his knowledge and experiences. We are so proud of this young man who always wants to experience and learn our culture. We in turn have learned so much from him.

—Karen Phipps (MO), host mom of D.J. (YES, Mozambique)

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Tabea (second from left), along with fellow exchange students and community coordinator Monica Pardo (second from right) with the breathtaking Grand Canyon in the background.

A Spectacular Spring Break

Our community coordinator Monica Pardo took us for three days from New Mexico to Arizona. On the first day, we went to Oak Creek Canyon to hike through the water. Than we went to Slide Rock State Park, where we slid and jumped from rocks. It was a lot of fun! We were a mixed group of exchange students from many different countries. We spent the whole second day at the Grand Canyon. The biggest hole in the world, one of the world wonders—and now we saw it! We hiked a little bit and walked around the edge. It was just an amazing time with everybody, and the weather was wonderful all three days.

—Tabea (Germany), hosted by the Mercek family (NM)

Speak Out!

I took part in a "Four Way Rotary Speech Contest." In this contest, I had to write my own speech and speak in front of the Bow citizens. I gave a speech on my exchange year, and I encouraged people to send their children on exchange programs like YES. I placed third out of five people and won $100 in prize money. There were few, but tough competitors. I was really frightened at first, but as I stood in front of the people, I delivered my speech very gracefully and confidently. After the speech, people asked me a lot of questions about my exchange year and how I am liking it. The experience was really different, and through this contest I gained more confidence. It was great learning experience for me.

—Poonam (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Bouchard family (NH)

Poonam makes her voice heard during a local Rotary Club speech contest.

Positive Impact

Doing community service has made me appreciate about this important spice missing in the cabinet of love in Pakistan. Many Americans are willing to step forward and help the community, and this has impressed me. After experiencing this, I want to introduce this taste to the people back home.

—Sohaib (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Reichert family (WY)

The Reichert's pastor talks about the important impact having a very engaged Muslim student in their church community has had.

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Community Service in the Eyes of an Exchange Student

Looking back on the months spent in the U.S., Safirah says there are things that can't be described in words; one of them is 76 volunteer hours. While there are exchange students who have volunteered more hours, it's not about the number. "To me, this opportunity to help others—to make one's life easier—is such an honor," she says.

—Safirah (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Chaudhri family (VT)

Quite content right where she is

One Reason is All It Takes

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I volunteered just for school credits and my ranking in Scouts. I didn't see much reason to volunteer here. But then, I met my host father, an 83-year-old man who achieved everything he wanted in life: good kids, many friends, great financial situation, etc. Now he was spends his free time doing community service, volunteering, and helping others. He wants to return the favor to the world that treated him so well.

Someone said once: "Some people cross your path and change your way completely." This is what happened to me, and where my story begins. I have given 404 hours of volunteer work in seven different areas and 14 activities. I was given this amazing opportunity to be an exchange student and now like to give back to show my gratitude. I also wish to be an inspiration. My opinion of myself has changed from "a person who tries to appear good" to "a person who wants to help others to appear good and then repeat the procedure as a chain reaction."

—David (YES, Bosnia and Herzegovina), hosted by the Fournier family (MA)

More volunteer hours coming right up!

March Volunteer Madness!

We had another great weekend making friends, gaining leadership skills and community service hours through AmeriCorps, and sharing cultures with presentations of music and dance!

After a presentation at a school on Friday in rural Livingston, AL, we left the next day for the neighboring city of Epes, working with city officials to ready their community garden for spring planting. We were invited to a nice community party with lots of food, and fellowship! The students shared their cultural presentations and dances, and in turn were taught the Electric Slide!

On Sunday we were invited to perform again at the annual Indian Springs School International Dinner—always a favorite activity for students and families!

—Rebecca Kinney, community coordinator (AL)

Left to right in their national costumes are FLEX and YES students Dewangkoro (Indonesia), Izabela (Georgia), Khapiya (Kazakhstan), Anastasiya (Turkmenistan), and Anika (Bangladesh) with Mariam (Egypt) up front.

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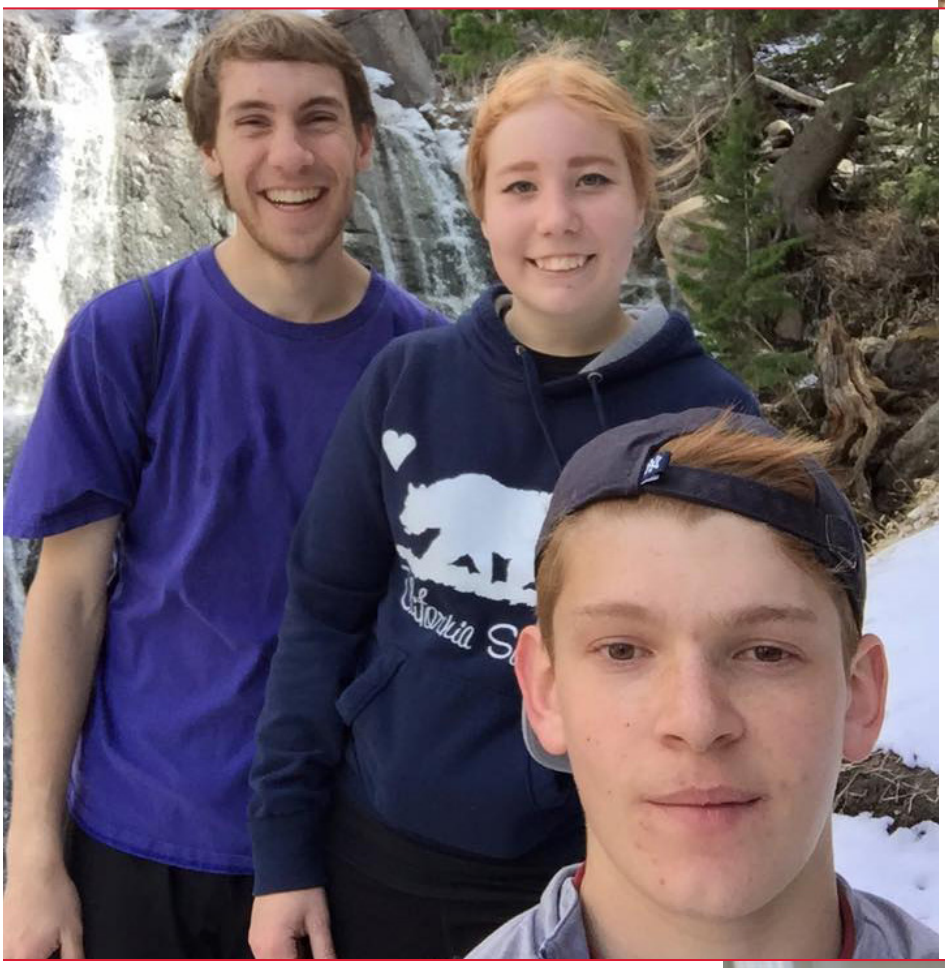
Familiar Voice, Unexpected Source

Yes, even in southern Alabama we have had both the British and the French invade at one time or another. Alicia from Belgium, hosted by the Rinehart family, could not believe the Old Watumpka reenactment of Early Alabama History—there were actually French soldiers and French hunters. Most surprising of all was an early French monk ready to share why he was in Alabama and how it benefitted France. They all spoke to her in French!

—Cindy Thigpen, community coordinator (AL)

After a chat in her mother tongue, Alicia pauses to smile with a "French" monk.



Great Adventures

My favorite thing about Utah is mountains. I can see them anywhere I look, and without them, it does not feel right. One of the most popular things in Utah, after going to Jazz basketball games, is hiking, and this is what friends and I sometimes do. This time we decided to do something more challenging and hiked up Bell Canyon to see the waterfall. It took us three hours to go up with a little bit of adventure. But the view of the waterfall surrounded by snow and ice and the contrast with the hot, blooming valley was a reward. And from the mountain, we could see the whole city spread out behind us. I felt so jealous to Utahans who can enjoy these views anytime they want. I am glad my friends showed me that place. People that I've met here made my experience special, and I love every part of it.

—Yuliya (FLEX, Russia), hosted by the Miller family (UT)

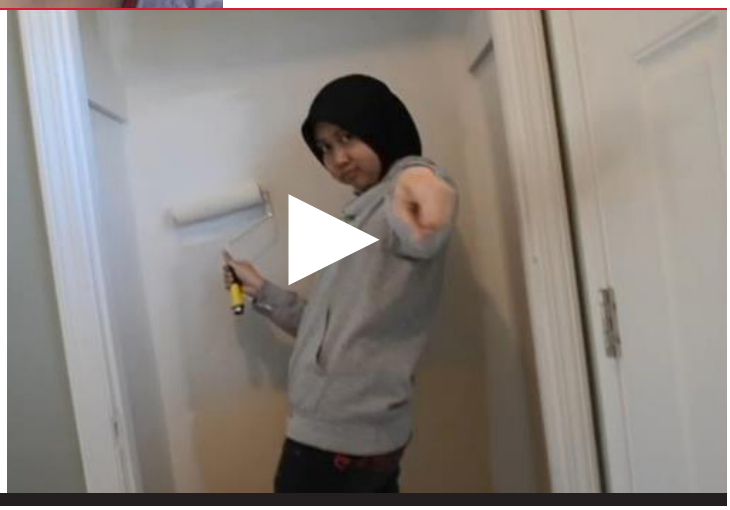
Yuliya with two of her friends, Michael (left) and Colton, take a break at the top of Bell Canyon.

My Volunteering Diary

I've done 150 hours of volunteer service—from picking up garbage with the Boy Scouts to serving food.

I'm inspired by the people I meet. Every Sunday morning for example, while my host family is at church, I volunteer at the office or in the library. Every week, I have more friends and also bring home more knowledge from conversations I have with people.

—Ayunda (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Jochman family (WI)



I want *you* to let me know if I missed a spot!

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As Seen in Social Media

Click on any image to view full post or watch video

We Want to Hear from You!

Whether you have considered hosting a high school exchange student, sending your teen abroad, having an exchange student at your school, working locally to support an international student, or you simply want to learn more about what it is we do, feel free to give us a call at **800.555.6211**.

Already involved and have something to share for a future issue? Regardless of your relationship to PAX, we are always accepting interesting content (stories, photos, videos, etc.) for next month's issue at paxpress@pax.org. **Click here for full details**.

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