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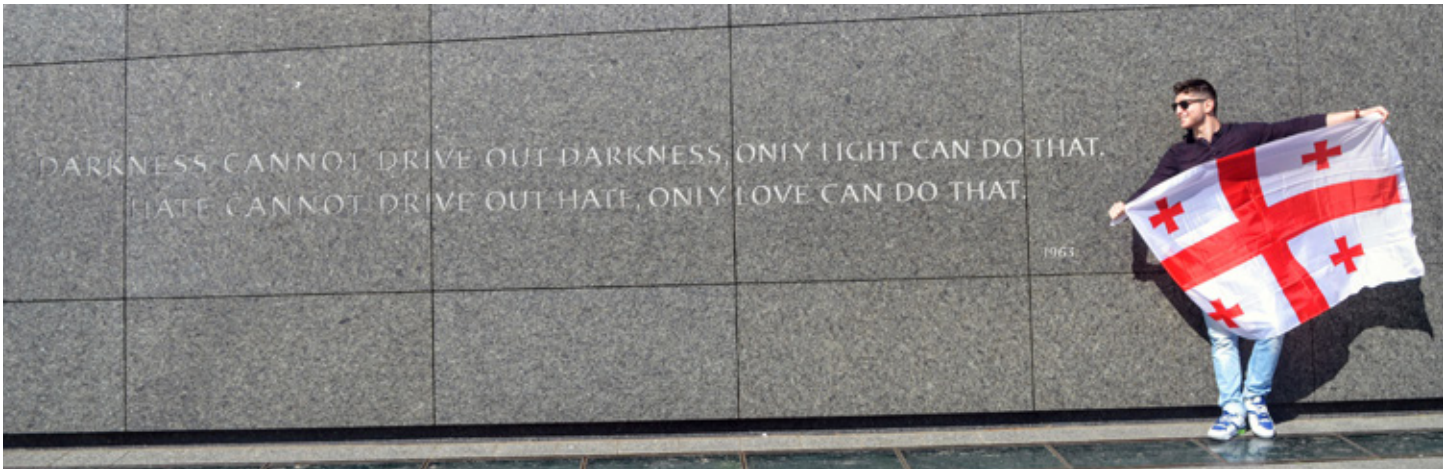
PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools



Giorgi proudly displays the Georgian flag in front of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.

Doing His Civic Duty

I won't be here two months from now, but I will have a lot of wonderful memories to remember. One of these great memories is Civic Educational Week, which was held in Washington, D.C., March 13-19.

The best part of the week was meeting with the senators and congressmen of our host states, so I met Senators Steve Daines and John Tester, and Congressman Ryan Zinke, who all represent the State of Montana. It was the most valuable experience to represent my home country and talk about my exchange program to the people who oversee "liberty and justice for all." We had a conversation about U.S. government systems and the election process. They said I am the one with a successful future. I hope they are right!

—Giorgi (FLEX, Georgia), hosted by the Evenson family (MT)

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What an EGGsellent experience for Yara!

Celebrating Easter in Wisconsin

Easter is the time to spend a fantastic holiday with the family. I went with my family to celebrate Easter at my grandparents' house in Wisconsin. We all had our Easter dinner together, and I cooked some blueberry pancakes. I had so much fun and joy coloring the eggs, where I got to use my creativity skills while decorating them with different colors. It is the time for me to learn more about the traditional way of how and why people celebrate Easter in America. Easter gathered us to make a strong family connection and our love continued to grow. It was a memorable experience!

—Yara (YES, Egypt), hosted by the Brunner family (IL)

Brayan and host sister Alida with Special Olympics athletes

Something Really Special

My family has been actively involved in Special Olympics for 12 years. The Special Olympics' mission is similar to being a host family and being an exchange student: working to spread compassion and acceptance in a way that can unite the world.

The vision of inclusion starts at the local level and expands to a global scale. My family sees that happening when we host foreign exchange students, and they get involved in something we feel so compassionate about. Our student Brayan has a sister with special needs and understands the importance of Special Olympics.

Brayan has been an important addition to the athletes this year. He has been involved in motivating the athletes and even practicing skills with them. We are so lucky to have such a compassionate student in our home and in the lives of our Special Olympics team.

—Kari Berg (MN),
host mom of Brayan (Mexico)

Unexpected Lesson

Hosting an exchange student was a way to infuse culture into my home for an extended period of time. When I agreed to host a student, sharing our traditions on death never occurred to me.

Yet recently, my exchange student Mireia suffered the loss of her grandmother, Roser. From the time she entered my home, Mireia spoke of the wonderful food her grandmother spent hours cooking. As a single mom, it is hard for me to find time to prepare food, much less elaborate meals such as those she described.

I tried to teach Mireia to remember and honor her grandmother instead of feeling the emptiness of not being with her natural family. We took a trip to our beautiful Cathedral Basilica to light a candle in her grandmother's honor. Afterwards, we went out for lunch, and as we waited for our food to arrive, a funeral procession drove by the restaurant. I was able to teach Mireia about this custom. We then enjoyed the amazing food—and we were convinced it was a gift from Roser.

The hosting experience has been amazing, even in the sharing of death. Honor those you love. In life, there are no boundaries; we all live and grieve.

—DeAnna Atkinson (MO),
host mom of Mireia (Spain)

Mireia lights a candle in memory of her beloved grandmother.

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Maira got very familiar with a hammer over spring break!

Building Homes, Helping Others

Over spring break, I did something a little different than most of my fellow exchange students. I had an awesome opportunity to serve the community. I went on a weeklong school trip to South Carolina to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, which is dedicated solely to building houses. We helped with flooring and decking.

This was one of the most productive and best weeks of my exchange year so far. Through this trip, I gained a lot. I saw myself growing and did things I had never done before. This trip made me realize how thankful I should be for everything I have, because not everyone in this world has a place to live or food to eat. I not only got 40 hours of community service, but the sense of accomplishment and feeling of helping others made me feel better and proud of myself and my teammates. I know I made a difference, and someone will be living in that house very soon.

—Maira (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Ochoa family (OH)

Opening Young Minds

My child development class went to an elementary school to play with the kids, do math puzzles, and just have fun. I told them that I am from another country, and they were surprised.

They asked me so many questions that I talked with them for almost an hour. They had so many questions, and some of them were so good! One of them asked me "Do you live in a pyramid, and do you ride a camel to school?" It was just too funny! These kids love my country now, and their dream is to visit there. What started out as a simple visit became a presentation about my country. I will never forget this day!

—Sewar (YES, Gaza), hosted by the Pence family (IN)

Sewar smiles with her future visitors to Palestine!

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Facebook Sensation!

People have been so nice to me that I decided to give a shout out to them and also to tell students that this is a golden opportunity and that they should try to be an exchange student.

My perspective has changed so much in the past eight months that I believe one needs to get out there and experience the reality of life; it's scary yet beautiful at the same time. My social media posts about my exchange led me to be contacted by "Humans of Islamabad," a Facebook page devoted to sharing life experiences and events of people from all around the city of Islamabad, Pakistan, where I'm from. They asked me to share my feelings towards my exchange and what I think of travelling with a purpose. I did, and they posted it. I got a lot of amazing feedback from people I didn't even know!

—Khushba (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Bergerson family (WI)

Here's a snapshot of Khushba's Facebook page post. Click on it to read the entire submission!

A Giant Bite Out of the Big Apple

I took my seven YES/FLEX students to New York City for an enhancement trip. The kids were so excited to see everything they could. We visited the 9/11 Memorial, the Top of the Rock, the Statue of Liberty, Chinatown, and Little Italy. We walked the Brooklyn Bridge, shopped in Times Square, and got to know the subway system very well.

We even attended the Today Show and saw ourselves on TV! This was truly a dream of mine to see them so interested in our great city of New York.

—Jane Ciancio-Green (NY), community coordinator

Back (l to r): Melissa (host mom), Kaitlynn (host sister), Conuor (host brother); front (l to r): Michele (host mom), Artem (FLEX, Ukraine), Iyad (YES, Jordan), and NBC anchor Craig Melvin

Xiangyi demonstrates zhezhi, an ancient Chinese art.

Sharing Her Culture

Xiangyi is a very confident young lady who is eager to share her Chinese culture with her friends and classmates in the U.S. She started a Chinese culture club at Bradley Central High School in Cleveland, TN, where once a month, she gets a half hour to share activities such as zhezhi (Chinese paper folding), the fine art of Chinese tea making, and teaching words from the Chinese language. She also likes to share some of her favorite snacks from China.

She has anywhere from 10 to 20 participants each month, including Unai, another PAX student from Spain. Xiangyi has been a true ambassador and a great representative for her home country. Her host parents Jack and Joanie Saunders say she has been a great blessing to them, and they will be sad to see her leave.

—Lori Beth Robleto (TN), community coordinator

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Learning Through a Scavenger Hunt

On the first day of our end-of-year meeting in Madison, WI, we had to do a scavenger hunt. Sounds fun? Yes, indeed it was. After being assigned into groups, we were tasked to do our very best to look for all the things noted on a piece of paper. All of them were tricky, and we needed to think yet be fast since we were given a certain amount of time. Frustrated and exhausted along the way, our group managed to have fun, to laugh at ourselves, and to take pictures of everything we found. We may not have finished all of it, but we learned a lot of things about Madison, about Wisconsin, and about ourselves.

—Alia (YES, Philippines)
hosted by the Wayland family (WI)

Fauzan (YES, Indonesia), Humaida (YES, Ghana), and Alia discover more than anticipated on their scavenger hunt!

Don't "Flatten" Your Experience

"I would like to share with you my experience with volunteering in the United States," begins Svitlana. The young Ukrainian—like so many PAX students—has thrown herself into volunteerism this year in order to get to know her host community "on a deeper level." From construction work to lending a hand at the library, food pantry, or theatre, the young lady explains how she has learned from all of these experiences and encourages her fellow students to do the same.

—Svitlana (FLEX, Ukraine),
hosted by the Schaller family (OH)

Svitlana's passion for volunteerism comes through in her narration.

Kyrgyzstan in America

My trip to Washington, D.C. was the greatest! We went to several museums and toured many historical buildings. We were able to visit with my country's embassy and ambassador as well. I really liked seeing the Capitol building, the White House, and the Jeffer-son and Lincoln Memorials. I am so proud of my smart host dad. He explained the significance of every room and every picture in the White House, telling me stories about the presidents who lived there. I am super grateful to my host family for giving me such an amazing opportunity to see the U.S. capital.

—Gulnura (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan),
hosted by the Sims family (AL)

Gulnura and her host parents pose with Ambassador K. Toktogulov of Kyrgyzstan.

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Get Involved!

Finding Passions

I had the opportunity to take part in the yearly Model UN conference at UMASS Lowell. There were about 60 other students, representing nine different schools. I represented Brazil! We debated and discussed the current issues of each country and how each one could be solved. During this conference, I learned so much about politics and world issues. I learned so much about Brazil without being there. Because of this conference, I think I have found a deep passion for politics, something I was never interested in.

—Shukri (PAX Means Peace Scholar, Somaliland), hosted by the McLaughlin family (MA)

Shukri (center) and friends Lauren and Emily at the conference

Dance, Chorus, Clubs, Oh My!

Since I've been in the United States, I have had many experiences. I was on a dance team in the winter. We had lots of competitions and performances and practiced every day after school. Practicing a lot, we all became like a family. Last month, the chorus performed a pop concert three separate times at school. I took a part in the concert with my friends. And I have done more than 100 hours of volunteering. With the interact club, we volunteered at a museum, serving dinner. We all helped each other out, and we became very good friends.

—Nazirakhon (FLEX, Tajikistan), hosted by the Putney family (VT)

Nazirakhon's (right with Celia and Madison) huge smile shows how she feels about her dance team "family."

Hello, Dolly!

I was so lucky to be a part of the musical *Hello, Dolly!* while being here in America. We started my first week here in August, then we had a break until January. That is when we started working hard. My school has a long tradition to have a musical every other year, and I am so glad it was this year. The whole cast, crew, and band got so close during the months we worked on it, and it made me get more and closer friends. My host sister was in the musical too, and that made us do something together, which was really fun.

I love singing, dancing, and everything that has to do with a musical. It was worth every hour of working on choreography and weekends spent at the school when we had five shows with over 400 people watching every night.

—Mari (Norway), hosted by the Pocernich family (WI)

Mari and fellow cast member Ben take the stage by storm!

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Zoo Visit: Check!

I got to visit one of the biggest zoos in the United States, the St. Louis Zoo. I got to see many animals that I've never seen before, but I always heard that they still exist, such as polar bears and ostriches. I got to see one of my favorite birds, the flamingo, and in a really cold room, there were penguins. Moreover, I got to know about animals that I didn't know existed and that there are many kinds of birds that we don't usually see or hear about. It was a nice experience for me since visiting a zoo was on my bucket list of accomplishments for this year, so that point is checked.

—Yasmeen (YES, Arab Communities of Israel), hosted by the Hose family (WV)

Sometimes Yasmeen just likes to "monkey around!"

A Year Filled With Everything New

Beatriz came from Brazil, a land of beautiful beaches and constant 74-degree weather year-round to humidity, football, BBQ, and sweet tea. So far Beatriz has experienced pumpkin carving, Thanksgiving feasts, baby showers, visiting Atlanta and the Gulf Shores, museums, weddings, proms, sitting in a truck talking with friends, high school pep rallies, and church in Alabama.

Beatriz is hosted by Donna Ott, a sixth-grade teacher who has hosted before and loves the exchange experience of bringing new cultures to her home and friends. She has traveled all over Asia and has family in many countries—including Brazil, where she now has a "daughter" she must visit!

—Cindy Thigpen (AL), community coordinator

Beatriz and her host mom Donna Ott create a special Easter memory.

Has Spring Sprung?

One day during spring break—when sunshine came to Washington State (normally it's cold and rainy here), my friends and I decided to go to Alki Beach, which is in West Seattle. We could see the sunset and downtown from there. I walked along the beach, one hand holding an ice cream cone, watching people hanging out with friends and families. We also had a bonfire and made S'mores! It was one of the best days of my spring break.

—Pin (Thailand), hosted by the Morris family (WA)

Pin takes in a beautiful sunset on the shore of Alki Beach.

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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.) at paxpress@pax.org.

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