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# PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

## No Cold Feet for Yousaf!

Finally, Wisconsin got its first snow. It slowly descended around us until I woke up to find that everything outside was covered in beautiful white. I got so excited that I forgot the cold and just wanted to enjoy the scene and snow.

Now that the football season came to an end, I have joined Whitehall's wrestling team. I had never wrestled before, but this sport has always fascinated me.

International Education Week was another exciting aspect of my last month. I managed to give 30 presentations to a variety of audiences, including elementary and high school students, church parishioners, senior citizens, and town officials.

Read more about my amazing experiences on the PAX website.

*—Yousaf (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Staff family (WI)*

**Yousaf goes barefoot in his first snow, presents his beloved Pakistan, and gives his all in a new sport.**

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# Happy Holidays!

## PAX Tradition Continues

Coins for Kids is a non-profit dedicated to the goal of providing Christmas for disadvantaged children. For years, the generous PAX host families and students in our area have "adopted" a family each Christmas season, and this year was no exception! The first step was raising funds for presents. Then, once we received information about "our" family, we had an idea of what type of gifts to shop for. The students had a great time wrapping the presents and especially delivering them to the family. It's a great tradition that we don't plan on ending any time soon!

*—Laurel Paul, community coordinator (UT)*

**Delivering to the kids are (top row, L to R) Tianran (China), Anamaria (YES, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Maryam (YES, Nigeria), Sheena (PAX/YES alumna 2014/15, Philippines), Jakub (Poland), and Maggie (host sister) in addition to Korapat (Thailand) and Claudia (Spain) who are pictured down front.**

## Fascinating Celebration

For me, religion has never been very important, so when my host family asked me if I wanted to go to temple with them and take part in a Jewish service, I said yes. It was a chance for me, someone who just goes to his own church at Christmas and Easter, to see how a different religion celebrates an important holiday. What made this experience extra special was that I was allowed to participate actively in the service. Everyone in the congregation celebrated when they finished reading the Torah and unrolled it. It was about 50 meters long! It was fascinating to see this religious tradition. I'm glad I said "Yes!" to this opportunity.

*—Malte (Germany),*
*hosted by the Knox family (NV)*

**Eleonora (Italy) and Malte show just a small section of the Torah**

## Feeding the Hungry

Despite frigid temperatures and a snowstorm, 55 volunteers, including 16 exchange students in addition to host parents, siblings, and community coordinators, gathered on December 10 to participate in a shift at Feed My Starving Children in Chanhassen, MN. For two hours, we packaged food that will be shipped to Haiti. The girls were all smiles as they played a significant role in showing goodwill this holiday season.

*—Kris De Mattos (MN)*
*PAX community coordinator*

**Viktoria (Germany), along with her host sister Jayita, as well as Federica (Italy), Johanna (Germany), and Kazusa (Japan) have fun while scooping rice into bags to feed the hungry.**

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# International Education Week

## Alumna on IEW

International Education Week is always a highlight of the year—both for our exchange students and the PAX community. But before we share this year's highlights, we are pleased to present the work of Julia Tymoshenko. The young Ukrainian was a standout last year, when she was hosted by the Hamilton family in Louisiana. Continuing to overachieve, she has accepted the "International Education Week Challenge" with her inspiring video. Enjoy!

## IEW Contest Winner: Anastasiya!

International Education Week was a great opportunity for all exchange students to share about their country, make new friends, find inspiration, and motivate others. Looking at the unique Ukrainian culture and history, I found that I loved my motherland even more, and I tried to include everything possible in my presentation to make people fall in love with Ukraine too.

While doing my project, I realized one very important thing: although world cultures are impressively different, we all have the same feelings, problems, emotions, and life goals. So we have to appreciate and treat each other with respect. That's why I ended my presentations with encouraging my fellow classmates to live active lives, to travel, and never be afraid of changes. I didn't think IEW would influence me as much as it did. Now, I have a goal: to be a citizen of the world. I know that dreams do come true, especially when you're an exchange student. Hope you'll enjoy watching my fairytale!

*—Anastasiya (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Shank family (VA)*

**Anastasiya educates during the Capital Club's Thanksgiving Potluck and IEW Celebration hosted at the D.C. offices of American Councils for International Education. (Photo: BKhan_CClub)**

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# International Education Week

**Rada is at it again with her signature film-making style.**

## Bring on Bulgaria!

I presented to around 130 sixth graders in all, and each class was unique! In addition to my PowerPoint, I brought some Bulgarian money, rose oil, traditional bracelets, a newspaper, and my country's flag. My audience was excited to learn about where my country is located, how it was founded, its greatest treasures, what it's famous for, traditional holidays, dances, and even some words.

The students weren't the only ones to learn new things. As surprising as it may sound, I read a lot of interesting facts about Bulgaria, which I didn't even know myself. I saw how interested Americans are in foreign nations and that they have the desire to explore overseas, which makes me feel happy and supported.

*—Rada (YES, Bulgaria), hosted by the Zwaska family (WI)*

## Learning About Libya

On November 18, I presented my country, Libya, to 25 seniors and the teacher of my government class. The presentation included facts about my country, including where it is located, what the flag colors represent, the climate, population, monuments, clothes, and of course food! Doing the presentation helped me to be confident, to speak better in public, and to answer questions in a formal setting.

*—Kareem (YES, Libya), hosted by the Farr family (IN)*

**Kareem and his classmates proudly display the Libyan flag on the steps of his American high school.**

## A Proud Pakistani

I did a total of nine different presentations for elementary, middle, and high school kids. One of the main objectives of my presentations was to clear the misconception about Pakistan here, especially among youth. The main reason is that people don't know much about my country and religion, which creates misconceptions. I am very proud to say that I achieved my goal and succeeded in representing the bright side of my country. They now know about the religion, traditions, beliefs, and culture of Pakistan.

I learned so many things by doing research, and I actually came to know more about my own country. It also taught me what it feels like to be an ambassador, and the whole week boosted my confidence and leadership skills.

*—Sana (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Schultz family (WI)*

**Sana demonstrates how to write in her native language, Urdu.**

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# International Education Week

## Telling About Turkmenistan

I was so happy when students showed interest during my presentations that it inspired me to do even more. I taught them about traditional Turkmen traditions, including our national dance. They also learned how to say a few phrases in my language. It's a great pleasure to be an ambassador!

In an effort to spread my message even further, I have made this video. I hope you enjoy it!

*—Darya (FLEX, Turkmenistan), hosted by the Mikell family (AL)*

**Darya's excitement is contagious.**

## Inside Indonesia

I never imagined standing in front of the class and introducing myself as a youth ambassador of my country, Indonesia! I did two presentations in my art and U.S. history classes. I was feeling nervous before I started my presentation, but then felt comfortable when I started talking, sharing information such as location, politics, economy, education, and other interesting topics.

One of the pictures I showed them was of a typical Balinese dance, and they loved it. Earlier, I had performed my traditional dance at the Diversity Assembly in my school and it seemed like they enjoyed it, because I got very loud clapping. I am so glad to have this beloved opportunity.

*—Widi (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Reiley family (OR)*

**Widi is a whiz at Balinese boogieing!**

## A Taste of Kyrgyzstan

From November 8–18, I presented nine times in my high school, as well as in a middle school, elementary school, and at church. I shared a lot of pictures showing my country's natural beauty, my school, parents, national clothes, and national emblem. I began each presentation with my national anthem and played a Kyrgyz song. I brought some items to show too and wore traditional clothes. I learned how to be confident in front of my audience and ready to answer a lot of questions.

*—Saltanat (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), hosted by the Fawcett family (IN)*

**Donning traditional Kyrgyz garb, Saltanat presents at her church.**

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## What a Weekend in the District!

This is my first year as a coordinator with PAX. So far, we have taken Jousian (YES, West Bank) to a Big 12 football game and watched her glide along the world's second-longest zip line, but this past weekend in Washington, D.C. was the best.

On Saturday, Jousian, her host parents (Mike and Ann White), and I were immersed in the history of "Air and Space," courtesy of the Smithsonian. Later that evening, we enjoyed the one-of-a-kind experience of the National Symphony Orchestra Christmas special, before topping off the weekend with a candlelight show on Sunday. Jousian was especially impressed by the "more than 200-person" orchestra's "beautiful sound." "I learned a lot of new Christmas songs," she said, adding that she enjoyed how they began and closed each song in perfect unison. I'm sure there will be many more exciting events—both for me as a coordinator and for Jousian as an exchange student—but this one was special!

*—Dennis Dye, community coordinator (WV)*

**Jousian poses at the Kennedy Center before the National Symphony Orchestra's Christmas special.**

## Look Out Broadway!

Acting has always been my passion, and that is what I pursued on my exchange. In my first week here, I auditioned and got the role of the funny and lively Mrs. Bumbrake in the play *Peter and the Starcatcher.* After three months of daily, hectic rehearsals, we finally performed five shows in early November. But this was not the end of our story since we won the state championship and later performed on the stage at the Arizona Thespian Festival in front of a 4,000-person audience! This show was not just an awesome experience, but it also gave me a new family and lots of memories to take back.

*—Sabahat (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Strobel family (AZ)*

**Sabahat (seated) is thrilled to follow her passion along with fellow *Peter and the Startcatcher* cast members.**

## Cluster Cuts a Rug at Winter Formal

It was so much fun to see how American teens talk and dance at a school dance in order to get to know each other better. Before the dance—which had a "black and white" theme—a big group of us got ready together and had a nice dinner. It was a very interesting experience that we will all certainly remember for years to come.

*—Zahratul (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Fiechter family (IN)*

**(L to R) Haylee (host sister), Anastasia (FLEX, Ukraine), Eunjae (South Korea), Shohida (FLEX, Tajikistan), Zahratul (in hijab), Kayden (host sister, behind Zahratul), Yok (Thailand), and Fany (YES, Indonesia)**

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# Alumni News

## From International Exchange to IT Accolades!

**Shahen was also honored with the Presidential Education Award in the IT Sphere. Here, he poses with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan at the ceremony. (Photo: www.president.am)**

A FLEX alumnus from the 2010/11 school year is making a name for himself in his native Armenia! Shahen, who lived with the Knauth family in PA, was recently featured in *The Bradley Herald*, a website for FLEX alumni. Shahen developed an app called "Triip" while working at an IT startup company—which was then named the IT Startup of the Year in Armenia!

Shahen shared a personal message to his fellow FLEX alumni and future alumni: "Our world is fast-paced, and the key to be successful in it is to constantly develop new skills and deepen your knowledge. Do not be afraid of trying new things, and most importantly, never stop learning." Way to go, Shahen!

## Continuing to Challenge Herself

Last week, I joined my first English debating competition! This is quite a change from who I was just two years ago. Before my exchange year, I was extremely shy; it was really hard for me to gather enough courage to even say hello to people I knew when I met them. But during my exchange year, I learned and grew so much, all thanks to my kind, supportive host family and friends who taught me that things that scare you will really help you grow if only you're willing to face your fears!

Now, I'm majoring in IT and trying speech and debate; it was scary at first, but it is actually really fun! So, for those of you who think one year doesn't mean much, here's the proof that one year can really change people.

*—Vici (YES 2014/15, Indonesia)*
*hosted by the Cooper family (UT)*

**Vici (right) has lost some of her past shyness!**

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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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