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Program of Academic Exchange

PaxPress

All Aboard!

"So this is sledding," exclaimed Jawaria Shah when she arrived at the sledding hill. At first she had no idea how to propel herself down the hill, but with a few tips from her Wisconsin host family, the Pakistani YES student developed quite a knack for it. Jawaria, second in the photo, says, "I am very thankful to PAX for choosing such an awesome host family for me."

Seeing Christmas Through Muslim Eyes

Christmas is not about presents. It is not about Santa. It's not about going to church and it's not about family reunions. For me, Christmas is all about the lights and the spirit within people.

It always captures my attention when I see Christmas lights in movies. The lights are fascinating! So, I wasn't waiting for presents when the holiday season arrived. I was eager to see the lights around town and put up a tree and decorate it.

Egyptian YES student Menna Abozied

Fortunately, I got to put up the tree lights myself and I learned how to hang the ornaments. I had never celebrated Christmas before so it was my first time.

I also felt the Christmas spirit during the Jefferson High School Choir holiday performance. The music touched my soul.

I found the Christmas spirit within the lights, songs and Christmas movies. In addition to that, the presents were awesome and a great bonus. I'm a Muslim and I love Christmas!

Menna Abozied, (YES, Egypt)
Hosted by the Hajek family
Cedar Rapids, IA

Proud to Be a Kazakh Kerby

I remember the moment when I met my host family in the airport, and they hugged me like we've known each other forever. So funny, friendly and outgoing, the Kerbys have given me the incredible opportunity to feel all the miracles of American life.

Since we've been sharing our cultures with each other, I've been amazed by how they appreciate and love the history of my country. Now my dad calls himself "Kazakh Khan Richard First" and my mom says *salem*, which is "hello" in Kazakh every time I Skype with my family. My host sister, Julie, accompanies me when I play my national songs on the violin and now everyone who goes near our house sees a big Kazakh flag! Isn't this incredible?

To my hosts, I want to say I am eternally grateful to you for the warmth and support that you give me every single day. We can remember this year forever and smile every time we meet and celebrate the significant events of our extended American - Kazakh family. I love you and I am proud to be your Kazakh Kerby!

Akmaral Kamaliyeva (FLEX, Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the Kerby family
Berryville, VA

The Kerby family with Akmaral, right

At Home on the Podium

One of the best decisions I made was to join the school speech and debate team. I'm now performing an expository speech on what it is like to be an exchange student. I travel to cities all over Montana for tournaments with my team. One time I even broke into the finals! I'm learning so much and am having unforgettable experiences. Today a friend and I gave a TV interview for the upcoming state tournament. How exciting is that!

Vanessa Runft (Germany)
Hosted by the Cox family
Butte, MT

Learning about Liberia

For International Education Week, YES student Satta Dinuwelle taught a group of Sedona children about what life is like in her homeland. ***Read page 7 for stories about student efforts to promote global understanding.***

Up Close at the Inauguration

In January, we went to Washington, D.C. to see and experience President Obama's second inauguration. For the first time, we travelled in a subway and walked through nearly all of Washington to see the magnificent memorials and the statues of many great men. Our wonderful host, Bonnie Frank Hume, explained what they did and what made them great. On the day of the inauguration, we were lucky to get golden tickets, which enabled us to be closer to the president. We saw him with our bare eyes during the very entertaining inaugural parade. The five days we spent in D.C. were absolutely wonderful. They are days that will truly never be forgotten.

Farhad Ali (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Hume family
and Karim El Miari (YES, Lebanon)
Hosted by the Fournier family
Orange, MA

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Roman Filippov (FLEX, Russia), Coordinator Gil Roy and Shukur Sadikhov (FLEX, Azerbaijan) take the classic photo outside the White House.

From Maine to Florida

This year my Christmas was celebrated on a three-week road trip with my students. Most exchange students dream of Miami Beach. Their dreams became a reality. They really enjoyed swimming in the Atlantic Ocean at Miami Beach. We also visited Disney World and Universal Studios in Orlando.

On our way we stopped in Washington, D.C. so they could visit the historic sites and buildings, the White House being one. We also visited Arlington Cemetery.

When I told them that I was going to drive, they thought that it would take us forever to get there. You see, in their countries they do not have the great highways we have here in America. They really enjoyed being able to stop whenever we wanted.

Gil Roy, Community Coordinator
Oakland, ME

Flourishing in the Footlights

Before coming to the U.S., I wasn't interested in theater. I didn't consider myself an artistic person. However, I decided that it was my chance to have an experience in the dramatic arts. I learned a lot of acting techniques and how to express what I feel. In addition, I made an enormous number of good friends. Each play we did during the first half of the year taught me something about American culture. The last play was my favorite as it was a disco party set in the 1950's. The drama members only had a week to prepare, so we worked hard. We had to learn many songs and typical dances from that time. Our set was amazing. We transformed the school auditorium to a 1950's television studio with cameras, audience and even old advertisements. The last part we had to do before the performance was to find costumes from that time. This play opened up another part of me, my singing talent. I love my drama club as it is a small part of the greatest theater of the world. It is part of the American theater.

Yuliya Voloshyn (FLEX, Ukraine)
Hosted by the Iwanisziw family
West Wareham, MA

Host mother Theresa Edwards and Indonesian YES student Farihah Lailah

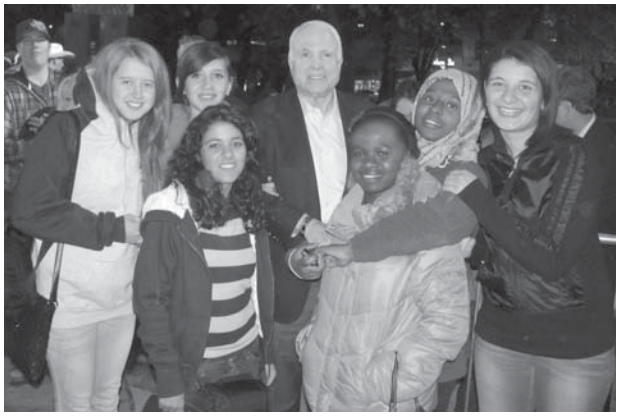
History Came to Life in Louisiana

I am hosted in Louisiana. It is one of the important places in the history of the United States. During the winter break, I visited the "French Quarter", the oldest neighborhood in the city of New Orleans. It's very interesting to connect what we learned at school about U.S. history with a visit to the place. I saw old buildings decorated with French architecture. I had so much fun with my host family as we walked around and met tourists from different countries. This is what makes the United States special. The U.S. has huge diversity and history that is related to countries around the world. Thank you for placing me in this amazing place! I enjoy history because we can heed the lessons and do better for the future.

Farihah Lailah (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Edwards family
New Orleans, LA

Bright Lights, Big City

Sofia Garcia, from Spain, and her hosts, the Towe family of Norway, Iowa, headed to Chicago in December for some big city Christmastime fun. Topping Sofia's list of things she did were: taking in the amazing display of Lincoln Park Zoo lights, shopping on the world renowned Michigan Avenue, enjoying the WinterFest display at Navy Pier and ice skating at Millennium Park. She also enjoyed Macy's store windows which were decked out for the holidays. Like typical teenage girls, Sofia and her host sister, Natalie, shopped from morning 'til night. They topped off their spree with a traditional Chicago-style deep dish pizza from Giordano's.



Arizona Students Given a Spectacular Trip to Washington, D.C.

On January 2nd we went to Washington, D.C. with our PAX coordinator, Marcia Goebel. The entire trip was sponsored by a gentleman from Sedona, Dorde Cedic. We stayed in D.C. for a week. The things we saw and did were incredible. When we arrived at the airport, Dorde presented us all with flowers. For most of us, it was our first time receiving a bouquet of flowers.

Not everyone is fortunate to have someone do something like this for them, and he did it for six of us! Dorde took us to the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court and Capitol Hill. We were invited to Senator Jeff Flake's swearing in reception, met Senator John McCain and spent time with Congressman Paul Gosar discussing political issues.

We also went to American Councils and the State Department. It was fun for us to see the people who are working hard to ensure we have an amazing year in the United States. The last day was spent touring the Mall and visiting different memorials and museums. Our favorite was the Native American Museum at the Smithsonian Institute.

We know how lucky we are and we want to let Dorde Cedic know how much we appreciate his gift. This was truly a trip of a lifetime!

The Sedona and Cottonwood ArizonaPAX Students:
Samira Ali (YES, Tanzania)
Satta Denuwelle (YES, Liberia)
Salma Elawaanni (YES, Tunisia)
Katevan Mammasakhlisi (FLEX, Georgia)
Darya Nevrayeva (YES, Kazakhstan)
Nazokat Samandarova (FLEX, Turkmenistan)

Bring It On

Cheerleading was a sport that I always wanted to do. When I came to Vermont I decided to do it, but my school doesn't have cheerleaders. They explained to me that since my high school doesn't have cheerleaders, I could join a team from another school. Then a friend told me that she was going to cheerlead for the basketball season. Both of us are cheerleading for a private school and we are having so much fun cheering at the games. In a few weeks we are going to start competitions, and I'm so excited for it. My host family always supported me and gave me advice.

Elisa Ramos (Spain)
Hosted by the Cayia family
Proctor, VT

Voting: A Right and a Responsibility

Tunisian YES student Manoula Benkhalifa and her host mother, Sue Dawson, marked Election Day in Chelmsford, Massachusetts.

Fantasy Football Becomes Reality

When I came here I wanted to play soccer, but I also wanted to try football to see whether I liked it or not. The first days on the football team weren't that fun, but with time, I found new friends because my teammates became my friends. At practice the coaches were interested to see my strengths so they could put me in the right spot, the spot that suited me and my abilities. I became the kicker for the team, and I made the team win a couple of times. My name has been in the local newspaper three times so far, and everybody recognizes me. In school everybody salutes me and gives me high fives!

Karim El Miari (YES, Lebanon)
Hosted by the Fournier family
Orange, MA

Advocating for Alabama

This fall, State Treasurer Young Boozer met with Coordinator Cindy Thigpen and Lisa Dabb's PAX students during their visit to the state capitol. Mr. Boozer explained how the state distributes funds to the schools and what the state does to provide for education.

PAX–Program of Academic Exchange is a not-for-profit educational foundation. Established in 1990, PAX sponsors international high school students from over 40 nations on five and ten month academic homestay programs.

For more information, contact:
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Hospice Volunteer Gains Valuable Lessons

Volunteering with Hospice of Little Traverse Bay in Petoskey has opened up many experiences for me and taught me a lot of precious things about life.

When I submitted my application to volunteer, I worried that it might be really hard. Luckily, we were given two days training. I learned what to do and what to expect. Also, I gained a lot of new nursing and health care skills.

Although I learned a lot during training, there are always obstacles in the real practice of working with patients. Some patients ignore me, some are so weak that they cannot speak at all, and some speak but not clearly. To overcome some of these obstacles, I use tricks like playing an instrument, reading the Qur'an and listening while a patient reads his Bible. I have learned it takes a lot of patience to deal with terminally ill people.

In spite of the obstacles, I still love volunteering in hospice. People might think hospice is a place for one who has only a few days to live, but that is not true. Hospice is a place for care and help through the end-of-life. I volunteer not just to fill my community service hours but because it teaches me how to value my life, not to waste the seconds I have, and to appreciate the love from those around me.

Febry Utami (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Rambo family
Harbor Springs, MI

The Penguin Plunge

Possessing a lot of courage and dressed like a penguin, Ahmad Ladadweh, jumped into an icy Vermont lake to raise money for families in need. "It was a lot of fun, but finger freezing!" exclaimed the West Bank YES student. He was accompanied by his host brother, Sebastian Durfee.

Trees for Tomorrow

I was selected to represent Appleton North High School at the Trees for Tomorrow four-day program held in late November. I learned about resource management through field experiences and studies of the forest ecosystem. I also looked at the linkage among humans, wildlife, plants, water, soil and air resources. I became acquainted with Wisconsin's Northwoods and the experts in this field: natural resource specialists, biologists, foresters and environment educators. It was interesting to note how humans interrelate and alter the environmental realm.

Trees for Tomorrow enabled me to become sensible about the decisions I make and how these could potentially hinder life on earth. I established great friendships based on mutual interests. Trees for Tomorrow left a profound impression on my passions and values.

Leigh-Anne Bosch (YES, South Africa)
Hosted by the Frelich family
Appleton, WI

Training Future Engineers

Over the winter break, Tygran Daniyelyan volunteered at the Shreveport Science Port. "It was a lot of fun," he said. "Those kids were really smart." The Odom family hosts the Ukrainian FLEX student in Louisiana.

At Your Service

PAX Coordinator Cliff Fournier, front, is known for helping his students get plugged into service projects in the Orange, Massachusetts area. Pictured with him working at a community meal are YES students Karim El Miari from Lebanon, Farhad Ali from Pakistan, Ibrahim Abu Khiran from the West Bank, Decky Tri Isdian Novinoor from Indonesia and Muhammad Khattak from Pakistan. They say that volunteering gives them a better understanding of the needs of a community and counters the stereotype that all Americans are wealthy. Some of the teens already have 200 community service hours tucked under their belts and are hoping to complete 500 hours by the end of the year!

Part of the Community

From Concern to Action

The differences between American culture and mine weren't notable until I attended an American high school. I was impressed by how students feel free to talk to their teachers and how people are concerned about each other.

I've seen this concern since I joined the Key Club. One hour of volunteer time can help hundreds of people. For the club, I gather canned food donations to send to agencies that help homeless people. We also donate money to a local charity, Caring and Sharing. Our school collected $3000 and with that money we bought things for kids from poor families.

It is really heartwarming how Americans teach their children to take care of other people besides their family. And our host families are the perfect example of this. I admire the hospitality of my host family and host school.

Chehronai Fozil (FLEX, Tajikistan)
Hosted by the Thomas family
Westerville, OH

Yasser Untong (YES, Philippines), Chehronai Fozil (FLEX, Tajikistan), Baqari Khachidze (FLEX, Georgia) and Nino Samsonidze (FLEX, Georgia) helped out at the International Dinner in Columbus.

Safety First

In Iowa, host mother Debi Towe, Oscar Ngombo (YES, Kenya) and Sofia Garcia (Spain) volunteered to be safety workers at the Cedar Rapids "Holiday Delight" parade.

Snowflakes for the Sandy Hook School

After the December tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, Yuliya Voloshyn and her fellow Massachusetts classmates sought a way to help. The Ukrainian FLEX student writes, "It was decided to decorate the new elementary school to make it look like a winter wonderland with thousands of paper snowflakes. During our advisories, students had an opportunity to use their creativity to make snowflakes. We tried our best to make them pretty and extraordinary. By the end of the two-day project, my schoolmates had made over 300 snowflakes, which were sent to Newtown."

Growing by Giving

Our school DECA Club had an angel tree for the Salvation Army. On the tree were the names of twenty angels who are kids that need things for Christmas. There were mostly toys and clothes on the wish lists. Groups of three DECA students were responsible for one angel so that money could be pooled to buy presents of good quality. My group went to WalMart to shop for our angel. When we got back, there were still several angels on the tree left so I took care of one by myself. I bought a warm coat at the Galleria. I hope that the coat will make the little girl feel better. No doubt, it made ME feel better. It doesn't matter that you will never see the person whom are you helping because understanding that you brought a moment of joy to a kid is the reward.

Anastasiya Khlopina (FLEX, Russia)
Hosted by Hyche family
West Blocton, AL

Andrii Kucher (FLEX, Ukraine), Valentina Biciuc (FLEX, Moldova), Emma Wouters (Netherlands), Luisa Stoegbauer (Germany), Mild Porasuvira (Thailand), Kazumi Noda (Japan) and Yuliya Akentyeva (FLEX, Kazakhstan)

Santa for the Day

For low-income families, Christmas is a particularly difficult time of year. To help them out, the Southern Utah PAX students "adopted" a needy family with two children through the "Coins for Kids" program. The teens and their host families donated to the cause, and then the students shopped for gifts and clothes from the "wish list". All agreed it was a great joy to see the two happy girls receive their gifts, including two bicycles.

It Feels Good to Do Good

During my life, I have done many volunteer activities but none have been as interesting as the ones here. In my projects right now, I work with others in teams to help those who need it most.

My host family has an old piano in the garage, so we decided to fix it and sell it. With the money, we will help a kid in Georgia, my home country.

I also work with my classmates to raise money and clothing for the homeless. It makes them happy and us as well.

So my point is that if it were not for the American lifestyle, host family and high school experience, I would never be as active in civic action as I am now and I am going to be in future.

Bakar Khachidze (FLEX, Georgia)
Hosted by the Stang family
Hilliard, OH

Ringing in Donations

The Salvation Army's Red Kettle campaign got an extra boost from Spaniard Sofia Garcia, right, and her host sister, Natalie Towe. They rang bells outside of a grocery store in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Feeding the Need

Georgian Giorgi Rostomashvili loaded crates for the Nettleton FAITH food pantry in Mississippi. He went there with Ukrainian Anastasiia Alekseienko, a fellow FLEX student, who is a regular volunteer at the pantry.

A-SMYLE student Dorde Cadenovic from Montenegro appreciated the holiday feast.

A Special Christmas

Celebrating American holidays is a truly remarkable experience for me. It is a chance to learn about American traditions and beliefs.

I had a lot of fun decorating our house for the holidays. I helped put up the Christmas tree and the colorful lights. My host mom took out little wooden figures of biblical characters that were present during Christ's birth and asked me to position them under the miniature wooden stable on the cupboard. It was really something special to me.

We spent our Christmas with a lovely family from the neighborhood. They prepared a very large and diverse meal followed by two big cakes for dessert. We exchanged presents and talked about the story of Christmas and how the holiday traditions are connected to the Bible. I know that I will never forget my first American Christmas, not just because it was a first, but also because it was a legitimately wonderful and fulfilling experience that will always be part of me.

Dorde Cadenovic (A-SMYLE, Montenegro)
Hosted by the Dussinger family
Waxhaw, NC

An Avalanche of Gifts

In my country, Christmas is not as important as it is in the U.S. Some shops and a few houses are decorated. People have Christmas trees and children get presents from Santa Claus, but that's all. We celebrate New Year more than Christmas in Japan. So I was surprised that everyone was looking forward to Christmas for a month and were doing many things for it. I got lots of presents. I had never received so many presents at one time. I was very excited when I opened them. It is one of my best memories.

Kotaro Imai (Japan)
Hosted by the Schroeder family
Hanover, IN

Holiday on Parade

Representing PAX at the Wilmington Holiday Parade in North Carolina were Denisse Arnold (Mexico), Jana Antonelli (Spain), Andrea Cardona Santos (Mexico), Ilaria Romanello (Italy), Anna Graf (Sweden), Panitporn Sivakunakorn (Thailand), Olatz Muneta (Spain) and host sister Cecila Britton. The group plastered Coordinator Tracy Bickel's car with their homeland flags, dressed in their national costumes and led the way with a banner.

Gaza YES student Said's first and only fall

From Terrified to Triumphant

Apparently, skiing is difficult, particularly if you haven't seen snow before. But once you know how to ski, it is the easiest thing ever. When I started, I was literally terrified. I thought I would break my back. By my third class, I had moved to the chair lift from the J bar, which I thought I would never ever be able to do. Now I ski regularly with the school every Wednesday. I am becoming better and better over time. They tell me that I will be a professional by the end of the year!

Said Alhousreini (YES, Gaza)
Rhodin-Swanberg family
Sharon, VT

Live from the Capitol

The Quinone family brought Thunchanok Rusmeererkset (Thailand) on a wonderful road trip from Tampa, Florida to Washington, D. C. for Christmas.

Loving the White Stuff

I've lived seventeen years in a tropical country – Indonesia. Coming to the U.S. gave me the opportunity to see snow and have my first winter experience. It was early on a December morning when I saw everything was white outside. I immediately changed my clothes and did what I usually only see on television – I made a snow fairy! Although it was so cold outside, it didn't matter because finally my dream became true.

Decky Novianoor (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Chapman family
Orange, MA

Counting Down with Candy

At the Lambert home in Tampa, Florida, Mira Hartmeier (Germany) shows Fernando Serrano Da Silva (Spain) the strings of mini stockings filled with German candy that her parents sent to her and her host sister.

Ho, Ho, Ho!

On Christmas Eve my host brother and I served dinner at a homeless shelter. I also taught Arabic in Sunday school and helped my neighbor make Christmas cookies. I celebrated Christmas a week later when my host family and I went to Lake Tahoe in Nevada to see friends and my host grandparents. It was my first time snowboarding and building snow-women with my host sister, Hana. We had a snowball fight and played the game *Risk*. I also went ice-skating with my friends, Dawn and Rebecca, for my very first time, and I didn't fall at all! My biggest challenge is missing my family but my host family is amazing which helps a lot. I appreciate each moment they spend with me.

Adan Daibes (YES, Israel)
Hosted by the Abdul Cader family
San Luis Obispo, CA

He's Got Game

This was the first time that I celebrated Christmas. I was excited but anxious because I had no idea what to do. It was truly awesome. We had people from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Brazil here. My host dad has hosted students for the last nineteen years, so it was amazing to hear from many of them on the phone. I had planned to buy a digital camera by the end of the year, but to my total surprise, my host dad gifted me one. It was my first time to see snow.

My host dad and another PAX official arranged a trip to Boston to watch the Boston Celtics vs. Rockets game. I met a Pakistani family there and we had lunch together. It was hard to believe that I could meet people from my city here, thousands of miles away. Then we watched the basketball game. I loved the environment at the arena. The enthusiasm with which the fans supported their teams was good to watch. I was completely lost in the game.

Muhammad Khattak (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Fournier family
Orange, MA

Snow Days & Holidays

Designed to Delight

These teens proved quite talented at the art of gingerbread houses. They made them at the home of Ronald and Tami Young in Tupelo, Mississippi. Pictured are: Katarina Astala (Finland), Ella Rauth (Germany), Anastasiia Nikiforova (FLEX, Russia), Carlota Manzan (Spain), Nattanid Kittisorayat (Thailand) and Nikolette Kolkinn (Norway).

Frozen in My Mind

When I was a kid watching television shows, I was amazed by the white stuff falling from the sky. When my father told me it was snow, I said, "I want to go there and play with that thing called snow." Then he said, "One day, son. One day." That day is right now. I'm in one of the coldest places in the U.S. — Ohio.

I came from a very hot country so my first reaction to snow was to open my mouth and let it fall onto my tongue. Of course, nobody had told me that snow doesn't taste like ice cream, which is what I'd been thinking all of my life! I love snow because you can make a snowman, start a snow fight or even write your name in it just like I did. The beautiful white snow will be a memory frozen in my mind! *Amo la nieve* (I love snow).

Matias Romero (Mexico)
Hosted by the Shimko family
Columbus, OH

A Sweet Start to 2013

In Greencastle, Pennsylvania, Thai student Piyaporn Sae-Leaw kicked off the new year with a cookie party with her fellow exchange students: Angel Polishchuk (FLEX, Russia), Anđa Paunović (A-SMYLE, Serbia), Aika Sydykova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), Daneil, Rosemalin Hama (Thailand) and Ann-Christin Langejürgen (Germany). Piyaporn says, "Thank you to my host mom, Michelle Smith, for this party."

Nader Hanna (YES, Egypt), host brother Zach Paske, Wahyuni Putri (YES, Indonesia) and host brother Trake Paske take on a Utah hill.

Now or Never

Winter is something new for me because I was born in a tropical country. That's why when my host family asked me to go sledding, I said, "YES!" I felt a little bit afraid before I went. At first, negative thoughts passed through my mind such as *what if I break my head or legs or arms?*

But then I had positive thoughts. *Well, I can't go sledding when I go back to my country, so I better try it now. Everything will be fine*. From the top of the hill, I rode the sled down. It went so fast. I felt so happy that I screamed, "LET'S DO IT AGAIN!"

If there's an experience that I can't do in my country, I'll say yes to trying it, even if it is just once. That's better than never, right?

Wahyuni Putri (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Paske family
Layton, UT

The Big Surprise

What was most exciting was the surprise I received at Christmas. It was when the doorbell rang. My host asked me to open the door. I wondered, "Oh, why don't they get it since they are closer? As I got to the door, I felt something. Then, I opened the door and what I saw, I'd never expected to see. It was my real Argentinian little brother with gingerbread cookies, and right by him, my real Argentinian parents!

As soon as I saw my family, I fainted. When I opened my eyes, there were my host parents and my real family staring at me, laughing and crying of happiness, and recording it with a video camera. It was like those dreams I used to have when I first arrived, where my Argentinian life was mixed with my American life.

I enjoyed a beautiful Christmas with my two families. We took them to the main cities around here, introduced them to my American friends and to the people at my church. I'm so thankful that my families organized all this for months in secret in order to give me an awesome surprise gift! They made me so happy!

Federico Canosa (Argentina)
Hosted by the Lantrip family
Enumclaw, WA

Snow Day!

December 20 was a snow day! It cheered up some students. We did not have school because there was a big snowstorm, about eight inches. No school not only meant a break for the students and teachers, but it also kept people safe. The roads were blocked by snow and so slippery. It's pretty common for car accidents to happen in those conditions.

On that day, my host family and I had fun shoveling the snow. Back in my country, I only see ice in the freezer. Learning the differences can open our minds!

Anis Wulandari (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Graf family
Appleton, WI

Share Your Experience

Congratulations to the Contest Winners

Video "My California Dream" by Lionel Adrichem (Switzerland)

Project 1 Theme: Welcome to the U.S.

Winner: **Lionel Adrichem (Switzerland)**
Hosted by the Kline family in La Grange, CA

Runner-Up: **Camille Frippiat (Belgium)**
Hosted by the Hilton family in Richland, MO

Third Place: **Sadhana Annamalai Dhananjayan (YES, India)**
Hosted by the Rivet family in Springfield, MO

Project 2 Theme: Share Your Culture

Winner: **Aida Oktombekoa (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)**
Hosted by the Moe family in Waltham, MN

Runner Up: **Raquel Jiménez (Spain)**
Hosted by the Stapp family in Alpine, UT

Third place: **Veronika Radinovska (FLEX, Ukraine)**
Hosted by the Taylor family in Westport, IN

Drawing by Veronika Radinovska (FLEX, Ukraine)

To view the five winning "Share Your Experience" videos, follow the links on the "What's New" page of the PAX website, www.pax.org.

Students, be sure to check your PAX email accounts to find out how to enter the next two "Share Your Experience" contests.

Kyrgyz FLEX student Sagipa, right, with her host sisters on Christmas morning

A Magical Time

When I told my friends that we don't celebrate Christmas in Kyrgyzstan, they were very surprised and said that I would love it. They were absolutely right! It is a magical time. My favorite part was early in the day. My host siblings and I ran out and saw a lot of presents under the tree. It was super exciting. We were in pajamas all day, which made for the atmosphere of Christmas. We had a wonderful dinner and then watched Christmas movies. I'm so thankful for such a wonderful new experience with my host family.

Sagipa Chorobekova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan) Hosted by the Makela family
Ipswich, SD

'Tis the Season

Our exchange students and their host parents held a potluck meal at the home of Gary and Pam Monaghan to get the holiday season started in fine fashion. Host parent Jeff Bowen gave the invocation. After enjoying a delectable meal, the group enjoyed playing "Dirty Santa." Everyone loved the game and had so much fun. Some of the gifts were hilarious! After the gift game, host father Joe Lukas asked each student questions, and their answers were very good. We ended the night by singing Christmas carols led by host father Michael Barron.

Mary Payne Hairald
Community Coordinator
Nettleton, MS

Hats off to the Northern Mississippi PAX clusters for winning second place in the Tupelo Christmas Parade. The Monaghans, host parents to Ukrainian FLEX student Anastasiia Alekseienko, designed and built the gigantic float which featured reindeer pulling a sleigh, a train loaded with presents, several Christmas trees, elves, and of course, Santa. Coordinators Mary Payne Hairald and Glenda Jones rode on the float while the students walked alongside it with their flags.

Stars and Stripes

I looked forward to Christmas and it finally happened. My family made me the greatest gift, a big American flag with the signatures of my host family! A few days later New Years Day came. I've noticed Americans are less excited about it than Christmas. In my country it is a very important holiday. The whole family gathers around the table, listening to the president's speech at midnight with lots of food, etc.

Tygran Daniyelyan (FLEX, Ukraine)
Hosted by the Odom family
Shreveport, LA

Marching Forward

In South Dakota, Germans Celine Derer and Sophie Kranhold carried the banner for their school! They are hosted by the Bender family and Schnoor family, respectively.

FLEX student Inna Tsoi's host sisters don her champion medals.

Earned First Place in Business Competition

I am a DECA (business club) member at Neenah High School. I was extremely excited about my first competition in Green Bay, Wisconsin. As soon as I stepped into the building I felt that it was going to be a great day because I saw my flag hanging from the ceiling!

The first part of the competition was two tests in marketing and economics. The second part was role plays in front of judges to solve problems. I had so much fun playing a vice president and a manager.

After lunch we went to the award ceremony. I clapped as Neenah students got awards. Finally, the marketing management results were announced. My heart started pounding because they called my name, pronouncing it wrong, of course. They gave me two medals for the highest econ and marketing score!

Shortly later, they announced the overall champions. I was in seventh heaven when I was given the first place award!

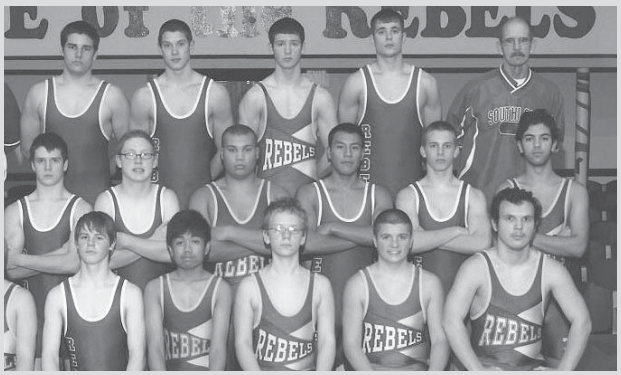
Inna Tsoi (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Novy family
Neenah, WI

Cruisin' for Fun

When Sofia Miron Barroso (Spain) and Fanny Willieme (Belgium) saw this card on Christmas, they couldn't believe it. On the back was an invitation to go on a cruise with their New York host family, the Jordans.

Talking Turkey

Kajo Krummenacher (Switzerland) and his host brother, Gabe Evans, chowed down on turkey legs at an Alabama festival.



Filipino Radzmier Abdul is in the first row, second spot. His fellow YES student, Moroccan Anouar Hilali, is in the second row, far right.

I Can Do This!

Deciding which sport to do was a hard decision to make. I am from the Philippines and most people there like basketball, including myself. But then I had a second thought. *I came here to America with a mission, like in a video game. For mental, spiritual, and physical reasons*. With the help of my host dad and a friend, Edgar, I made up my mind to wrestle. It was not that hard at first, but then I realized that I'm not here just to be physically active but also to learn and have fun in wrestling. I am wrestling at 106 pounds. I have 2 wins in 9 matches and more to go. I can do this!

Radzmier Abdul (YES, Philippines)
Hosted by the Roberts family
Elkton, MN

The Real Sopranos

Congratulations to Yuliya Akentyeva, a FLEX student from Kazahkstan, who was selected to be in the Washington County Utah Honor Choir. Students from six local high schools practiced and performed under the direction of a college professor at Dixie State College in St. George, Utah. Yuliya lives with the Simpson family this year.

Laurel Paul, Community Coordinator
and Utah Area Manager

Go Green!

See www.pax.org "What's New" page for the PAX Goes GREEN contest details. The entry deadline is April 24.

Bhacharawarai Wongluang (Thailand) and her host sister, Rebecca Potter, show their hockey player game growl.

Girls Hockey Rules

This was my first time playing ice hockey. I was not sure I should play it because it costs a lot of money for the equipment and fees, and moreover, I can't bring all the equipment back home. But after I watched my first real hockey game with my host brother, Jacob Bailey, I totally changed my mind. Before the season started, I went to stick time at the ice rink to learn basic hockey. Guess what? My host siblings were my coaches! We did dry land training for four weeks before getting on the ice. It was hard, making me almost out of breath (seriously). The first week on ice wasn't that good because I was still new but all my teammates and coaches really inspired me, especially Rebecca, my host sister. She is really enthusiastic and always gives 110% in both practice and games. I want to be like her some day.

This has been the best part of my life here: doing something I never did before, doing it well and meeting nice people who became my best friends.

Bhacharawarai Wongluang (Thailand)
Hosted by the Bailey family
Guilford , VT

I Love PAX

Coordinator Tracy Smith's PAX students spelled it out in Minnesota: Anouar Hilali (YES, Morocco), Radzmier Abdul (YES, Philippines), Fairuz Prastyanti (YES, Indonesia), Alexandru Mahmoud (YES, Lebanon), Kseniya Garbuzova (FLEX, Ukraine), Kristina Makarenko (FLEX, Russia), Eltaj Hasanova (FLEX, Azerbaijan) and Aida Oktombekova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan).

American Dream

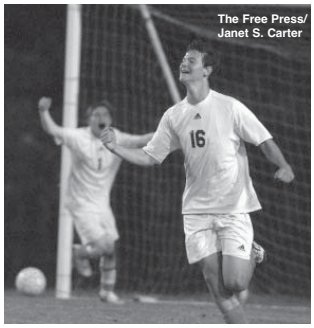
Childhood dream of freedom country
Fairytales about native life tree.
One day the dream comes true...
First I was afraid, I was petrified.
Kept thinking I could never live without Kazakhstan.
America is freedom land, it's a multinational place,
First time in another space,
With other people, another culture.
But I braved this adventure.
Oh the culture shock, all the problems that I faced
And in this case, I was alone, I was depressed,
I had been stressed.
I couldn't hide what pain I had inside.
But then I spent a lot of days and nights,
Who, tell me, helped me to survive?
Who was near me all the time?
Who supported me when I tried?
I am so grateful for you, my host family.
Only you saw how I felt awfully,
You opened your doors for me,
and taken care so warmly.
In school I was lonely, sad enough,
I couldn't smile, talk and even laugh.
Everything was so hard
I started to think that I took the wrong card!
But time goes fast every day,
I realize that I'll go home in May.
Unique chance God gave me to be here:
To be part of a big world, to be what I really want.
I am ambassador from my country!
Now I am not afraid!
I am here to distribute my country to this world
It'll be not enough to say a couple words.
I am here to break a stereotype,
To stop the thoughts of people our type.
Borat is a lie. It's not a truth.
Who, if not me, will show the proof?
Now four months have past,
I blow fear as dust.
One day the dream comes real,
People just don't see what they have near.
I will not stop, I will survive
I will explore to change our life.
And now I know that work and studying hard,
Will show me a good result.
Grass is green, sky is blue
Now I realize, America, how I love you!
For being here, for having an awesome time,
I want to thank you from this heart of mine!

Tokzhan Zharkenova (FLEX, Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the Erdmann family
Waubay City, SD

What's the Buzz?

When Jessica Inglesis (France) came to Alabama to host mom Betty Frater's home, she was told that she would soon fall in love with sweet Alabama. Jessica knows sweet wines and champagne from her region of France, but she had much to learn about harvesting sweet gooey honey from beehives. Beekeeper Bobby Short taught her how to smoke out the bees to access the honey for another kind of sweet.

Cindy Thigpen
Community Coordinator
Maylene, AL



The Big Win

With two goals at critical moments, Stan Vanclooster led his soccer team to victory in the team's first ever state playoff match. The Bogan family hosts the Belgian student in Kinston, North Carolina.

The Heart of Bangladesh

During International Education Week I gave ten presentations on Bangladesh. Currently I am in Future Leaders of America, on my school newspaper and in forensics where I will be giving a speech on exchange students.

I was able to enjoy the Wisconsin winter and snow which was fascinating to me. Moreover, I tried some fun activities like tubing, bowling and snowball fights. I went on a trip to Old World Wisconsin to learn about Christmas during the 18th and 19th century. At present I am managing the girls' basketball team and it is a totally new experience for me.

Tabassum Shahjahan (YES, Bangladesh)
Hosted by the Pennings family
Bonduel, WI

Rubicon Photo

Ask Me about Kazakhstan

Donning a ceremonial hat from Kazakhstan, Kuralay Talgat answered questions about her country's government and culture. The Hixon family hosts the FLEX student in Iowa.

Discovering Our Common Bonds

This past November during International Education Week, PAX students poured into classrooms to give presentations. Students and teachers alike appreciated the chance to hear their international students' perspectives.

Tanzanian Chosen for Teacher Workshop

January 8th turned out to be a nice day because I got selected to participate in the Youth Leaders in Teaching of English workshop. Twenty-eight YES, FLEX and A-SMYLE students were chosen. It seemed impossible to get selected from the 250 students who applied for it. My host parents were really proud when I told them and that meant something big to me. They have been my inspiration on everything, even when I don't believe in myself. I am also proud that I am going to represent my country because I am the only person from there to be chosen, so that is a big thing, too. I have always dreamt of being recognized for something in a foreign land and finally my dream has come true. I can't express how happy I am.

Samira Ali (YES, Tanzania)
Hosted by the Buckley family
Sedona, AZ

All About Indonesia

YES student Wahyuni Putri gave a well thought out presentation on Indonesia to her classmates. The Paske family hosts her in Layton, Utah.

Spotlight on Finland

Along with a presentation to my English class, I did other ones during International Education Week. In my music class, I played the Finnish national song and then performed "Jingle Bells" in Finnish. I had the class guess what song it was. For my history class, I spoke about some current events in Finland and my favorite president. I read a famous Finnish children's storybook to my host mom's primary school class.

Karoliina Koivupuisto (Finland)
Hosted by the Olsen family
Taylorsville, UT

Celebrating Culture

At the St. Petersburg, Florida International Folk Fair, these PAX girls enjoyed seeing some of their countries being represented. Pictured are: Onjira Kiatchalermkhun (Thailand), Chanhwi Park (South Korea), Solvaar Espeland (Norway), Thunchanok Rusmeerkset (Thailand) and Yunfan Jiang (China).

Reveling in Russia

November 16 was a busy day! For six hours I gave presentations on Russia to seven classes at McAdory Elementary School for International Education Week. The time that I spent with the students was fun and educational, entertaining and challenging, full of new discoveries of the world, questions, smiles and thanks. I hadn't imagined that it would be so interesting and exciting for fifth graders to meet somebody from Russia. They learned a lot and now some of them want to study Russian language and visit my country one day. I told the children about our magnificent land and nature, fascinating cities and historical places, outstanding Russian people and delicious food. Most of all, the students liked learning how to say "yes", "no", "bye", "thank you", "hi" and "my name is" in Russian.

Anastasiya Khlopina (FLEX, Russia)
Hosted by Hyche family
West Blocton, AL

Iowa PAX Students Take 200 Guests on a Gourmet Tour Around the World

This past November Cedar Rapids PAX students treated school administers, teachers, family members and friends to a feast, complete with entertainment and songs from their homelands. The guests received recipe cards so that they could repeat the national dishes the students prepared. The group extends a special thanks to Mount Vernon High School for hosting the event.

Rubicon Photo

In back: Sofia Garcia (Spain), Cristina Santamarta (Spain), Kuralay Talgat (FLEX, Kazakhstan), Guillermo Vega (Spain), Madelen Kittelsen (Norway), Nathalie Blasin (Belgium), Ruixin "Jasmine" Deng (China), Jeanine Kaemper (Germany), Menna Abozied (YES, Egypt) and Coordinator Jeff Schmatt. In the front row: Marco Marco (YES, Tanzania), Oscar Ngombo (YES, Kenya), Tim Schwarzwald (Germany) and Arthur Piret (Belgium).

POSTCARDS

Memphis, Tennessee

Giorgi Rostomashvili (FLEX, Georgia) and Javier Ferrer Diaz (Spain) went to see the city's NBA team play basketball.

St. Petersburg, Florida

Onjira Kiatchalermkhun (Thailand) and Yunfan Jiang (China) and their host mom, Yvonne Morgan, hit the beach.

Niagara Falls, Canada

Spaniard Laura Luengo Bravo went with her Michigan hosts, the Hinkley family, to see one of the world's great natural wonders.

Orlando, Florida

Italian Ilaria Romanello, Spaniard Olatz Muneta and German Tobias Wirtz had a blast at Disney World and Universal Studios.

Sweet Sixteen

South Korean Juree Jeong hugs her Alabama host mother, Donna Ott, during her birthday party.

This Song is For You

So I say a little prayer. Hope my dreams will take me there. Where the skies are blue. To see you once again…my love. All the seas from coast to coast. Find the place I love the most. Where the fields are green. To see you once again…my love.

A song called "My Love" from the group Westlife was the song that I sang in the talent show at my school on January 12. I dedicated it to my hosts, the Gonzalez family. When it was my turn, they did not know that I would sing this song and give a short speech about them. I wanted to surprise them. After my performance, I saw their tears.

I am really happy to have them as my host family. They are such a nice family and are very understanding. I like to share everything with them such as my culture. Cooking is one of my favorite times with them. We cook all kinds of foods, such as Thai food, Mexican foods and Indonesian foods. They like the Indonesian peanut sauce and fruit salad that I make. I just want to say thanks for everything they have done for me since I have been here. I love you, my American family.

Stella Monica (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Gonzalez family
Berryville, VA.

got culture?

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Korean Pig Feet — Surprisingly Good!

Hyungyung, our foreign exchange student from South Korea had her birthday on December 26th. We celebrated by going to an authentic Korean restaurant. Although we had experienced several Korean dishes that Hyungyung had prepared, this dining experience was a treat for all. The only non-Koreans in the restaurant were us. We were the foreigners and Hyungyung was right at home.

Hyungyung enjoyed chatting with the waiter and telling us about her favorite foods. It was a BBQ style restaurant with the charcoal grill right in the table. You order your meal and they bring you a bowl of rice, raw meat, and many side dishes. It is your responsibility to cook your own meat to your desired temperature.

Before we enjoyed the main courses of *samgyupsal* (pork belly), *bulgogi* (beef), and *chadolbagi* (thinly cut beef), we ordered an appetizer *jokbal*, which is pig feet. Never in my life would I have dreamed that I would

love pig feet wrapped in a lettuce leaf with a very salty sauce. I had to make myself stop eating it to have room for the main dish.

The food was delicious but the best part was seeing my two children embrace the experience. They tried many new foods and wanted to learn Korean words such as "thank you" and "where is the restroom".

I'm sure if Hyungyung wasn't in our life we would have never sought out this restaurant and had this experience. On the way home, the children talked about other ethnic restaurants we should try. Thank you, PAX, for helping make this possible.

Hyungyung Lee (South Korea)
Hosted by the Payne family
Rushville, IN

Our Bright Light

On the dark, cold nights of Lake Oswego, Oregon, our student Natan is the bright light. His good nature, sense of humor and athletic prowess make him an incredible addition to our family. He's on the undefeated Lake Oswego High School basketball team, ranked #14 in the nation, so we get to watch him play at least two nights a week. We have hosted team dinners and the guys enjoy Portland Trail Blazers basketball games together. Natan also participated in the 17th Annual Les Schwab Invitational Slam Dunk contest over winter break. The highlight video of it on YouTube has gone viral!

The Bolger family
Hosts for Natan Jurkovitz (Switzerland)
Lake Oswego, OR

Catch Me if You Can

My host family is very kind to me. They've taken me to many places such as Moab, New Mexico and caves. During the weekends, we cook Thai food (yummy!) and watch a lot of movies and TV shows. Those help my listening skills improve! With my host sister and brother, we play games such as tag, hide and seek, etc. They fulfill a missing part of me because I have five older siblings in Thailand. Now, I am the oldest one. I love what I have, the best host family.

Suthida Sujaritsrichaikul (Thailand)
Hosted by Villalobos-Flores family
Eagle Mountain, UT

The Three Musketeers

Ines Martinez (Spain), host sister Sweet Davis and Selina Rachor (Germany) are quite the trio in the Clanton, Alabama. Coordinator Cindy Thigpen notes that the exchange students, now like Alabama natives, argue over which is better, the Alabama or Auburn football teams!

Little Brother, Big Fun

"Having a little brother for the first time is a wonderful experience!" exclaims Khloud Al Zubi, pictured playing in snow with him. The Jordanian YES student is hosted by the Dryden family in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Once Strangers, Now a Family

Mattridi Ramansiriwong (YES, Thailand) and Dusan Stanojevic, (A-SMYLE, Serbia) are enjoying Alaska with their host parent, Edward Morgan.

Dusan and Mattridi were not used to the Alaskan winter. Mattridi had never even seen snow before getting to Alaska. In December the temperature got down to -47F degrees below freezing! Even though it was hard for them to adapt to the new climate, they got maximum help and support from their host father who helped them choose warm arctic clothing.

Four mornings a week Ed drives Dusan to play guitar for jazz band practice at 5:30 am. After school Mattridi works out at the gym with Ed, while Dusan has cross-country skiing practice.

They are from different cultures and different parts of the world, but that never presented an obstacle to having good times together. They spend every weekend either doing volunteer work or visiting the cultural centers of Alaska.

Labor Day weekend found them sailing out of Valdez in Ed's sailboat. Over the two-week Christmas holiday break, Ed took them to Hawaii where they played in the surf and sunshine, enjoyed many outdoor activities, rode in a submarine, and toured both the Pearl Harbor Memorial and Polynesian Cultural Center. They had an amazing time!

None of this would ever have been possible without their host dad, Ed, who helps them to the best of his ability.

At one point they were just three strangers at the airport, but now, a half a year later, they have become family and Ed Morgan has become their real father.

Pamela Twitchell
Community Coordinator
Fairbanks, AK

Our Greatest Gift

"We had a wonderful holiday season with Kristel. She is such a blessing to our family. We look forward to having a friendship with her for many years to come," says host mother, Lori Pence of Indiana. "Hosting has been a very rewarding and fulfilling adventure." Kristel Orantes Coello (Mexico) is pictured on the far right with Lori's nieces.