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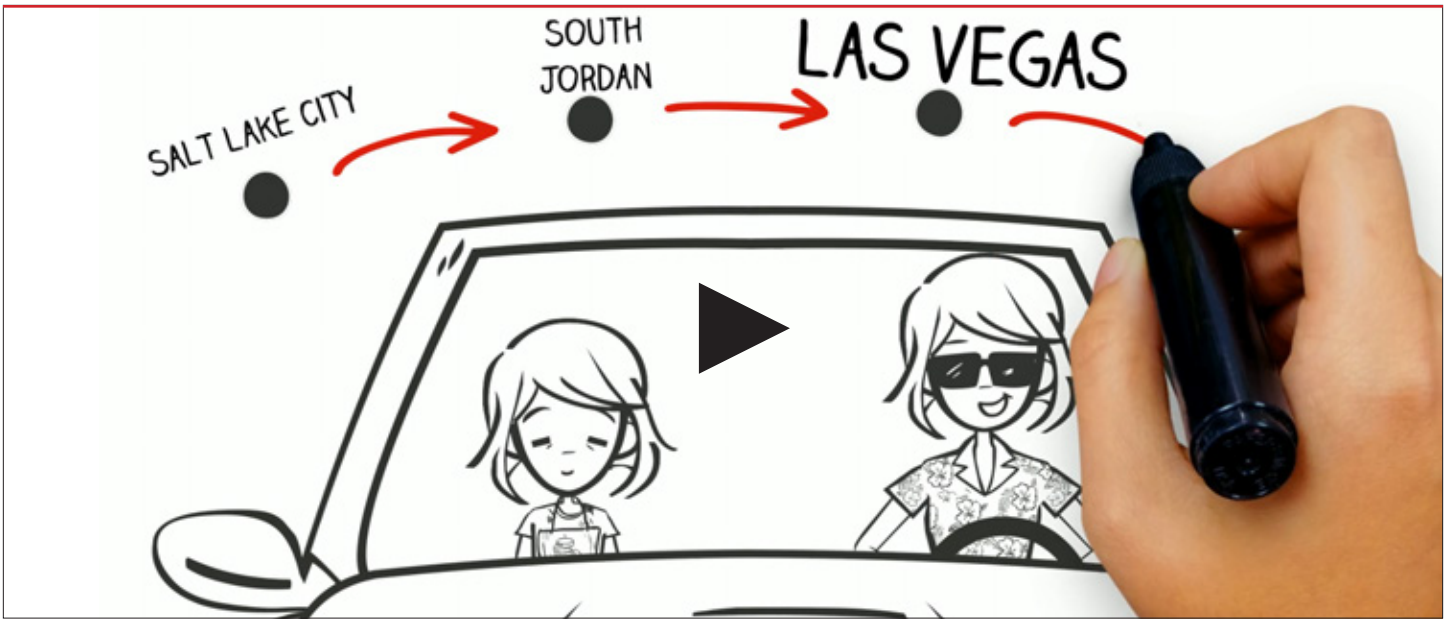
PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools



"*Salut*, PAX!"

…So begins Marie from France's video. The animated film recounts her time as a PAX student in Utah in 2012/13 before offering advice for future students, families, and coordinators.

Now an undergraduate at the Reims Campus of Sciences Po Paris Euro-American where she studies social sciences, Marie sums up exchange both creatively and at times remarkably succinctly in the short: "You learn so fast about yourself and the world, and then you're part of this huge community that can help each other and become close friends."

Not all deeply reflective and introspective, Marie is also sure to include renditions of American adventures with her former Community Coordinator Laurie Wilkinson, as pictured above. The video is a must-see.

—Marie Dry (France), hosted by the Spencer family (UT) in 2012/13

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Marie and Laurie: *PAX Press* caught up with these characters in real life.

Alumni News

Group Message

"Time flies, so if you want to do something, do it." This is just one of many insights offered by a very special group of 2014/15 PAX alumni from the FLEX and YES programs. A series of interviews with the ten students, the film offers prescient insight for current PAX students entering the final months of the program year.

To shoot the video, two then-high school students (Alex and Shirli), followed the group on a PAX-led tour of New York City. Featuring exceptional cinematography, Alex and Shirli's resulting film is inspiring to the point of goosebump-inducing. Not surprising, Alex has since gone on to study film at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts.

Enjoy the video, and as Altynai from Kyrgyzstan says, "Have fun!"

—Video by Alex Ioanoviciu and Shirli Samara, 2015 alumnae of Mamaroneck High School (NY)

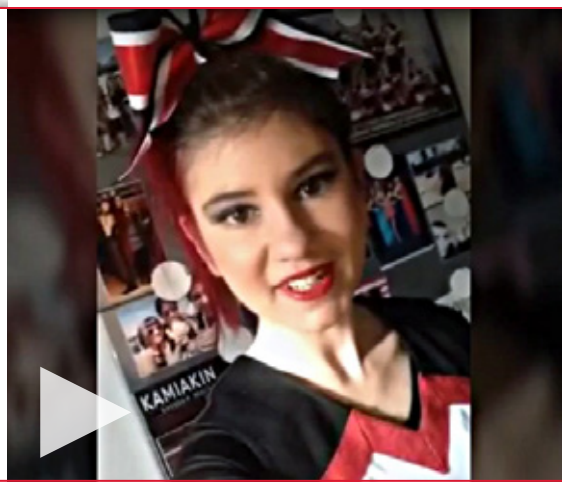
Be the Best You Can Be!

Lucia is now in her first year of college, where she studies translation and interpretation—a direct impact of her year in America. In her video she recalls with nostalgia her wonderful host family, high school, and coordinator—the late Elena Brown.

Her high school's motto was "Be the best you can be." Lucia says not only was this one of the most meaningful things she learned but that she continues to put it into practice today. Lucia recommends participating in an exchange program, because "It makes you grow in many ways and shapes your personality."

—Lucia Calderon (Spain), hosted by the Melior family (WA) in 2013/14

Lucia dons her old Kamiakin High cheerleading uniform. Go Braves!



Back in America!

"My experience as an exchange student taught me lots of things," says Purui ("Pray"), who went from being an only child to living with a large family on a farm. "I learned to take responsibility…how to care for others," she says. "In the end, my exchange experience taught me how to open my heart to everything."

It made such an impact that she decided to continue her studies in America! She is currently a junior at Purdue University, where she is studying social studies and working toward earning a teaching certificate. Her roommate is also a former PAX exchange student!

—Purui Liu (China), hosted by the Best family (IN) in 2012/13

Pray reflects on her ongoing experience from her dorm room at Purdue.

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All hail, "Queen" Zhanna!

Belle of the Ball…and Much More!

Our beautiful exchange student Zhanna was the guest of honor at the Junior Auxiliary Charity Ball, where she was named Queen! We are very proud of Zhanna. She has studied hard while in the United States and has accomplished many things. She has put in over 250 volunteer hours, been very active in the youth group with her church, and just won her first tennis match!

—Pam Monaghan (MS), host mom of Zhanna (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)

Finding Her Passion

I can certainly say that the USA helped me to find my passion. I fell in love with theatre. It began on the first school day when I, shy and hopeful, came inside the small theatre in our school. From a simple class it turned into a lifestyle and dream. I met a lot of wonderful people who are really welcoming, deep, and exciting to communicate with. Despite my funny accent, I gave it a try and got a part in the fall play, *It's a Wonderful Life.* To challenge myself, I tried out for the all-school talent show. It was one of the best moments of the exchange year to dance on stage, existing and living through every moment of a Ukrainian song.

—Vladyslava (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Nelson family (OH)

Vladyslava stuns the audience with her traditional Ukrainian dance.

Alishba revels in her very first snow.

Seeing Snow at Last

My family planned a ski trip, and I was truly thrilled for it since this would be my first time seeing snow. Pure white snow coasted downwards from a light, cloud-filled sky, and soundlessly settled on roofs and tree limbs, and enveloped the world in a cozy comforter of bleached down. I stood with my arms outstretched, mouth opened wide, and with my tongue sticking out. The flakes landed softly on my tongue, frosty and wet, bringing a wide grin on my face. Making a snowman, having snow fights, chasing after the flakes, and sledding were indeed very fun. I had at last seen snow with my own eyes, and now I'm looking forward to the blooming flowers!

—Alishba Rizvi (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Pearson family (WA)

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Nevada PAX Goes Rebel Red!

We got the awesome opportunity to get together for UNLV's home basketball game against rival Nevada Reno on a recent Saturday afternoon. We all "got our Reb on" and wore red and gray to show our support for the home team.

What a great game! The score went back and forth, and the spirits were high as Luca from Germany led us in the cheers. The number of 3-pointers brought us to our feet, chanting "U-N-L-V, UNLV, Go, Fight, Win!"

The Rebels did go on to win in overtime, scoring over 100 points, with a final perfect 3-point basket. What an exciting introduction to college basketball culture!

—Finn (Germany), hosted by the Hoppe family (NV)

Back row (left to right): Anis Sofia (YES, Malaysia), Minaho (Japan), Luca (Germany), Finn (Germany), and Leah (Germany); front row (left to right): Muhammad (YES, Malaysia), En Qi (YES, Malaysia), and Virginia (Italy)

Maria loves to help her host grandmother bake!

Just Like Grandma Used to Make…

Maria helped her "grandma" make homemade dinner rolls. Maria is one of many students over the years to have this experience at Grandma's. "We're going to Grandma's" is a phrase every exchange student is excited to hear. They know they are in for some really good homemade American cooking. And when you ask them what they are going to miss when they go home, they tell you, "Grandma's cooking."

—Anita Wilson (MI), host mom of Maria (Mexico)

Sayeed is a quick study!

Showing Kindness and Respect

Our host student Sayeed has much respect for elderly people. He routinely takes time out of his busy day to play chess with our "Dedushka" (grandpa), who despite his dementia, was thrilled to have a new student! Only a few days after Sayeed came, Dedushka promptly sat him down and taught him the intricate game of chess. Sayeed is now a good chess player and plays with our grandpa almost every day.

—Yelena Brown (WV), host mom of Sayeed (FLEX, Tajikistan)

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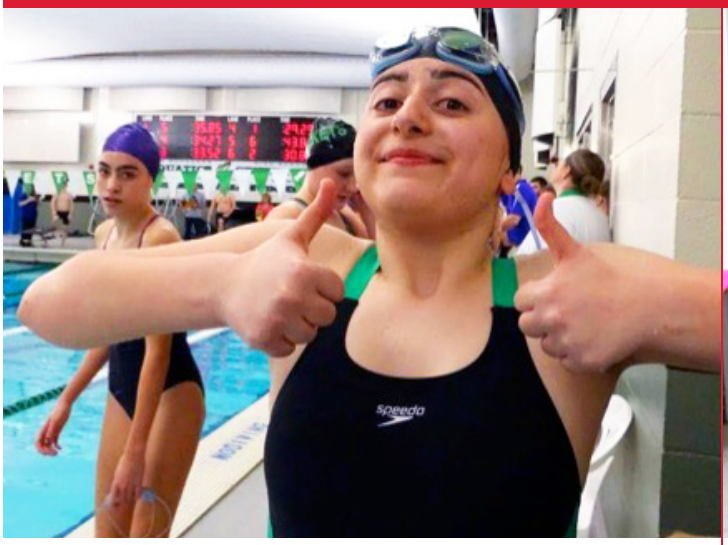
Get Involved!



Marianna Gives Swimming Two Thumbs Up!

Just Swimmingly...

Every season has its sport, so I decided to join my high school's swim team. Now that the swim season is over, I understand that the three months that I spent swimming with my team were the best three months in the exchange year.

My swim team has become my second family in America. Each team member and the coaches were with me, helping me from the first day to the very last one! They made my exchange year unforgettable.

They made me fall in love with swimming, so I decided to continue to swim when I go back to Armenia.

—Marianna (FLEX, Armenia), hosted by the Reeder family (PA)

Aigokul shows off her paper mache yurta with Ms. Stafford.

The Life of an Artist

I just love art; it can make other people happy! It was one of my first connections with my host family. I drew them a picture to make them happy one morning. It was just a simple picture of a cat in a cup; it was super cute.

I love this feeling, when I see my host mom's face. It is an awesome feeling when you know that you made someone's morning better. It does not take long, and it isn't about the technical level. It is about the love that you had intended to share.

Also, I made a model of a yurta, our national house, out of paper mache. It was a perfect example for my cultural presentation. My art teacher Ms. Stafford and I have a very good relationship. She is an excellent teacher, and I learned a lot of things. We are drawing with watercolors and even tried to copy Van Gogh's *Starry Night* with plaster and oil paint.

Ahhh, the life of an artist!

—Aigokul (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), hosted by the Fritz family (MS)

Muhammad belts one out.

Showing His Talent!

I have loved singing for a long time now, and when I got a chance to do that in the Winona Senior High School annual talent show this month, it became a perfect cultural exchange.

I sang a song in Urdu (the national language of Pakistan), and everyone loved it. I ended up with third place which felt nice, but the general appreciation I got from the audience after my performance was even better.

—Muhammad (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Rothering family (MN)

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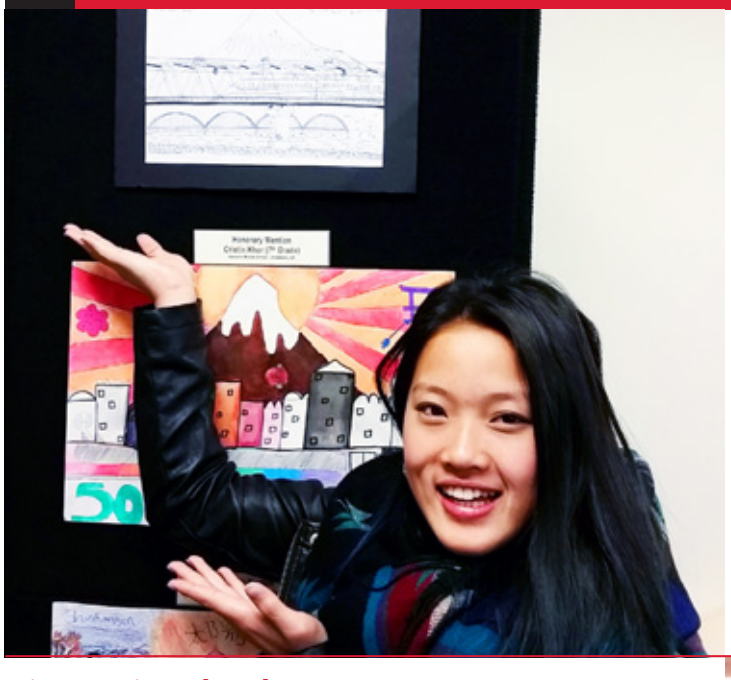
Get Involved!



Drawing Her Own Conclusions

Last fall, the Atlanta-based Consul General of Japan held a drawing contest that was open to all students in states under his jurisdiction—Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. The subject of the drawing was Japan's bullet train. Six students took first, second, and third place prizes, while six more won Honorable Mentions, including Jiang, who had entered the contest at my urging.

There was an awards presentation in the Consul General's office that we attended. Jiang was accompanied by her PAX sister Jessy (YES, Egypt), host mom Lia Smith, and me.

—Roxanne Lau (GA), regional development manager

Jiang shows off her award-winning art.

Discovering the Theatre

Since January at my school we have been preparing our spring musical *Beauty and the Beast*. Finally, on March 11, we had our first show!

It's been an amazing experience that gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of people and learn a lot of things about not only how you have to be on stage and how you have to represent your character, but also about all the backstage goings-on. I'm really happy that I decided to be involved with it, and it's definitely one of the things that I'm going to miss the most.

—Maria (Spain), hosted by the Kincanon family (IN)

Maria poses with Mrs. Potts after another dynamite performance!

Trying Something New

I tried tennis as a new sport. We started practicing in October, and last month the season started. I was very unsure if I was good enough to join the team. In the end, I decided I would just give it a try, and I can say it was the best decision I made!

I found many new friends on the team, and tennis really became my favorite activity. My doubles partner and I are practicing as often as we can, and our practice has shown results. We already won a few matches! I recommend that everyone joins a new sport this season to make some amazing memories these last few months!

—Olivia (Germany), hosted by the Blum family (LA)

Olivia and her doubles partner Marcelina take a break from the tennis court.

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Saimahbub takes a break from the leadership camp to chill out with his guitar.

Leadership Camp–Great Expectations!

In February, I went to a mid-year orientation leadership camp with other exchange students in Mercersburg, PA. Before going to the camp, I had expected to learn how to communicate with different people, cultures, and perspectives and learn leadership skills as well as teamwork. Luckily, all my expectations came true.

We took a test to determine our personality types and then divided into two groups that did an activity. We pretended to be survivors of a subarctic catastrophe and discussed which items we needed to keep. We did not succeed, because we did not know each other's personality types and did not have sufficient knowledge about working in a group. Then, we learned about determining personality types and group skills, and it helped us to understand each other better and discuss issues much more effectively.

On the second day, we learned about leadership skills and leadership in a team. As teams worked together, we realized that we were using the skills we had learned.

—Saimahbub (FLEX, Tajikistan), hosted by the Browne family (WV)

Sharing Their Knowledge

It was a spectacular event as 20 foreign exchange students, representing 18 different countries, came together to share about who they are, where they come from, and what they have learned during their exchange year. Each student set up a display, which included interesting facts about their country, and had food for the attendees to sample. The students also put on three very humorous skits, and each student took some time to express their gratitude for the host families who have graciously opened up their homes and hearts to help make a dream come true.

—Marie Lackore (WI), community coordinator

Alia's (YES, Philippines) smile says it all as she shares her native country with attendees.

A Recipe for Success

In late February, I went to the Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) state conference in Indianapolis, where I presented an individual project and a team project, which was about all the activities that my FCCLA chapter had been doing to help our community. It was also about how this club helped me as an exchange student to get involved, proving that FCCLA is the recipe for success. The best part of my project was that all of us were from different countries.

—Paulina (Mexico), hosted by the Lee family (IN)

Paulina, Autumn (U.S), and Sewar (YES, Gaza) provide a unified presentation at the FCCLA state conference.

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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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