Surpassed My Dream

This exchange program was found for my brother, not me. But my brother, who doesn’t like to take risks, denied it. I, who love adventure, was interested. It sounded terrific! I asked my dad if I could apply, but he said no. The reason was simple: I am a young girl. So I kept asking him for six months. I glowed with visions of my life in America. English? I would be able to speak as if I was a residential American. Character? I would grow and not be a mere child anymore. I now compare my present self to what I had hoped to become. The result is not bad at all. I can express things in English. I have many special memories from here. I learned how to make better choices and logically solve problems.

Even though I worked hard, I am still not the perfect adult that I expected to become. However, I am extremely happy here. I feel loved in this far away country and I am not homesick. I love my host family and friends with my whole soul. This love was the strength that helped me to survive these ten months. It is the main source of my wonderful experience.

Na Hyun Kong (South Korea)
Hosted by the Foshay family
Bradport, VT

A Journey of Self-Discovery and Joy

It’s very easy to forget who you are when you are placed in another culture. This year has been a test of my principles and character. I have learned to sift every experience, and to take the good and leave the bad. It has been a journey of self-discovery. Away from what is normal or what I am used to, I have watched myself plough through unfamiliar ground: living with new people, making friends, being part of the track and field team, and being a radio reporter.

I rejoice because the plough didn’t stop and say, “This is too hard”, but went on and now a thoroughly tilled land is the wonderful result. I realize how lucky I am to have had this experience. To know that education is not all about memorization and recall. That it could include understanding and appreciating a culture different from your own. I have acquired skills I never had, from attending workshops in Seattle and Washington, DC, to interviewing both the man on the street and a senator on Capitol Hill, to writing for radio and audio editing.

It’s been worthwhile leaving friends and family for ten months because I’ve found friends and family here, too. I’ve made everlasting memories, and when I’m ninety and old, I will sit by the fireside with my grandchildren and tell them of my ten month long adventure in the USA.

I’ll never forget Mr. Hargraves, who brought laughter to math class. For people like me, it is the only way the equations will stick in the brain! My host mom Tamarah’s teaching healed once more the bruises of a dark, brutal history, and demonstrated that we are first people before affiliates of a race. I think Thanksgiving should be held everywhere. I will sorely miss it. Everyone has something to be thankful for.

Mawusi Kudu (YES, Ghana)
Hosted by the Lee family
Redmond, WA

Russian Teen Wins Book Cover Contest

Congrats to Yekaterina Bocharova for winning the CSIEF Annual Art Design Cover contest. To see her artwork, which will be featured on the 2012-2013 cover of Advisory List for the Council on Standards of International Educational Travel, go to www.CSIEF.org. The Reece family hosts the talented FLEX student in Kansas.

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www.pax.org

City Boy Brings Home the “Green”

I am from a big city where there are just a few trees, so I didn’t have any experience working in gardens or on a farm. When I first arrived, I thought, “How will I spend the whole year around these mountains and trees?” But now I’ve adjusted to this new lifestyle and I really like it. I planted some flowers and I mow the grass. I take wood from the forest near the house and make bonfires with my host family and friends. We toast marshmallows and have fun. These things are new experiences for me.

I’ve also gained a lot of leadership abilities in the US, so I’m planning to start a campaign to plant flowers and trees across the United States. I want to teach my friends to help my city with small steps. We can overcome the pollution and have a fresh and healthy atmosphere in Karachi.

Syed Ali Larosh Zaidi (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Minch family
Inwood, WV

Double the Fun

After describing the cold winters in this part of the U.S., I was proven wrong when we had a very mild winter and went sun bathing and running into the Atlantic Ocean in mid April. Typically we don’t go into the ocean until June. Busra and Sasha bring me loads of joy and keep lots of young energy in the house.

Sue Dawson, host mother for Busra Cetin (YES, Turkey) and Alexandra Bedenko (FLEX, Kazakhstan) in Chelmsford, MA
Spring Break by the Numbers

11 Teens from 9 Countries visit 5 States

John and Amy Cooper teamed up with Indiana Coordinator Teresa Metz to take this crew on a road trip through Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Florida. Their ultimate destination was the Gulf shore for a week of dolphin spotting, alligator hunting, mini golf and lots of time at the beach. Pictured are Patvitee Nuengray (Thailand), Hae Jun Lee (South Korea), Alisa Abravaya (Spain), Max Ziman Zhang (China), Lukas Oberbeck (Germany), Michael and Victoria Metz, Alicia Yager, Tanja Ronnemose (Denmark), Juliette Renard (Belgium) and Mario Diaz (Mexico).

Alabama is Awesome

Fortunately, I knew my host family pretty well from Skyping when I arrived. We got along like family from the beginning. On the other hand, I nearly died at first with the 112°F summer weather in Birmingham. Even the highest temp back in Germany never reaches 100º.

A few months later we went indoor-skydiving in Tennessee. When you jump into the center of a net, you hover in the wind blown by a car-sized fan! We also visited an American Oktoberfest. It was amusing to see Americans walking around in lederhosen when they cannot speak German nor behave like real Germans. Stereotypical, but very funny to see how Americans think we act and dress.

During football season we went to the home of Alabama football, Tuscaloosa. We camped close to the stadium by a lake. Raccoons came near our tent and campfire, so we decided to watch them and ended up falling asleep outside. The next day we woke up in the middle of a net, you hover in the skydiving in Tennessee. When you jump into the center of a net, you hover in the wind blown by a car-sized fan! We also visited an American Oktoberfest. It was amusing to see Americans walking around in lederhosen when they cannot speak German nor behave like real Germans. Stereotypical, but very funny to see how Americans think we act and dress.

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Throughout this experience, I have learned a lot about American culture and life. I have also made many new friends and have had many interesting experiences. One of these experiences was going to the natural hot springs in Alabama. The water was very hot and the scenery was breathtaking.

Alabama is a beautiful state with many natural wonders. I was able to enjoy the beautiful landscapes and the vibrant culture during my time there. I will always cherish the memories I made in Alabama and the friends I met there.

Zip Line Adventure

The rush of adrenaline while riding such an overwhelming ride is a great experience. I went to Missouri with my host family, and on the way back we visited the tallest tower in Branson known as "The Shepherd of the Hills". We could see the whole city split into different interesting sectors. So when my mom and I saw the zip line, we thought that it must be the craziest thing we could think of trying before we left Missouri. We went for it. At first I was scared and thought my heart would come out of my mouth. It was so full of fun. I had a fabulous time there and I’m blessed to have this family to support me. The saying is true indeed: It is not a year in a life, but a life in a year. Love you, mom and dad.

Moshitaka Akhter (YES, Bangladesh) Hosted by the Lyons family Shreveport, LA

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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Port Chester, NY 10573
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Thank you for submitting letters to PAX Press. Because of space limitations, however, we are unable to print each letter in its entirety.

PAX Press is printed on recycled paper with soy based ink.

In Memoriam: Rayetta Fetter

We are saddened by the news that one of PAX’s most treasured coordinators passed away this month. Everyone who met Rayetta was struck by her warmth, creativity and zest for life. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she founded a beloved cultural tradition, the International Dinner, in which exchange students treat their host families and teachers to an evening of global entertainment and specialty foods. An impressive ninety-seven students from more than 20 countries have called her “mom” over the past nine years. During her travels to 27 countries, she and her husband, Gordon, were able to visit many of these students and their families. She will be deeply missed by the whole PAX family.

Surf and Sun

Going to Florida for spring break was something that I will never forget. We did a lot of things together like water volleyball, Disney World and a water park. We also went to Daytona and Cocoa Beach. Surfing was so much fun! I turned 18 years there. I am extremely thankful to have had this opportunity.

Carla Santamarina Sanjuan (Spain) Hosted by the Knuffel family Cheboygan, MI

Christmas Replay

The Tipton family brought Rino Ishizaki (Japan) to the world’s biggest Christmas store in Michigan. Rino says, “When I return home, I will miss big American events like Christmas tailgating on campus where I met some nice people and had a good time.”

The saying is true indeed: It is not a year in a life, but a life in a year. Love you, mom and dad.

Moshitaka Akhter (YES, Bangladesh) Hosted by the Lyons family Shreveport, LA

Bye Be My Valentine

Janie Kreshbach offers one of the cake pops she made with her host mother, Sherif Kennedy. The German exchange student spent her year in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

PAX and YES provided me with the change to understand the world from a totally different point of view. From this experience I had the chance to understand the world from a totally different point of view.

Moshitaka Akhter (YES, Bangladesh) Hosted by the Lyons family Shreveport, LA

In front of a NASA aircraft, Pakistani YES student Yasha Ali contemplates her next dream — becoming an astronaut.

To Infinity and Beyond

This journey started with a small thought that changed into a hope and then into a dream. These eleven months were a life changing experience for me and I look forward to many ups and downs, along with some moments when I realized that if I wasn’t there, then I would never know that I have the potential strength to go through hitches by myself.

In this challenge we can ascertain a whole new world. Voyaging to a place which is absolutely new is a breathtaking opportunity in itself, but this is what we came here for! A cultural experience and great memories with new global allies.

PAX and YES provided me with the chance to understand the world from a totally diverse outlook and with the ability to help others through volunteering and community service. After experiencing almost a year of teenage life in the USA, I am going to live more dreams!

I hope I can implement all the things that I learned here as an exchange student for goodwill, world harmony and peace.

Yasha Ali (YES, Pakistan) Hosted by the Whittaker family Westerville, OH

A Mountain of Fun

I am a big fan of snowboarding and it was always my dream to snowboard in America, especially in Colorado. When my host mother told me that we would be going on a ski trip with the family, one of my biggest dreams came true! Here at home, I live with my host parents and their daughter. My two older host brothers do not live at home anymore. I was even more excited when my host mother said that both of my host brothers would come with us. We stayed in a beautiful cabin twenty miles away from the mountain. The cabin was really nice and big. My host mother cooked food before the trip and froze it so we had a really delicious dinner every evening when we came home from the slopes. One of the nicest things of the trip was going to the natural hot springs. To be honest, the smell of the water was not that great, but the feeling when you were in there was amazing.

Lennard Richter (Germany) Hosted by the Majewski family Albuquerque, NM

Travelling Man

With my host family I went to Ruidoso for skiing, Grand Canyon for hiking, to New Mexico and six more cities. It’s been really awesome. Because South Korea is not a big country, I have never ridden in a car for ten hours, so that was tough. But after that, I had a lot of fun with my host family.

Woonmo Yang (South Korea) Hosted by the Harmon family El Paso, TX
having a good time.

he got a ticket to the Super Bowl. The Leflers

helped me develop problem solving

new friends, improved my English and

second locally and then second at the state

host the Mexican teen in Illinois.

Puig (Spain), Elisabetta Fabretti (Italy) and

Blanca Barajas Vallejo (Spain), Maria Samon

Florida Coordinator Karen Rose, center, with

had the chance to visit the Hershey factory

and the Washington Monument. We even

History Museum that we had seen in “Night

Cemetery, which we had heard so much

Coordinator Chris Duncan, without whom

that went by the White House, the Capitol,

Museum. We also did a really cool bike tour

about in US history class, to the Natural

Community Leaders of America state

won an award at the Family, Career and

Karima Kurmanzkhan (FLEX, Kazakhstan)

about it and said they appreciated the effort I’m putting in. Hopefully they

impression on the community and my neighborhood. People stopped by, asked

peppers. I also planted three trees in the front yard as part of my Earth Day

used, filthy sandbox in my backyard into a useful garden. I got some

compost manure and other compostable waste such as leaves and grass

clippings, as well as fruit and vegetable compost from the kitchen. I then

added some dirt. After making the base, I planted raspberries, blueberries,
tomatoes, lettuce, celery, cabbage, radicchio, and five different kinds of

peppers. I also planted three trees in the front yard as part of my Earth Day

project. My host family and friends helped me. This project left a good

impression on the community and my neighborhood. People stopped by, asked

me about it and said they appreciated the effort I’m putting in. Hopefully they

will end up doing some good work in their backyards as well.

Fasih Durrani (YES, Pakistan)

Hosted by the Jones family

Camp Hill, PA

PAX Goes GREEN first place contest winner Fasih Durrani (YES, Pakistan) with his sandbox-turned-garden.

The Plastic Bag Facts

Did you know? That the raw material for plastic bags is oil. Therefore, the more plastic bags we use, the more oil we waste, and oil is a non-renewable energy source. That the petroleum-based plastic bags take decades to break down, so if they are not recycled, they become long lasting litter. That plastic bags endanger wildlife, particularly sea life such as sea turtles and dolphins that become entangled in them and suffocate or mistakenly assume that these bags are jellyfish and eat them.

Many people think they can’t have an impact on environmental problems. Issues like global warming, loss of rain forests, acid rain, the ozone layer and our waste disposal crisis can be huge and out of control. But there’s good news. You can change the conditions we’re facing right now by doing little things. If each copier in the U.S. made five fewer copies a day, we could save up to 1.4 million trees.

Protecting nature and maintaining a green environment should be our goal. Nature will die without our help. If every single person does something, even a little bit every day, the impact is going to be big.

Eleni Minashvili (FLEX, Georgia)

Hosted by the Ghan family

Kennewick, WA

Got Rid of the Car

Alona Shulga (FLEX, Ukraine) and her host mother rely on biking and walking to get around their West Virginia town. She announced a bonus beyond the reduced carbon use. “Less money used for gas meant more money for fun!”

Draft Dodgers

When Shayan Sikander (YES, Pakistan) learned that rod-shaped sacks filled with sand could block drafts from windows and doors, he reached out to his Massachusetts neighbors with pamphlets about their simple energy saving idea.

Power Down

Denys Andrushchenko (FLEX, Ukraine) published a story on how his West Virginia school could save $17,430 a year and nearly 10 million joules on energy. His solution was simply turning off each school computer for ten minutes a day.

Exchanging Best Practices

Nozhan Amonova (FLEX, Tajikistan) shared ideas from her homeland, including a method to prevent newly planted trees from drying out. One practice Nozhan will take back is

A Better Flush

Silvia Juste (Spain) knows a great way to save water. Just change the water levels on the mechanism inside the toilet tank. She adjusted three of her New Hampshire host family’s toilets to the low flow setting, saving thousands of gallons.

Nature’s Gifts

My host family works during the springtime on the front and backyard. This year a vacant space was to be a garden for my host mom, sister and me. I had fun shoveling dirt and raking the yard. We laughed until our tummies ached. While resting under a tree, I realized that we don’t really see how beautiful nature is until we get it on our feet and explore it. With pictures I took of the garden, I can show people how I see nature. We should ask ourselves, “What if it wasn’t there?”

Janica Katricia Diamalon

(YES, Philippines)

Hosted by the Eastes family

Francesville, IN

Today’s Stewards

On Earth Day, Missouri Coordinator Liz Carver, right, brought her students to the St. Louis Earth Day Festival, Science Center, zoo, planetarium and Meramec Caverns. With her are Anna Khoperia (FLEX, Georgia), Heinrich Dettman (Germany) and Lado Sirdadze (FLEX, Georgia).
Lost? Not Me!

I went on an orienteering field trip with a class at school. We were divided into sixteen groups and were told to go into the woods and find different checkpoints by only using a map and compass within three hours. It was really fun and exciting as I had never done anything like that before. My team was awarded the Orienteering Ribbon by the class instructor. It was a great experience.

Nabeel Malik (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Drakeford family
Ruther Glen, VA

National Honor Society inductees Syed Ali Larosh Zaidi (YES, Pakistan), Denys Andrushchenko (FLEX, Ukraine) and Radovan Srdinov (Czech Republic)

Finish Line Victories

My biggest experiences here have been in sports. After swimming in a regional tournament with the varsity team, I immediately joined the varsity track team. I was so excited to try pole vaulting. My Pakistani exchange brother, Ali Larosh, taught me how to play lacrosse and my two mile running times. Also, I have tried hurdles, but I ended up staying with my best student in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Chop Chop
Marium Teme, left, demonstrates cooking techniques during family night at school. The YES student from Mali says she will miss the American holidays and special events like this one. She sends a big thank you to the Turner family for hosting her in Cosmopolis, Washington.

Grease is the Word
Budding actress Elizaveta Gunovna showed everyone that she has what it takes on stage during her school musical Grease. The Shirerum family hosts the Russian FLEX student in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Student of the Month:
The Rewards of Optimism
Five days before school began, I went with my host mum to tour the high school, so I would have an idea of where my classes would be. Mathematics and social studies on the first floor, science and English on the second floor, student services next to the cafeteria and between them is a big wall where the student of the month pictures are posted. When we saw the pictures of these students, we stopped and my host mum told me that she would love to see my picture there. I promised her that she would, but obviously I thought it would be impossible. How could an exchange student become student of the month if no one knows him or her, especially the teachers? Sometimes you have to be optimistic and do the best you can without thinking about the recompense. That’s when they will value your work.

After Christmas break we received an invitation for the student of the month meeting. My English teacher had nominated me. After we read the invitation, I said to my host mum, “I told you that you would see my picture on the wall!” It just goes to show that nothing is impossible when you believe.

Paula Fragoso Espinosa (Spain)
Hosted by the Doty family
Westerville, OH

Sweet Success
When Shomy Chowdhury (YES, Bangladesh) arrived in Michigan to live with the Reinhout family, she had no idea what an impact she would make. She dove right into school life, winning the senior class “Hawaiian Day” costume award, singing a solo in a choir concert and making the honor roll. During International Education Week, she gave 17 presentations about her homeland to Cheboygan area elementary, middle and high school classes. To teach her classmates about the Bengali language on International Mother Language Day, she dressed in a black and white Bengali outfit.

This winter, Shomy was in the news headlines when she won first place and $150 for her Bengali dance at the “Northern Michigan Has Talent” show sponsored by the Cheboygan Area Arts Council and Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. She also won $30 and the first place award at her school talent show.

Mary Payne Hairald
Community Coordinator
Nettleton, MS

Top Scholar
Yujie Wang (China) was selected as a senior Rotary Scholar. She, along with the others who won the award, was honored this week with a Rotary Club luncheon. She selected her host mom, Teresa Reeder, and myself to be her guests. Throughout the years, I have had many students who attended Tupelo High School, yet Yujie Wang is the first exchange student I have supervised who won this honor. The winners were selected from the very top students who took advanced placement courses. Yujie did this and won!

Mary Payne Hairald
Community Coordinator
Nettleton, MS

Checkmate!
One of Alina Zyeyakova’s favorite volunteer activities is teaching chess at an elementary school. Along with showing the children her favorite game moves, the FLEX student likes to give a primer on her homeland, Ukraine. Focused and engaged, this hardworking student has been fortunate to become a part of America. I’ve got the FLEX and PAX programs to thank for that.

Aigerim Artykbaeva (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Mulvehill family
Penfield, NY

The Artist Within
The most unpredictable event of my year was receiving “The Principal’s Art Award” at Penfield High School! My school is a great place, although I still get lost sometimes because it’s such a huge school. This whole year has been the most interesting page of my life story. America became a part of me as well as I became a part of America. I’ve got the FLEX and PAX programs to thank for that.

Aigerim Artykbaeva (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Mulvehill family
Penfield, NY

A Star is Born
My school’s spring play was a parody of Sherlock Holmes: The Hound of the Baskervilles. I got a part as the annoying and wannabe-star maid named Laura Lyons. She is the murder suspect. It’s pretty amazing because exchange students usually are an extra or do crew. I’m really grateful to get a main part. I love being part of the drama activities in school, and it made me get more involved in my passion for fine arts. I’m so happy, too, because my PAX friends and coordinator, Jeff Schmatt, came to watch me in the role on the final night.

Ghathys Syahultari (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by Mihm family
Norway, IA

Way to Go, Jon!
What could be more affirming than scoring a goal at your first game? Congrats to Jon Alex Artaza, The Barton family hosts the Spanish teen in Berryville, Virginia.

Student of the Month:

2023 November

Sweet Success

Chop Chop

A Star is Born

Way to Go, Jon!

Most Improved Player

Student of the Month:

Sweet Success

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Walking a Day in My Brother’s Shoes

We are the Hajek family from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We have been hosting Usman Ghan, a 16-year-old boy from Pakistan. Throughout this experience we have learned so much about his religion (Islam) and his culture. Some things are very different from our practices here in the US, while other things are pretty much universal. One of the things that fascinated me the most as Usman’s host mom has been the customs and practices of his Muslim religion. We have had many hours of discussion on this topic, of which I previously had very little knowledge. On a recent spring break trip to St. Louis, we decided to take it one step further: My 10-year-old daughter Kelly and I decided to wear traditional Muslim women’s clothing and hijab for one day to see and feel how people respond to openly Muslim people. Another exchange student, Abdullah Abohaimed from Saudi Arabia, came on the trip with us. He and Usman wore their country’s traditional dress on this day also. I felt people’s interactions with me that day were not at all what I expected them to be. If anything, I felt that I was treated with more respect by strangers and the service people we encountered. I think the reason for this is because here in America most people don’t physically wear clothing that represents their religion in such an open, outward way. The modest dress of Muslim women is meant to portray them as equals in intellect, while distracting outsiders from seeing or viewing the females as “obscene.” I definitely experienced this. If there were any negative comments or looks given to any of us, I didn’t notice it at all. This tells me that most Americans are becoming much more tolerant of diverse cultures in their presence. My hope is that people are educating themselves as to what these cultures are really like. Just as in any “group”, there will always be the radical segment, but the majority usually are common peace loving people, just as most of us here in America are.

I can say that my family and I have learned more from these exchange “kids” than I could have ever learned on my own. This has been such a positive, eye opening experience for all of us and one that we will cherish for the rest of our lives! And maybe there will be a trip to Pakistan in our future. The Hajek family, hosts for Muhammad Usman Ghan, (YES, Pakistan)

Cedar Rapids, IA

Wisconsin Students Take Up Curling

Each year we plan a monthly event for our exchange students and their host families in Northwest Wisconsin. One very popular sport that is played here is curling. For those of you who do not know anything about the sport, it originated in Scotland where it was played entirely outdoors. We now have heated curling ice arenas so the season can start in early fall and last until late spring. As a result, the Midwest has curling teams that are now highly competitive at the international level. This fact was made even more apparent with the US team’s success in the last winter Olympics. Pictured are the exchange students who learned the rules and techniques of the game in less than a half hour. We were able to play at a state of the art facility located in Rice Lake. The facility displays flags from the many nations and states that have been actively involved in the sport of curling here in Wisconsin.

Steve Eichman
Community Coordinator
turtle Lake, WI

Ready, Set, Bag

Recognizing that some families in their Florida community don’t have enough money to buy food, Coordinator Danyell White’s group bagged groceries and delivered them to a local food pantry. Pictured are Atikarr Suantawe (Thailand), Alejandra Azcona Puig (Spain), Emely Schell (Germany), Sophia Lawrent (Germany), Ana Prada Herrero (Spain), host mother Lue Sender, Abuubakarr Conteh (YES, Sierra Leone), Sophie Kruijff (Netherlands) and Rachele Leibrandt (Germany).

Helping Children in Need

Louise Bertelsen (Denmark) promoted the silent auction at the fundraising dinner that she and the other Great Falls, Montana PAX students put together to benefit a home for neglected and abused children.

We CAN!

Keegan Manuel (YES, South Africa) and Johnny Elias (YES, West Bank) spent months gathering aluminum cans for recycling. With the can refund money, they bought non perishable food to donate to the Key Club food-a-thon benefiting six food pantries in the Orange, Massachusetts area.

Enlivened by Service

Nothing makes me as happy as the realization that I have helped somebody—that I made a person smile. Only few hours a week is not a big deal to me, but it is for them. It always feels good when you know that somebody is happy, but the feeling you have when you are the reason for his or her happiness is unexplainable. This year I’ve been volunteering for newborns in need by making quilts and clothes packages for them. In March, I went on a mission trip to help at the Hope Children’s Home in Florida. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said, “The happiest people I have known have been those who gave themselves no concern about their own souls, but did their utmost to mitigate the miseries of others.” Now I know what that means and I want to say thank you to PAX for giving me the opportunity to see life and real happiness. My soul had never been this rich before.

Syuzeta Martirosyan, (FLEX, Armenia)
Hosted by the Lopez family
Springfield, MO

Kelly and Javan Hajek appreciated the respect they received when they spent the day donated in the traditional clothing of their student’s country, Pakistan.

Tornado Recovery

My youth group organized a three-day mission trip to Kentucky to help people affected by the tornado that happened on March 2nd. We first headed to an older man’s house. He lost a lot of his property so we helped clean the mess the tornado left. The next morning we talked to a man who lost his wife in the tornado. It was really sad what happened. We cut up downed trees and picked up loose wood on his property. Later in the afternoon, we drove around with the town’s sheriff to find more places to help. In conclusion, the mission trip was a very good experience for all of us, and it made us thank God for what we have. Helping people is one of the best feelings in the world. I believe that we should be there for one another during the difficult times.

Akram Al-Ida (YES, Yemen)
Hosted by the Arp family
Walker, IA

30-Hour Famine: Teens Go Hungry so Others Don’t Have to

To fight hunger around the world, four YES students in Massachusetts fasted for 30 straight hours with the Athol Orange Baptist Church youth group. Through this effort, Johnny Elias (West Bank), Keegan Manuel (South Africa), Maryam Bad (Pakistan) and Jewahadi Salih (Philippines) raised $3000 for World Vision. Pictured is Keegan alerting drivers to the devastating effects of hunger.

Hello from Big Sky Country

“Wide open spaces and small towns, this is what American life is really, truly about.” Montana Coordinator Melody McLaughlin says.

Pictured are Aparajita Naik (India), Lalisa Trirattanajarasporn (Thailand), Ana Cecilia Carnevali Padilla (Mexico), Thanaporn Puttinton (Thailand) and Allison Van Pouke (Belgium).

Cheers for Volunteers

My youth group organized a three-day mission trip to Kentucky to help people affected by the tornado that happened on March 2nd. We first headed to an older man’s house. He lost a lot of his property so we helped clean the mess the tornado left. The next morning we talked to a man who lost his wife in the tornado. It was really sad what happened. We cut up downed trees and picked up loose wood on his property. Later in the afternoon, we drove around with the town’s sheriff to find more places to help. In conclusion, the mission trip was a very good experience for all of us, and it made us thank God for what we have. Helping people is one of the best feelings in the world. I believe that we should be there for one another during the difficult times.

Akram Al-Ida (YES, Yemen)
Hosted by the Arp family
Walker, IA
A Sizzling Time in the Great State of Texas

When I got to Texas in August, it was 110 degrees, which is completely different from my freezing Siberian city. Everything was strange and odd. But here I found good friends and even a best friend. I joined many school clubs: dancing team, theatre society, Key Club, UIL math, debate team and school plays. Clubs made my life interesting and helped me achieve some success. I won second place in the District Math UIL contest. My math teacher nominated me for the National Math Award and my theatre class was honored at the State Theatre Festival. It was great to volunteer with Key Club, especially helping disabled students at my school. Every time I had a problem, my host family helped me. They became my second mom and dad. They care about me as if they were a Pakistani friend.

One was my host sister, Taylor, and another was a Pakistani friend. Day by day I made more friends at school. But what I needed was time and patience. My amazing host family taught me how to make friends at the same time sad. I missed my family. I was stuck between two worlds.

My Metamorphosis

My first days in the US were funny and at the same time sad. I missed my family. I passed through a hard time making friends at school and got a part in the Peter Pan musical. I could write a book about my experiences... I have changed a lot, a year that made me be completely responsible for what I do and say, and generally, I learned how to organize my life. It was a great opportunity to see American life like it is – with happiness and sadness, with problems and solutions. I've got a better understanding of humanity now. I learned how to solve my problems, how to express my purposeful.

My family and I have done a lot of interesting stuff together and we’ve really had fun. They tease me a lot. At first I didn’t really get them. Then I started to understand and react. Now I can tease them back! Thanks so much for making me a member of this family. I learned more than a lot here, both in knowledge and behavior, plus how to make myself happy in life and enjoy time.

Thank you for making me a member of the Great State of Texas.

What a Wonderland!

“Before I came, I never imagined this year would be so great! I love my host family, my school and my new friends!” exclains Silvia Elguero Tejera, who is pictured between her Nordic team ski friends gliding across a frozen lake. The Williamson family hosts the Spanish student in Charlotte, Vermont.

The Great American Pastime

It’s time for baseball! Host father Mel Blunt brought Georgian FLEX student Lado Sirdadze to the opening events for the Kansas City Royals.

Life Lessons

Through this year I gained a lot, mainly a better knowledge of life. It was a year of breaking stereotypes and seeing real American life, just as it is – with happiness and sadness, with problems and solutions. I’ve got a better understanding of humanity now. I learned how to solve my problems, how to be completely responsible for what I do and say, and generally, I learned how to organize my life. It was a great opportunity to see from a young adult’s point of view, not a child’s. It helped me to concentrate on my life goals. For all this, I want to thank my host family. They helped me learn those important life lessons.

The Wild West

At the Clark County Fair in Nevada, Francesca Bellesso (Italy) went back in time with host parents Michele and Dave Walker and their grandchildren. They remarked, “My how fashions have changed!”

Happy Birthday to You

Atham Alfanan (YES, Egypt) will never forget his birthday in Iowa. He is pictured with Muhammad Usman Ghani (YES, Pakistan), Coordinator Anna Spina and Consul Kerimova (FLEX, Azerbaijan).

Monkeying Around

During a cruise stop in Honduras, Hera Hassanin (YES, Egypt) and her host brother, Bryce Wigfall, fell in love with this little guy. "Feeding the spider monkey was awesome!” Hera exclaimed.

Hip Hoppin’ Easter

Smith Korean Em Ji Shin got a kick out of painting eggs and later hunting for them, telling us, “Easter was a big event for Americans, especially Christians.” The Sharpe family hosts her in Niles, Ohio.
Citizen Diplomacy Gains Traction in Michigan

Coordinator Linda Workman’s YES and FLEX students have been joining in on the community discussion groups held at the Cheboygan Library. A recent one was attended by Shaida Fatima Ionail (YES, India), Brian Musyoki (YES, Kenya), Abdalla Al-Masri (YES, Jordan), Shomy Chowdhury (YES, Bangladesh) and Olga Redenko (FLEX, Ukraine). Afterward, the students received a warm note from Karen Martin, the founder of the Straits Area Concerned Citizens for Peace and Justice, who wrote, “If others could just meet with those from other countries, face to face, and talk to them…how could we still war?” She closed, saying, “You are all fantastic ambassadors for your countries. Your parents must be very proud of each of you.”

The Next Generation of Leaders

A hundred exchange students from about forty countries came together this February in Des Moines for the Iowa Student Leadership Conference. It was a valuable experience to take part in this workshop with people from all over the world. During the conference we discussed global problems and tried to find possible solutions. We shared our views and ideas. We broadened our outlook and gained new leadership skills that will definitely help us in our future. We also had a special guest, Talia Leman, whose speech was very inspirational for all of us and proved the words of an American social scientist Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world”. In addition to the workshop, we had fun playing a trade simulation game, making a video project and meeting interesting people.

Two days at the Iowa Student Global Leadership Conference were not only educational but also enjoyable. Thank you to the Iowa International Center and The Stanley Foundation for organizing such a great conference.

Yuliya Vyavryshchuk (FLEX, Ukraine) Hosted by the Wycoff family Mount Vernon, IA

Our Dream: A Better World for All

It was great to participate in the Better Understanding for a Better World Conference held in Orlando, Florida by the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation. I was so proud to share my beliefs, culture and love! I was also proud to be a representative of Tajikistan, my host community and my PAX family. There were more than eighty students from thirty-one different countries. Thank you to the US Department of State, the creator of this conference, and Imam Bashar, Kimberly King, Hamza Khan and a lot of others who made it successful. We had great experiences going to a Jewish temple, a Christian church, a Muslim mosque and parks, etc.

During the conference, we all were like brothers and sisters. We shared our stories. This conference gave us hope that if all nations started working together and understanding each other more, then we can make the world a better place for everyone. Having different religions on the earth is like having different classes you learn in school. If you study and respect them, then you will be more educated and open-minded.

We found a lot of similarities in the church and mosque. That means that we are all inter-connected to each other. It does not matter which religion you are or what color of skin you have. It matters what is in your heart.

We are not bad; we are not perfect; we are just different in our own ways. During the conference, we learned that inside of everything, there is a beauty. That beauty is in our hearts. If we find that beauty, we will know how to choose and treat people.

We can all make a difference. We never should stop believing in ourselves! Now I have a saying in my heart: I will never allow my fear to block my dreams. All of our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them!

Nozzin Amonova (FLEX, Tajikistan) Hosted by Barrick family Martinsburg, WV

In front of the Iowa Capitol are Adham Alfanan (YES, Egypt), Nursofia Sideh (YES, Thailand), Yuliya Vyavryshchuk (FLEX, Ukraine) and Ama Owusu-Darko (YES, Ghana).

State Department Representative Alva Hamilton (left) presented an award to Williamsport High School Guidance Counselor Susan Hunsinger, Principal Tim Faunacht and PAX Coordinator Ann Swift.

Tajik FLEX student Nozzin Amonova is second from the left.

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Civic Education Workshop

At this year’s Civic Education Workshop, FLEX and YES students impressed Washington officials with their thoughtful and engaging questions on leadership, US foreign relations, freedom of the press, and women’s rights and roles. “This week is something I will never forget. We all explored Washington, DC with the help of American Councils, met with congressmen and senators, and took part in alumni activities that will help us better apply our experiences back in our countries,” recounts Evangeline Redenko (FLEX, Ukraine), who is pictured with Senator Lee.

“I attended three meetings with Utah Representative Jim Matheson, Senators Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee,” said Natasha Chojuhari, who is pictured with Senator Lee. “It was a great opportunity to see with my eyes how everything works.” The Mendonhall family hosted the FLEX student from Moldova in St. George, Utah.

The Importance of Citizen Engagement

The Civic Education Workshop changed my life. I learned much more about the US government, the people, their values and the first amendment. I improved my leadership and communication skills, made lots of friends, explored monuments and saw places I had dreamed about. One of the best things was hearing from alumni about sharing the experience after returning home. The Civic Education Workshop taught me how to become a good citizen and successful leader. I will use this knowledge to improve my country and community. I am also going to make presentations about my experience in Washington, DC to my classes and clubs at my school. Thank you for your support and this fabulous workshop.

Lado Sridadze (FLEX, Georgia) Hosted by the Blunt family Lee’s Summit, MO

Global Classrooms

In February, a representative from the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, visited several Pennsylvania high schools, including Williamsport High School, a model school reorienting exchange students as a valuable resource for preparing American students for their future roles in an increasingly global society. This year, Williamsport has six exchange students, bringing their seven-year total to 29 PAX students!
Heck If I Know

This year my family and I have been hosting Blanca Barajas from Madrid, Spain. My host sister has taught me so much. She taught me how to be more mature: she’s been here for me when times were tough; she taught me Spanish and she’s also taught me how to do math. This has been the best experience I’ve ever had and I’m glad I got to experience it. One of the funniest times was at Christmas when she asked, “May I have some paper to rape the presents?” We laughed so hard and told her it was wrong. Also, she can’t stop saying “heck if I know” when she doesn’t know something! And she likes to say hגזœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפמ::-גœפم...