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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Finding the Right Fit

During our short time with Anastasiya, she has affected our lives and strengthened our family, immersing herself into both it and our community. As for her time at high school, it might best be characterized by a search for the right activity. She was especially interested in sports.

She had never tried most of them, and practices had already started by the time she arrived. She contacted the swim coach—too many girls on the team. Maybe tennis? We were able to get a one-on-one lesson to determine if this was something she would like. As she experienced both failure and success, she always conducted herself with grace, patience, and a positive attitude. She has displayed this inner strength and optimism in many aspects.

In the end, she joined the cross country team. Even though it is a new sport for her and very hard work, she remains excited to be part of a team and enjoys working to accomplish hard things. She has a very bright year ahead of her.

—Cheryl Gurney (WA), host mom of Anastasiya (FLEX, Ukraine)

Nice catch, Anastasiya! Who needs school sports when you can do this on the weekend?

Splendid and Insightful

Exchanging cultures, playing sports, doing volunteering work, and spending quality family time have all been splendid. I have especially liked trying new things. I saw a church from inside. It was a great experience. Listening to the priest's sermon, I realized that Islam and Christianity are more similar than different. I tried kayaking, canoeing, and pedal rafting for which I am thankful to my family. Going on a boating trip along the Mississippi River and volunteering by helping my parents clean one of their rental properties are perfect examples of things which made me more comfortable with my family. The time here is not only making me responsible by doing my own chores but also helping me discover the finer side of myself and gaining self-confidence.

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

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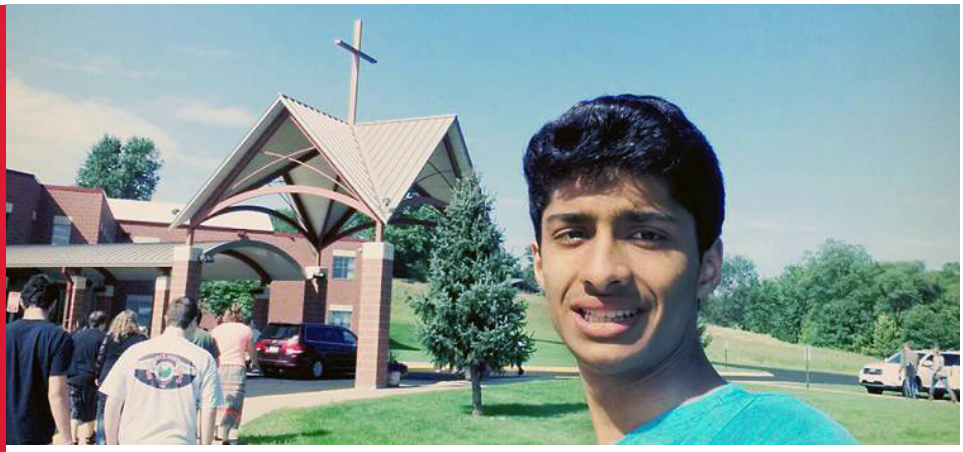


Muhammad captures a shot of his first visit to a church.

Continuing a Cultural Tradition

I grew up with a family that supported exchange student programs. Starting in fifth grade, my family hosted students from China, South Korea, Germany, and Brazil. I loved growing up with different cultural experiences in my own house, and especially the connection and bond we made with each student. They were more than just visitors; they became family. I still keep in touch with my "brothers and sisters" throughout the world.

We decided to host Paul because I wanted to be able to pour into the life of an individual as my parents did, and bring a different bit of culture into our own home. Since day one, Paul has been our son. We love him and do things together all the time. We have only been together for a month, and we feel like we have already known him our whole lives. He teaches us little things that we forget about, like the importance of being together and loving one another. We can't wait to see what the year holds for our family as we share in this adventure together.

—Joel Barron (MS), host dad of Paul (Germany)

Joel, Reianna, and Micah Barron welcome Paul into their family.

An American Favorite

We've had a wonderful time showing Naja our area of the country, which features many national parks. One of Naja's favorites (also one of ours) was Bryce Canyon National Park—so many beautiful vistas! We also visited the Grand Canyon and Zion National Park, and took a day trip to Las Vegas during Labor Day weekend: large malls, M&M World, Hershey World, the Bellagio Conservatory, and taking in the spectacle that is the Las Vegas Strip.

It was great to see it all new through her eyes. We look forward to seeing what the coming months bring, with more travel, quiet family times, and cultural exchange.

—Amy Niemeyer (UT), host mom of Naja (Denmark)

Naja at Bryce Canyon National Park

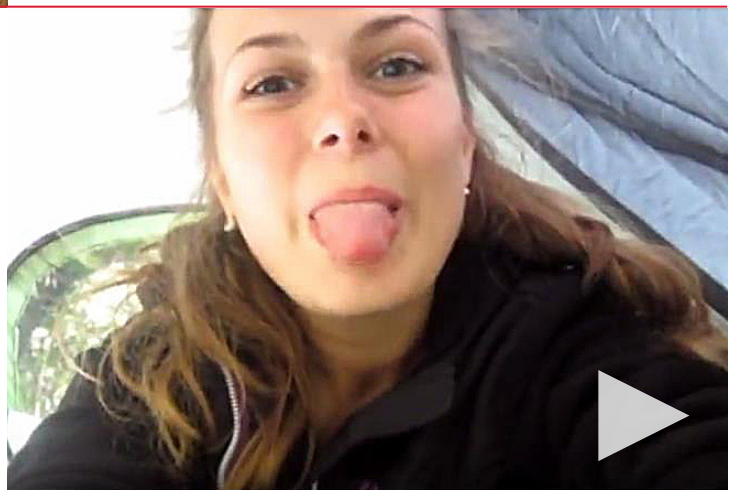
Settling in with Svitlana

For the first time in my life, my daughter asked me why she doesn't have a sister! It seems like Svitlana can be friends with anyone in this world. She just shines with her positive energy.

Svitlana is such a sweet girl. She always helps out and takes care of her room. She is also very smart—she does her homework, studies, and is getting good grades. She joined the girl's golf team without ever having played golf in her life. She is doing fantastically on the golf course with her teammates. We are really impressed with her willingness to try new things.

As a family, we attend church, have toured Columbus, visited the zoo and water park, gone camping, and attended different picnics and cultural festivals.

—Natalya Schaller (OH), host mom of Svitlana (FLEX, Ukraine)



The unsinkable Svitlana goes camping!

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Get Involved!

Lady Crusaders Kaycee and Mariah, Coach Aufdengarten, and their newest player Fides (right), celebrate their first place win.

Beam gets ready to cheer at a Pine Island High School home game.

Bringing Home the Hardware!

Soon after I arrived on August 20, I was asked if I do any sports. I've played tennis in Germany for more than eight years, so that's what I chose. The girls on the tennis team at Wellington High School are super nice and curious about Germany, so I have met a lot of cool people and made very good friends.

On Labor Day, the WHS Lady Crusaders went to the Chaparral Invitational Tennis Tournament, and we took first place! I love playing tennis with this team, and our coach is amazing too. It doesn't matter if we win or lose; we always have fun together!

—Fides (Germany), hosted by the Oathout family (KS)

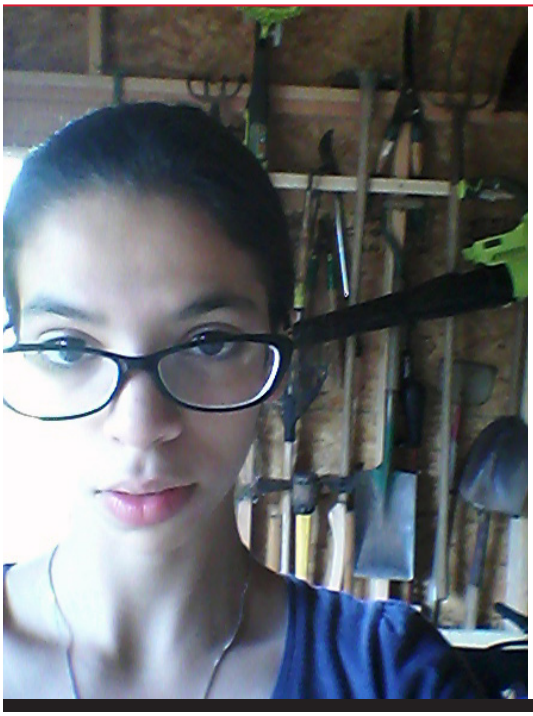
Getting in the Spirit of Things

Every exchange student comes to the U.S. in hopes of participating in something truly American. Beam gets that chance since she is a football cheerleader for the Pine Island Panthers! It doesn't get much more American than that!

Beam arrived on August 7 and is adjusting well! She was very shy at first, but we are all getting very comfortable with each other now. School began this last Tuesday, and Beam, who is our second exchange student, is loving American high school!

We host because we want to learn about other cultures and teach our children about the world right from our own home. It is such an amazing opportunity.

—Megan Nelson, community coordinator (MN), and host mom of Beam (Thailand)



Soukaina with the now familiar gardening tools behind her!

Does "Green Thumb" Translate?

I've joined some school activities during my first weeks at Henry County High School, like basketball and the fashion club.

As for my host family, they are so awesome and kind. We went to the international farmer's market, where I got to know different kinds of food from all around the world; it was exciting and pleasing! There was a Moroccan area, and I was so happy to buy some ingredients to make Moroccan meals in the U.S.

I usually help my host parents in the garden, where they grow different kinds of plants and trees. We have a lot of paprika trees, but I like the small chili peppers the most—they are so colorful and hot! We also mow the lawn every weekend, which is a lot of fun.

I learned so many new things about my family, and I don't feel that I'm an exchange student anymore, but a family member.

—Soukaina (YES, Morocco), hosted by the Depriest family (GA)

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Kamilla (left) and Dure (YES, Pakistan) at work in the food pantry

It's not every day you get to stand behind a governor's desk, as these PAX students did!

First Time in a Food Pantry

When I heard about the food pantry from another exchange student, I was looking forward to volunteer there. When we got there, there were many people of different ages: adults, teenagers, and kids, who were helping there with their parents. A girl named Lexa showed us different kinds of work we can help with. I helped her with packing. We talked during the work. She told me a lot about her family, school, and interests. She asked me questions about Kyrgyzstan. I was happy to share my knowledge with her.

The food pantry is a place where you can meet different people with different destinies. We served 100 people, and by the end I was tired. Volunteering makes me happy! When you help someone, you share part of yourself with these people.

—Kamilla (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), hosted by the Ham family (OH)

An Eye-Opening Trip to the Utah Capitol

Fifteen Utah-based PAX students and three coordinators with kids/host siblings participated in a field trip to the Utah State Capitol on September 11. The Corinthian-style building was built out of granite mined from local canyons and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Following introductions and checking out the rotunda with its expansive murals that depict Utah history, Senator Jim Dabakis charmed the group as tour guide to the governor's office, where the deputy chief of staff talked about state governance and allowed a group photo behind the governor's desk.

After the tour, everybody regrouped at Senator Dabakis' art-filled home for pizza, salad, and homemade desserts adorned with world flags. PAX students visited with the senator as well as local high school students.

In addition to being a fun and educational experience for PAX students, the coordinators hope that the trip will inspire an increase in slots for future PAX students to study in Utah.

—Sara Jordan (UT), community coordinator

Exchange for a Change

"Why will the U.S. Department of State sponsor you?" I was stunned by the question asked by a friend of my host family, and that made me think. "They sponsored us to make a change, to represent my country, to build connections and strong relationships, to create a better world and to make long-lasting peace." I was confident by my answer, but what struck me more is when I was asked, "What have you ever done to make peace?"

That left me speechless. Before I came here, I was just a little girl dreaming to have a good and better life. But now my entire life has changed. I care for the world now. I felt guilty for not doing something to make a brighter world. But I know that being here in the U.S. is the first step. Traveling 18 hours from the Philippines is a big thing. I believe that this is just the start for a change every exchange student will be doing.

Being an exchange student is a big responsibility; it's being a citizen of the world. Being an exchange student is believing that there is a person inside of you that will make a change for a better future for the next generation.

—Sittie (YES, Philippines), hosted by the Wason family (UT)

Ready to make the world a better place, Sittie volunteers at a NAMI event.

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Many Great Adventures Still to Come

I can't describe the excitement we felt when we first saw Valentyna appear as she was coming down the escalator at the San Antonio International Airport. I will never forget the moment when my daughter Emily ran up to meet her for the first time—the love they have for each other was apparent from that first hug.

Valentine, as we call her, has fit right in with our family. We feel like we've known her for years. We have a great time laughing and explaining our everyday phrases like, "Howdy," "Gotcha," and "Okie dokie." She has barely been here three weeks, and we have inside jokes to last a lifetime.

Valentine has already volunteered with the Octagon Club at Canyon Lake High School, where she is also on the PTSA Healthy Lifestyles committee, has attended her first high school football game, and will attend her first homecoming dance. Valentine's commitment and great attitude for trying new things will take her far this year, and we are happy to be a part of her great adventure!

—Janelle Edge (TX), host mom of Valentyna (FLEX, Ukraine)

Valentyna and host sister Emily embrace the experience.

Many Firsts!

The day I arrived was undoubtedly the best day of my life. Since then, everything has been quite new for me. I had never done swimming before, so the first time I jumped in a pool was hilarious, but I learned to swim. (After that, I was ready for Funtown Splashtown USA in Maine.)

I had never been on a roller coaster before either—that was the best thing that ever happened to me! I was afraid of heights, but I've learned that when opportunities present themselves, you shouldn't be afraid—just go after it. I played go karts for the first time too. I broke all the rules—bumping, swerving, and going on when the race was over, but I eventually learned.

I made so many friends at the very first day of school, as I was wearing my cultural dress. I did well in chorus class too, and now I'll be singing in all the concerts. I had never played soccer either, but now I'm playing. In my first game, I got a goal, and we won.

My family decided to take me to an American wedding too. I got a chance to show them a Pakistani bridal dress. They loved that. The journey so far has been great, and I've made this video to prove it!

—Nimra (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Furbish-Carter family (NH)

Nimra poses with the bride.

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On the Home Front

So Far, So Good

Different culture, different accent, but I'm really enjoying my time here due to the great support of my mom, local coordinator, teachers, and friends. And not to forget that we are enjoying all the time with a big German shepherd dog! At first, I was scared of that dog, but now we are best buds.

Sometimes, I cook the food from my country. Mom likes it. What *I like* about my mom and friends at school is that they want to know more about me, my culture, and my traditions. I also like learning about American culture. As they say, it is not good or bad—just different.

—Achyut (YES, India), hosted by the Coons family (IL)

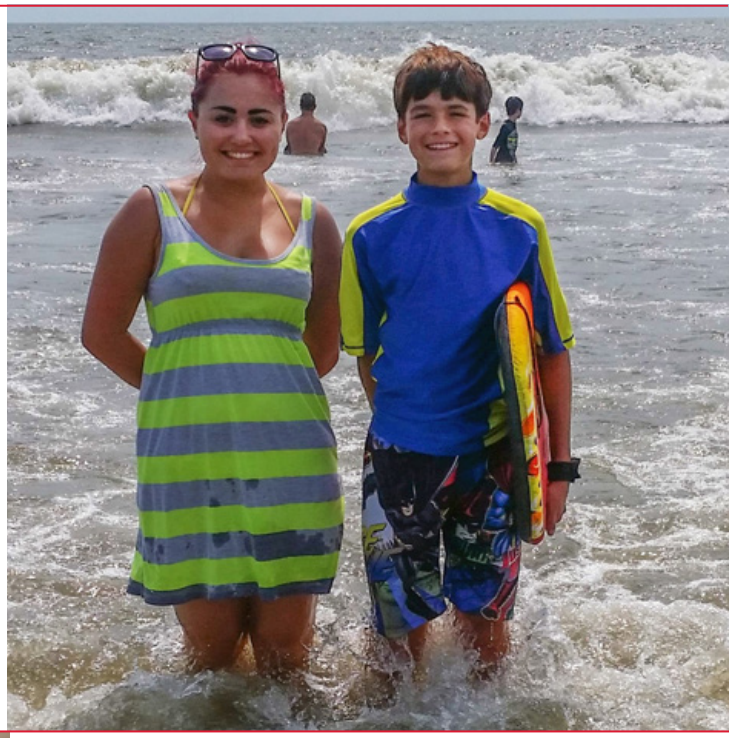
After a Labor Day like this, the town is anxiously waiting to see how Achyut will celebrate Halloween.

From Turf to Surf

Coming from Kazakhstan, the world's largest landlocked country, Anastassiya, or Asya as she likes to be called, had never been to the ocean before. She loves the beach at lakes and rivers she has visited at home, but being in New Jersey, we couldn't let her miss out on some of the nicest beaches in the world!

Our family decided to take this opportunity to spend two days in Ocean City, NJ, on the beach and boardwalk, and in the ocean. Asya was very excited to learn that when we told her we were going to the beach, we meant the ocean! While eating dinner the first night, Asya asked what time she had to be ready in the morning to head home, and I wish I had a picture of her face lighting up when I told her that we would be spending the whole next day on the beach again. On the drive home, I asked her if she had a good time. She stared at me like I had two heads and simply said, "Of course!"

—Phillip Altobelli (NJ), host dad of Asya (FLEX, Kazakhstan)



Host brother Riley welcomes Asya as she enters the ocean for the first time in her life.

Rasha takes a quick selfie break before getting back to her volunteer work.

The "Yes" Girl!

Two days after Rasha arrived, I asked if she wanted to come help with Little Red Schoolhouse (school supply distributions for the under privileged). She said, "Yes!" She volunteered for three days, accomplishing her tasks with a smile and a happy spirit. Next, we took her to visit family on an island. Did she like being on the water? "Yes!" Did she want to try crab? "Yes!" Go on the boat? "Yes!" She baited crab pots, pulled them, and then tried kayaking.

Finally, I was volunteering at tennis tournament five hours away. Did she want to go? "Yes!" She spent the entire weekend helping in any way she could. When asked if she wanted to take a shift off, she replied, "I can sleep in Jordan. While I am here, I will experience everything!" By the end of her second week, she had completed 37 volunteer hours.

—Joy Snodgrass (WA), community coordinator of Rasha (YES, Jordan)

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The Adjustment Cycle

Fellow exchange student Khadija from Senegal and Fariha get silly with host mom Michele, her brother, Mike, and his son Ryan.

A Bangladeshi Buffalonian

I got off the plane with a heavy heart. Everywhere I looked, I saw unfamiliar, foreign faces. I continued walking through Buffalo Airport. But then I saw them, and I knew I was exactly in the right place. My small, kind family was there waiting patiently to receive me. As we walked out of the airport, I felt my spirit rising higher. My heart was back to its normal elated state, and I was myself once more.

Since my arrival, I have fallen head over heels with my family and Buffalo. We have gone to various festivals, Como Park, Canal Side, and even Niagara Falls. Sometimes we just stroll down the street to have the best chicken wings that exist in the world, the Buffalo wings! Armed with my carnivorous appetite for the local drink Loganberry, and the chicken wings, I am on my way to become a true Buffalonian!

Moreover, the people in Buffalo are very nice, friendly, and hospitable. Every time I introduce myself, I am greeted with a heartfelt genuine smile. I know I have just arrived here, but I already know I will miss this wonderful place!

—Fariha (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Sprada family (NY)

My Life So Far in the USA

In June, I found out that I would be coming to Williamsville, NY to study at Williamsville East High School and stay with the Arthur family. I freaked out immediately!

When I arrived, amazing people were waiting for me with very cute welcome signs. So far, I have gone camping, shopping, met wonderful people (including the other exchange students in the program), visited my school, tried lots of different dishes, and much more. It's been an awesome experience. I can't wait to see more beautiful places, make new friends, and enjoy this new chapter of my life.

—Marina (Brazil), hosted by the Arthur family (NY)

Marina at Glen Falls

Home Sweet Home in America

Before coming here, my biggest fear was high school. Going to school here always scared me, because I thought everyone would already have their friends and groups, but to my surprise I made friends even before school actually started. And then I started looking forward to my first day at school. It was just like movies. I used to watch movies back at home and think, "I wish I could go to an American high school too." And here I am today, in my home sweet home in America.

It's been one month since I've been here, and I don't want to go back! Not because we have freedom to do everything, but because I found my family here. This is the place where I actually belong! I'm looking forward to my exchange year.

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

Khushba and her host family at a cousin's wedding

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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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