Never Say Can’t

When I first came to America, I had a lot of fears. I was scared that people wouldn’t accept me. For the first couple days I stayed at my coordinator’s home. She made me feel comfortable to talk. She talked about my host family a lot so my fears about staying with a new family started to disappear.

It wasn’t that easy to interact with Americans for the first couple days, especially at school. I tried to be myself and be more open. I tried to adapt myself.

I found help, love and appreciation from everybody around me. My host family was very warm. They made my aware of everybody around me. My host family was very warm. They made me feel accepted. For the first couple days I stayed at my coordinator’s home. She made me feel comfortable to talk. She talked about my host family a lot so my fears about staying with a new family started to disappear.

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I found help, love and appreciation from everybody around me. My host family was very warm. They made my aware of everything and they advised me. Their support changed me a lot. Also helpful was my exchange sister Elza from Armenia. We shared so much together this year.

My mom Jeanne helped me become stronger and more independent. She said, “Never say I can’t!” After I started to believe in myself, I made more friends than I could ever imagine. Now I feel that I’m in my own country with my own family. You never feel homesick beside people who love you for who you are.

Nobody knows how happy and proud I felt when I got a good grade at school. Before, I didn’t think that I could be really successful in my life, but after doing a lot of challenging things, I think, why not?

This has been the most challenging year of my life. The most important thing to happen to me is that I began to love myself. Coming here has not been the end, but a huge start to my new life.

I want to say thanks to everybody who has helped me: my lovely family, my coordinator Fariba Kazemi, Streetsboro High School and my American friends. Thanks YES and PAX for giving me the opportunity to come here and become a better person.

Somaya Ahmed (Egypt)
Hosted by the Sobot family
Streetsboro, OH

School Launches
Aspiring Diplomat

The high school that I am currently attending is Linworth Alternative Program. It is very different from other high schools in the USA because it has a different kind of teaching program. The school provides students with choices, lots of responsibility and a participatory government. The students and faculty vote on school policies. I am very happy that I am in this very nice high school. It has given me the chance to do a lot of things that I never thought to do, never imagined to do.

As I am a junior at Linworth, I did an Interim Week, which is a break from the classroom-learning environment. Students get to learn about something that they find interesting in a way that can’t be accomplished in a traditional setting.

Interim was the most amazing time of my life. I am interested in government, so I got the chance to go to the State House and the Supreme Court of Ohio. I found out how people work there and I compared it to our own government and court. As I want to be a diplomat for my country, it was a big step forward for me.

I really appreciate my host family, coordinator, friends and school staff. Without them I would not have had this wonderful chance to see the USA as it actually is.

Samedol Oromzod (Tajikistan)
Hosted by the Canty family
Worthington, OH

Exchange Student Springs Into Action

“On the first day of spring, my host dad asked me to mulch the yard and fix the plants. I was so excited about the project and I did it gladly.” Gamaliel Sangga Buana recalls. Since the YES student lives in a city back home in Indonesia, he relishes outdoor chores with the Hendrickson family at their home in Ruther Glen, Virginia. “It was so much fun to mulch the yard, a simple but family-oriented spring celebration. I’m sure I will miss this moment.”

Host a Student:
No Passport Required . . . . . . .8

Nurturing Young Minds

FLEX student Elza Ghadyan (Armenia), on the right, and YES student Somaya Ahmed (Egypt), back, volunteered 40 hours for a children’s program. For stories on community service, see “Part of the Solution” on page 3.

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Host a Student!
No Passport Required . . . . . . .8
The scavenger hunt winners show off their t-shirts. The "second placers" have hats. From the back, Angnaree Tirote (Thailand), Yingsak Muansawad (Thailand), Ruongqiong Zhang (China), Sebastian Nice (France), friend Rodrigo (Peru), Eirik Lerfald (Norway), Denis Allano (Italy), Robert Savivdi (Mexico), and front, Elisabeth Miers (Germany) and Chiara Pasturino (Italy).

The Hunt is On
I, along with two other chorusmen, took a group of ten exchange students to Redington Shores, Florida for a spring break vacation in February. We all anxiously boarded the plane seeking warm weather. We had rented a condo overlooking the beautiful ocean. All was perfect, except the weather. I think it only reached 60 degrees one day! In spite of the weather, we had a great time and made our own fun! We swam, shopped, ate, sang karaoke, played mini golf, danced, played charades, cooked, etc.

The highlight of the trip was a scavenger hunt. We gave each group a list of 44 items to find and do. They had to videotape or take a picture of each item such as singing a song with a stranger, teaching a native dance to a stranger, etc. It was awesome. We had a wonderful vacation and the group of students was outstanding. Christine Cossalter, Community Coordinator Burnsville, MN

Big Bend Beauty
Mari Sellias (Norway) and Dang Young Kim (South Korea) loved going with the Siglin family to one of America's great nature reserves, Big Bend National Park in Texas. The girls were amazed by the desert park.

PAX Abroad in Spain
Shortly after Julia Radomski arrived in Getxo, Spain in January, the PAX Abroad student was swept up in a whirlwind of Carnival festivities with her new friends and host family. She loved the street parades and parties leading up to Lent, the forty-day period before Easter. Julia is the third lamb in this flock.

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The Best Year of My Life
I've grown so much and I'm better at English now. Besides that, I met a lot of new people and made many friendships. When I'm back in Germany I will miss the American personalities because the people are so open, nice and friendly. I will also miss pancakes, regular cakes and ice cream. All that stuff is just so delicious. The countryside is also very unique and beautiful. I will miss the pretty views out of my window.

I will miss Charlotte very much when she leaves. She is a real good friend in America and we are very close. Her name is Cadyn. We always have fun together and laugh a lot. We go hiking, to the movies and in the hot tub. We could be sisters.

I can definitely say that my stay in America was the best year in my entire life. Darra Lohans (Germany) Hosted by the Lukich family Sedona, AZ

Open Our View
We have loved learning about Charlotte as a person, how she views our American life, her life back home in Germany and how she would approach similar situations. Charlotte has challenged some of our perceptions and taught us another way to view the world. Our son Kyle was very lonely as an only child and having Charlotte in his life has given him a friend who, in his own words, he can play with, jump with and go around and around with. Charlotte, for her part, has learned that although children can be disgusting and disruptive, they still might be worth having someday.

We will miss Charlotte very much when she goes home and are very glad we had the opportunity to get to know her.

The Gercken-Imrn family, hosts for Charlotte Niemann (Germany) Middleton, OH

River Rat Race
A week ago, the nearby town of Athol held a canoe race. It was a new and tremendously fabulous experience for me. Organized by the Athol and Orange Lions Clubs, this annual springtime party began with the River Rat Promenade parade, celebrating the race, area residents and the region. The first challenge for the racers was to get through the crowd under the 30-foot span of the South Main Street Bridge. About a half hour later, the racers arrived at the Orange River Front Park.

Muhammad Amir Syarifuddin (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Chapman family Orange, MA

Weekend Retreat in Pennsylvania
Coordinator Laura Puckett's FLEX and YES students reconnect with each during their mid year retreat. The Pennsylvania cluster includes Ekaterina Komonova (Tajikistan), Melike Surucu (Turkey), Abishik Paruchotham (India), Orest Franchuk (Ukraine), Hadei Abdel Aziz (Egypt), Nino Lajur (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ruslan Fakhrutdinov (Russia), Michael (Afganistan), Jasly Sannamkhan (India), Omar Khedre (Egypt), Juvila Rasihli (Moldova), Maja Hristovska (Macedonia), Sunjiji Shah (India), Azamat Shaidehdinov (Kyrgyzstan), Jean Boltan (Albania), Bahar Orazurdyieva (Turkmenistan) and Muhammad Abdul Kader (Malaysia).

Capital Getaway
We took our two exchange students to Washington, DC over spring break. It was a great educational experience. We were able to see the Supreme Court, the Arlington National Cemetery, the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Holocaust Museum, the National Art Gallery, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Air and Space Museum and all the memorials. Although they have seen these things on television, they said it was an even greater experience to see it in person.

Nancy Nelson, host mother for Mariami Parachashvili (Georgia) Mert Nizamoglu (Turkey)
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Made My Day
Soon after I arrived, I met Miss Fang who is also from China. She is my host sister’s Mandarin teacher. We have become good friends. It is nice to have someone here who speaks Mandarin.

One of my favorite experiences was visiting my host father’s farm in Santa Rosa. He grows grapes for wine there. I got to go in the little farm truck that goes around the vineyard!

Zhao Qinyi (China) Hosted by the Feingold family San Luis Obispo, CA

Fond Farewells
Brazilian Rafael Valverde, left, enjoy one last day with German Alicia Busch, friend Hamish and Thai Wutthaya Sakoobrops before heading home after his semester in North Carolina.

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Brazilian Rafael Valverde, left, enjoy one last day with German Alicia Busch, friend Hamish and Thai Wutthaya Sakoobrops before heading home after his semester in North Carolina.

FROM PAGE 1

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Muhammad Amir Syarifuddin (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Chapman family Orange, MA

Special Thanks to our PAX Sponsors
Thank you for supporting 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.
Meeting in Thailand

My host parents just returned from a trip to Southeast Asia for their 25th anniversary. They planned this trip before they knew that I would be staying with them. It is totally a coincidence that their cruise started out in Bangkok where I come from. We made a plan for them to meet my parents. They spent the weekend together. My mother and father took them to see things around Bangkok, including my school. My host parents even went to my house and met all of my family (parents, grandparents, aunts and cousins). My mother and grandmother cooked a lot of good Thai food for them. They called me when they were together and told me that it was wonderful for them to meet because they are now sharing the same daughter.

While they were there, the Diamond’s daughter Tamara flew to Palm Springs from San Francisco to stay with their dog and me. I think it is just amazing that I was at their place in the U.S. and they were at my place in Thailand at the same time! While they were on their trip, Tamara took me to my school where I received the Principal's Award for a 4.0 GPA at Palm Springs High School.

Meetanun Chaoonkolaks (Thailand) Hosted by the Diamond family Palm Springs, CA

My Coordinator Rocks

Indonesian YES student Aulia Mustamir thanks Coordinator Sherry Andrews and her Indonesian YES student Aulia Mustamir

The Crystal Palace

Our family went on a tour of the Franklin Park Conservatory. It was built by my host dad Pete Nelson. While there, I learned about his job as a project manager and engineer. It was so interesting to see so many plants that I haven’t seen before. We also saw an exhibition of Chihuly, the famous glass sculptor. One of my favorite parts of this field trip was when we attended a glass blowing demonstration.

Mari Paeckelhsanivili (Georgia) Hosted by the Nelson family Gahanna, OH

Snow Angels

Host sister Caroline Purdy and Warunya Sakolvipas (Thailand) waited no time getting out in the snow after a rare snowstorm in Raleigh, North Carolina.

My Other Mom

Do we look alike? My host mom and I are really close. She has almost everything in common with my real mom; they love to walk, talk and take care of me. I learned that I can have fun here, hanging out with my friends and enjoying activities with my hosts. When I get back home, I will never forget that they are also my lovely family.

Arpa Realsatjanon (Thailand) Hosted by the Kiernan family Gahanna, OH

Part of the Solution

PAX students make an impact near and far.

Help for Haiti

In Indiana, Shuxuan Cao from China pitches in with the Beasley family to put food packages together for the Haitian people affected by January’s devastating earthquake.

Selling Shirts, Rebuilding Homes

When I heard about the massive earthquake in Indonesia last year, I felt so sad for my country. I found out that a friend of mine lost his house in Padang, Sumatra Barat. He is hosted in Virginia this year. All of the Indonesian exchange students are trying to help him.

Since I like the computer a lot, I decided to try to make an awesome t-shirt design. I made an announcement at my high school about the earthquake. People showed their sympathy for Indonesia and wanted to buy my t-shirts. The t-shirt is light blue and says “Recover and Discover Indonesia” on the back. I am so happy that my fundraising project was successful.

Willy Gusti (Indonesia) Hosted by the Frailey family Williamstown, PA

Packing Protein

FLEX and YES students in Coordinator Laura Puckett’s cluster volunteer at a meat canning plant in Pennsylvania. The meat they canned was sent to people around the world.

Mustafe Hori (Somalia) Hosted by the Hendrickson family Ruther Glen, VA

Hair Color for Hope

When the day came, there were almost fifty youth from the East Coast. We had lots of activities and lots of fun. I didn’t even realize that I was fasting. In the morning, we fed the homeless people in the shelter. I was so sad to see their condition. I learned a lot from the Hunger Challenge. It was good to know how it feels to be in the victim’s position and how to stand up for people instead of doing nothing.

Gamaliel Sangga Buana (Indonesia) Hosted by the Singh family Rochester, MN

Stepping Up to the Plate

It was a good experience being a waitress and helping at a Haiti fundraiser. I waited tables, served rice typical to Haiti and bussed tables. It was really fun. After we were done, we were so weary because people had kept coming and coming. The French students from my school raised $200 for Doctor’s Without Borders and $150 for an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. The art auction raised $8000. I was proud of what I did and I have started thinking about volunteering more. I am thankful to Mrs. Larson for getting us to do this. It made a difference in my life.

Indonesian YES student Gamaliel Sangga Buana and his fellow fasters serve breakfast to the homeless.

Hunger Challenge

We have all heard how the earthquake devastated Haiti. The chance to help came when my church had a service project for youth called the Hunger Challenge. We could not eat for 24 hours, although we could drink. The money we raised would rebuild a school in Haiti. Everyone needed to get sponsors for every hour we fasted.

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Gamaliel Sangga Buana (Indonesia) Hosted by the Hendrickson family Ruther Glen, VA

Stocking Up a Food Pantry

Muhammad Amir Syarifuddin helped move truckloads of canned provisions into a food pantry in Orange, Massachusetts. The Chapman family hosts the Indonesian YES student.

PAX Alum Starts School in Somalia

During my last day in New Hampshire, Coordinator Dolores Sisk encouraged us to do something positive back home. I thought about how I could help my society and came up with the idea to establish an English school in order to help people learn the language.

The school is three years old now, and it contains five English classes, a computer class, an office and a printing room. The total number of students in the school is 65+.

Mustafe Hori (Somalia) PAX Alum 07

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Gamaliel Sangga Buana (Indonesia) Hosted by the Singh family Rochester, MN
Try Something New

“i think it is a good experience to do something that you’ve never done before.”
Yulia Lokhchina (Azerbaijan)

Gulem Naz Akcay learned Spanish at Groochland High School. The Turkish student already speaks German, Turkish and English. One day she hopes to speak seven languages. She lives with the Bellows family in Connecticut.

Sang a Gig. Before coming to Wisconsin, Yulia Lokhchina (Azerbaijan) only sang at home. “I thought it might be a good idea to try singing in public because it is something I’m afraid of.” After receiving rave reviews when she sang at church, she worked up the courage to sing at the Harmony Café in Appleton. “It was different from when I sing by myself at home. I sang two songs: Perfect by Simple Plan and Wake Me Up When September Ends by Green Day.” The FLEX student is hosted by the Murphy family in Greville.

Worked as a Special Ed Assistant. In her Salt Lake City, Utah school, Amalia Mulyasani took a class called Peer Tutor Training. “There are 2 or 3 students each period. This class was so much fun. I helped the special education students learn in class. Not just that, I made a lot of friends there with special education students, too. It made me really want to be a special education teacher. I learned a lot from this class about that and it was really useful for my future.” The Gordon family hosts the Indonesian YES student.

Yujung Jang was the basketball team manager for the Wheeling Park High School girls’ team. “Being a part of the team was my greatest experience here. The girls on the team are really nice and cool. I attended every practice and game. I worked for the team and I learned how to be more responsible. I really enjoyed the basketball season.” The Hulderman family hosts the South Korean student in Tidadelphia, West Virginia.

Chynthia Ningrum changed a tire! On hand to guide her was host father Thomas Kinnard. “It was fun actually: using the jack to lift the car, loosening the nuts, and putting on the new tires,” says the Indonesian YES student. Along with some car mechanics, she learned to shovel snow, make cookies, boul and ice skate in West Allis, Wisconsin.

Fostered Global Ties

Recounting a presentation on Malaysia, Khaled Anuru said, “There was a moment of sheer exhilaration when I invited the school officials to come up and accept my country’s flag as a token of appreciation!” The Norton family hosts the YES student in Berryville, Virginia.

On the Road with Qianyi

My daughter Lily and I have been the fortunate host family for Qianyi. In addition to our interesting family life at home, we have had several travel adventures. Over winter break, we visited Washington, DC and New York City. Qianyi and I both had friends on the East Coast. Apart from the rare snowstorm and hiking over ice to see the sights, we had a fabulous time. In February, we went to Lake Tahoe to ski. She was a very good sport and we all took turns falling and flying down the mountain. We also visited San Francisco several times, and today we are leaving for Los Angeles to take Qianyi to see the famous band May Day in concert.

Qianyi has been a great gift for our family. She is a wonderful big sister to Lily and has worked very hard all year in pursuit of her educational goals.

Elisa Feingold, host mother for Qianyi Zhao (China)
San Luis Obispo, CA

Trip to a Magical Land

On our spring break trip to Florida, we would wake up every morning and discuss where we would go that day. On the first day we decided to go to Universal Studios. It was a nice place if you like Hollywood movies. The next day was the highlight of the vacation because we went to Disney World. When you are in Disney World, it feels like you are in a magical land where dreams do come true. On the last day we went to the beach. It was cold and windy so we looked for shells instead of playing in the water. It was the best vacation that I have had in my life. I love my family and feel so lucky to be an exchange student.

Moji Wang (Thailand)
Hosted by the Holden family
Saint George, UT

The Gears of Government

FLEX students Yana Rayssvikh (Russia), Begench Atajanov (Turkmenistan) and Amina Martynova (Ukraine) take a break in front of the White House during their spring vacation in Washington, DC with Ithaca, New York Coordinator Lori Sonken. Aside from touring Congress and the memorials, they stopped by their home embassies to say hello to their fellow countrymen.

The Sweetest Valentine

Mississippi Coordinator Mary Hairald gathers her students for a Valentine’s Day party. Her students include Gordon Wurriche (Germany), Geraldine Brieard (Belgium), Geroine Arnold (Belgium), Ines Bourdoux (Belgium), Quentin Mours (Belgium), Anna-Katrin Ellermann (Germany), Thawatkorn Nimcharoen (Thailand), Charlotte Devaux (France), Jean Russo (Argentina), Pauline Servais (Belgium), Tsangthong Praditporn (Thailand), Alizee Boels-Wittemo, Johanna Arenofovel (Germany), Nathalie Vervey (Netherlands) and Stella Azara (Germany).
Accepting People

One thing that I really like about the American culture is the way people show their great humor and personalities to the people around them. Personally, this is the best type of culture that I can think of. Within the nine months that I have lived and interacted with people here, I never thought of myself as being different. We embrace each other with acceptance. This amazing yet fantastic culture is so strong that whatever you do, it evokes great feelings and emotions.

Al Basher Julhamid (Philippines)
Hosted by the Hendrickson family
Ruther Glen, VA

Southern Warmth

The first thing I realized when I arrived in Mississippi was the friendliness and the simplicity of the people. They will always say “Hello, how are you doing?” even if you don’t know them. They don’t care if they are well-dressed or not. Students come to school in shorts and t-shirts and nobody cares. That’s one of the things that I won’t forget from the South.

I also learned to have fun and make unforgettable memories out of nothing. One evening, a friend invited me to her house. We made homemade pizza, played games and gossiped all night long. We had a great time.

I gained a lot from this experience. I don’t think my personality changed but I certainly grew up. I’m more open-minded. I realize how people can live differently than I do. Without spending a year here, I wouldn’t have learned that.

There is no “You’re welcome” quite as believable as the one you get from the South, just as is said on the Stephen Fry in America series. It’s totally true!

Alizee Boels (Belgium)
Hosted by the Saxton family
Aberdeen, MS

A Friendly Nation

This is the experience of a lifetime because I feel very comfortable with every member of my host family. They care for me as if I am their own daughter, though they have five kids of their own. I’ve met wonderful people who opened my eyes and showed me what the real America is. I’ve started to understand what American values are about. I know that in Russia I am going to miss people always being so friendly and helpful.

I am very grateful to PAX and the Department of State for this wonderful opportunity, my host-family for taking me into their home and hearts, and my coordinator, Kharran Cattell, for taking perfect care of me.

Faina Driganets (Russia)
Hosted by the Weinstein family
Newtown, PA

It’s Easy to Be Green

Indonesian YES student Reksa Alviona wrote a moving essay about things we can all do at home to improve the environment turning off computers, using as little detergent as possible, recycling plastic and unplugging chargers. She calculated that her New Hampshire house would produce 93 tons of carbon dioxide instead of 120 tons with just these changes.

At school, Reksa joined the Green Keene Team, a club of students that take care of the environment by doing projects such as collecting recyclable materials. They sponsored Green Keene Up Day to get the attention of their fellow teens and worked on a campaign to convince the school to use natural light sources.

A White Winter

This is my first time I have seen snow. Wisconsin is one of states where you will definitely have snow every year. I feel so lucky to be placed here. The first time I saw it, I went crazy running around outside in the snow. We made snowmen and had snow ball fights. I helped my family shovel the snow. Even though I love the beauty of snow, I spent the whole time doing it, I went mad at myself that I didn’t listen to the radio, but I did enjoy my first snow! I’ll really miss snow and snow days when I go back to Thailand.

Nutchakon Wong-onta (Thailand)
Hosted by Keana Kabieszewski
Grand Rapids, MI

Super Sizes

German Katharina Roth gets the giggles from seeing the “very American” jumbo-sized cereal boxes at Sam’s Club in Dayton, Ohio, where she is spending her exchange year with the Olby family.

Artists in Residence

Vermont YES students Bolkiah Mamadsual (Philippines) and Montakarn Khochusawad (Thailand) created these beautiful book covers for CSIET (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel).

Sports and Snow Days

Living here, I’ve seen many differences that I have never seen before, such as weather changes, intense sport competitions and so forth.

At home, my school doesn’t have sport teams for students. Being on the Creston swimming team meant that I had to get up at 5:00 a.m. for a one hour morning practice before school. Then we had a three-hour practice after school. I proudly got a varsity letter from the swimming coach at the end of the season.

I was so excited when I first saw snow because I haven’t seen snow before. On the first day it snowed, I happily walked to school at 6:30 a.m. I finally got to school and realized that no one was there! I thought of what my host mother said the day before. She said, “Don’t forget to listen to the radio for the news about a snow day.” I felt a little mad at myself that I didn’t listen to the radio, but I did enjoy my first snow! I’ll really miss snow and snow days when I go back to Thailand.

Nutchakon Wong-onta (Thailand)
Hosted by Keana Kabieszewski
Grand Rapids, MI

What I Like About America...

It’s the people, the people, the people. People love you more here. Americans can be very polite. They will always care for you. They will always help you.

A Friendly Nation

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Faina Driganets (Russia)
Hosted by the Weinstein family
Newtown, PA

Hosts Lead the Way

I am so proud of my host family because they realize that we need to do anything we can to save our world. My dad won’t allow more than two lights on in a room if we don’t really need it. He always reminds us to unplug cables to save the energy. Also he wants us to save water by only doing laundry if the load is full. My mom collects bottles, cans, and newspapers to take to the recycling center every week. Besides that, we separate regular garbage and organic materials to make compost. Their actions motivate me to also do something to save the world.

Reksa Alviona (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Saxon family
Nescopeck, PA

PAX Goes GREEN participant Reksa Alviona describes her project, “I made a poster about saving energy from light bulbs by instead using the light from the sky. My school has a lot of skylights that are sometimes not in use. I made some leaflets and stuck them on the walls around the school. We persuaded all the people at school to use more light from the sky, reducing their carbon use. Our project will be published in the school year book.” The Harman family hosts her in Keene, New Hampshire.

Trees for a Better Future

In Pennsylvania, Indonesian YES student Nanda Nidya and her fellow Central Silver Service club members planted 100 trees. “It was a lot of fun to dig in the ground. I loved doing it because it is not only us who gets to benefit, but also the next generation.”

Nanda Nidya (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Weaver-Harvey family
Nescopeck, PA

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Nanda Nidya (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Weaver-Harvey family
Nescopeck, PA

It’s the people, the people, the people. People love you more here. Americans can be very polite. They will always care for you. They will always help you.
Injured Runner Turns Manager

I should have been running and jumping for the track and field team this spring. But early this season I got injured and since then I couldn’t sprint. I thought that would be the end of the season for me since I couldn’t compete. Luckily, my coach knew how sad I was and she didn’t want me to leave the team. She found me something to do for the team, so now I’m the manager. I put the scores from the meets in the computer, take times, take care of the medicine and help out in different ways. So I am still a part of the team, just in a different way.

Josephine Benndorf (Germany)
Hosted by the Velasquez family
Lafayette, IN

Have Some Pi with Your Pie

South Korean Ji Yeon Park and her math teacher sample pies on Pi Day, a new holiday gaining hold in the United States. It is marked on March 14, which corresponds with the mathematical constant “pi” rounded to 3.14. Ji Yeon tells us, “My teacher, Mr. Koening, is a really amazing person. He knows how to speak Korean and he learned Korea’s national sport, Taekwondo.” The Richards-Haugan family hosts her in Wright, Minnesota.

High School Highlights

Do-Re-Mi

I am so grateful to be at Bloomsburg High School. I found wonderful friends and teachers. I joined the Drama Club and we did The Sound of Music for the spring play. It was awesome to get involved in that production. I got a role as one of the singing nuns. The funny thing is, I am Muslim. Being one of the nuns taught me a lot about another religion because we had to really get into our role. I was a waltz dancer, too, so now I can waltz. It was such a wonderful time!

Elna Willemen

Prom Night, 2010

Anna Konovalova, left, says, “The people in this picture made my life in the USA a lot easier. Connor, Mary and Eric are really good friends that I can count on.” The Mosby family hosts Connor, Mary and Eric in Lee’s Summit, Missouri.

Team Hoopla

When Eline Willemen returns to Belgium, she’ll be bringing this poster that her teammates made for her! She attends Tri-County High School and lives with the Richards family in Lafayette, Indiana.

Singing with Success

The experience, including the challenges, changed my life and is one of my most important turning points. In school, I got a 95 average in my last semester and I started learning my third language, Spanish. I joined the high school chorus. Our group, the Mooreville High School choir, won first prize in the district chorus competition. We went to Jackson to participate in the state competition and made second. Also, I am a member of the drama group. Our play, The Magic Lamp of Aladdin, was tremendously popular not only in high school, but also everywhere in the city of Mooreville.

Jeahan Haron

High School Musical

Xin Wei Li (China)
Hosted by the Whitfield family
Mooreville, MS

Head of the Class

On my first day assisting a second grade class at DuPont Elementary School, I had to teach how to measure in yards and inches. I had no clue how because in Malaysia we were taught meters and centimeters. As embarrassed as I was, I had to ask Mrs. Newberry to teach me before I could help the kids.

The children were absolutely adorable! It’s strange how much you can learn from kids of a different culture. I asked a lot of questions about the school system. It is fascinating and really very systematic.

Sue Anne Chee (Malaysia)
Hosted by the George family
Chattanooga, TN

Glee in New Hampshire

Valeriya Serheyeva (Ukraine) gives her friend Claire a lift to their musical practice. The FLEX student is living with the Stepanor family.

In the Footlights

The best moment of the school year for me is when I was included in the school musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat. It seems like I got another new family there. The cast, the crew and the teacher are all so nice. I loved it and I’ll miss it.

Nanda Nidya (Indonesia)
Hosted by Harvey-Weaver family
Nescopeck, PA
Alaskan Family Wins Video Contest

Congratulations to Ujang Purnama (Indonesia) and the Barnes-Johnson family for winning the YES Host Family Contest with their video, “An Accidental Global Family”. PAX applauds all the families who put together creative videos. To see the video, go to www.pax.org/whatsnew.html to see the Barnes-Johnson family story and the other PAX YES finalists, the Wason family who hosts Emmanuel Aruszong (Ghana) in Utah and the Mino family who hosts Pauline Bannaeth (Ghana) in Massachusetts.

Our “Forever Thai” Daughter

It has been wonderful to watch May with all the “firsts” she has experienced: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Each holiday meant that much more to us, watching May’s eyes filled with excitement.

We were very fortunate to have hosted her older sister before her and meet May in her own country last summer. Our family plans on going back to Thailand to visit both girls in a year or two.

May snow-shoed, ice skated and snow-tubed for the first time this past winter. She visited New York City, Boston, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Canada, fulfilling a lifelong dream to see Niagara Falls.

Little did we know how much May would mean to us and how much she has added to our lives. Our hearts are full of love for her and she will surely be missed. We feel we will always stay connected to her and her family because she is our “forever Thai” daughter.

The Lefave family, hosts for Sarochinee Kreatwechana (Thailand) and North Adams, MA, found out that Vanoss High School had a good art program. I displayed two paintings and one sculpture. Although I’ve done some watercolor paintings and was pretty confident about them, acrylic painting was difficult. Thanks to my art teacher, I was able to learn techniques and do them well. It was a big night for me. I felt that I “became a real artist”. The Clark family hosts her in Stratford, Oklahoma.

Engaged in the Global Economy

Coordinator Jeanne Monte’s fifth grade daughter Alexandra, on the right, recruited her high school friends to help with her business, Aly’s Asian Gifts. Thanuta Sangahtirawatana (Thailand), Yue Li (China) and Yoonsung Jeon (South Korea) wrote personalized bookmarks in their native languages. Their project was part of “Business Day” at St. Joseph’s Episcopal School in Boynton Beach, Florida. The PAX students spent the day visiting classes and answering questions about their respective countries.

An Envoy for Korea

When I received a letter from PAX asking me to share my culture, I decided to give a presentation to the fourth grade class at my school, Cambridge Central. There are about 70 kids in the fourth grade, so I gave two separate presentations.

I started by reading a Korean folktale, Hungboo and Nobboo. Afterward, I showed a map of the Korean peninsula and lots of pictures of food, traditional dress and tourist attractions. I explained that Korea shouldn’t be confused with other East Asian nations, and that it is important to remember that every country has its own cultural heritage distinct from its neighbors. After talking about culture, I told them that despite the differences, modern life in South Korea isn’t as different as the ones in the States as they may think.

When I finished, I gave out Korean candy to the children who could say something that they learned about Korea. Also, since it was written in English, I donated Hungboo and Nobboo to the elementary library.

I felt truly like an ambassador after teaching children who hardly knew anything about my country before.

Gawon Kim (South Korea)
Hosted by the Anderson family
Cambridge, NY

Take a Bow

Inusah Taimako (Ghana). Active in debate. The YES student participated in seven tournaments and won first place in the Okoboji, Iowa debate tournament on December 5. On the right, he is pictured with the tournament president. The Bergstrom family hosts him in Austin, Minnesota.

In February, Gerome Arnold (Belgium) was Student of the Month at Booneville High School. Cheryl Prather is his host mother in Mississippi.

Karishma Vahora (India) won third place and a $100 prize in the Bennington area 4-Way Rotary speech competition. The Putney family hosts the YES student in Bennington, Vermont.

Swara Fadinis (India) and her friend Laurie were selected to perform a song at the Family, Career and Community Leaders State Convention in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Indian YES student explains, “We mixed a Hindi and an English song, which is called ethnomusicology, as a symbol of cultural bonding and friendship through the universal tongue of music. I taught her the Hindi lyrics and told her the meaning of it. We chose songs that talk about friendship, and coincidentally the rhythms matched. Now she sings a Hindi song and my heart just beams to hear her sing it.” The Zimmer family hosts Swara in Pierce, Nebraska.

Jamie Riego Inclan (Spain) was accepted to the National Young Leaders Conference, which will take place in Washington, DC after the school year ends. Florida Coordinator Susan James says, “It is a real honor and privilege to attend. You get to go where the public does not as you tour Washington, DC.” The Hard family hosts Jamie in St. Augustine, Florida.

Kyungh Cho (South Korea) won second place at an art show held at the McSwain Theater in Ada, Oklahoma. “Since I have always been interested in art, I was so happy when I found out that Vanoss High School had a good art program. I displayed two paintings and one sculpture. Although I’ve done some watercolor paintings and was pretty confident about them, acrylic painting was difficult. Thanks to my art teacher, I was able to learn techniques and do them well. It was a big night for me. I felt that I “became a real artist”.

David Tuntiya (Russia) was elected president in his American Government class mock election. The FLEX student recounts, “The teacher asked us to run a mini campaign for the presidency. We divided into groups and each one had its own name and party leader. At first, I didn’t want to be a party leader, but then I said to myself, why not?” He called his party “The Future”. His campaign included posters, a press conference, speeches and a debate on nation, state and school issues. The Blunt family hosts David in Lee’s Summit, Missouri.

King Yaw Soon (Malaysia) won the CSIET Book Cover Contest and $500. The Lamp family hosts the YES student in York, South Carolina. Check the PAX website later this month to see his artwork.

Better Understanding for a Better World

Sixteen FLEX and YES students were selected to go to the 2010 Better Understanding for a Better World Conference in Orlando, Florida. The four-day February event brought together teens of diverse faiths to foster mutual understanding and tackle problems resulting from prejudice and intolerance.

Montakarn Khotchasawad (Thailand), Nanda Nidya (Indonesia), Saritka Hasirman (Indonesia), Emmanuel Aruszong (Ghana), Mohamed ElBetity (Egypt), Maja Hristovska (Macedonia), Ibrahim Kombo (Kenya), Rekha Alvimon (Indonesia), Nigora Khulova (Tajikistan), Khu Fam (Ukraine), Mariann Kochohava (Georgia), Elena Pupova (Kyrgyzstan), Aitolkyn Kazmamgambet (Kazakhstan), Valeria Dubravina (Tajikistan), Kha Fam (Ukraine), Ani Makaryan (Armenia), Mariami Khocholava (Georgia), Elena Pupova (Kyrgyzstan), Aliykyn Kasmangambet (Kazakhstan), Valeria Dubravina (Tajikistan) and Reksultan Ibraimov (Kyrgyzstan).
NO PASSPORT REQUIRED

When you host a bright and curious international student, you broaden your family’s horizons and develop deep connections across the globe. To learn more, call PAX at 800-555-6211 or visit www.pax.org.

PAX students speak English, have personal spending money and are fully insured.

Flourishing Together

Nadia was a perfect match for our family. I could not have asked for a better student for my first time being a host parent.

Nadia taught me to have more patience than what I had before. I had to reflect a lot on my teenage years to remember what it was like and it helped me come to terms with past feelings and regrets. I feel more complete as a person since she has been here. It also helped me with the decisions I had to make for Nadia’s well-being.

My advice to other host parents is to enjoy the time, learn from your student and keep an open mind. Treat them as they are your own and communicate. Your student may not always get it the first 30 times, but midway through the year, you will see they have learned so much from you.

Every single aspect of this experience has been wonderful. We did have moments that were tough but we got through it, just like any other family would. We laughed a lot, cried some and enjoyed family dinners. Some of the funniest moments happened at the dinner table, just like I remember when I was growing up. I got to teach her traditions from my family and hope she will share them with her natural family when she gets home.

Angela Kazmier-Schaffer, host mother for Natia Dunia (Georgia) Lebonan, MO

Gabriel Lopez (Brazil) with host sisters Aubrey and Ali.

Our Crazy Brazilian Son

Gabriel Garcia Lopez has been a wonderful addition to our family. We hosted his brother Filip two years ago, also through the PAX program. We have enjoyed Gabriel and his positive attitude, especially the warm way he greets us as we enter our home, saying, “Hi sister!” or “Hi Mom!” He is a great cook and has shared many delicious BBQs and recipes with us. Gabriel has also improved so much in his English language. We are so proud of him. He has made many American friends and is even thinking about coming back for college. He calls us his crazy American family. We love you Gabriel.

Cary Hellenbrand, host mother for Gabriel Garcia Lopez (Brazil) Madison, WI

Fits Like a Glove

We decided to have an exchange student because we’ve always had an interest in other cultures. We wanted our kids to experience another culture as well.

In deciding upon which student to pick, we just knew August was the one. He has fit in great with our family. In Norway, he has an 8-year-old brother and a teenage sister. Our family has an 8-year-old boy and a teenage girl.

He’s very easy going and thankful for anything we do for him. With Skype and email, he keeps in touch with his family and friends. He’s never been homesick. We exchange emails with his parents and they are very appreciative that he is in a good home. From early on, it’s been like he’s one of the family.

He has some chores and has been very helpful with all the shoveling we’ve done this winter. Coming from Norway, he’s used to the cold. This experience has been wonderful. I know we’ll always have a bond with him.

Jan Pasteka, host mother for August Skara (Norway) Bellevue, NE

Gabriel from Belgium

This motivated him to form a circle that performs at events and perfects. Jordi’s warm personality and sense of humor are a perfect fit for our family. He also is a competitive tennis player.

Angela Kazmier-Schaffer, host mother for Jordi from Belgium

Saluting Sabine

Wow! We have had a fabulous year! My husband and I were so nervous about receiving our exchange student from Germany. We did not know what to expect from our first time hosting. We had no idea it could be so rewarding. Sabine was only supposed to stay until January, but she decided to stay until June and we are so blessed to have her. We have learned so much about the culture in Germany. She cooked us a meal that was wonderful. We have a great bond with her.

She has had so many great experiences here. Sabine had the opportunity to travel to Key West Florida, and her best friend from Germany surprised her just before Christmas and stayed with us for two weeks.

The hard part is going to be when she leaves. Sabine and my daughter Abree have become very close. We forget that she is an exchange student. We have accepted her in our family.

I think the best advice to give is to be firm in the beginning. It’s easier to give a little than to take. Treat your student like your own. The expectations have to be the same for your own children. Most of all, love them as your own and make the best of your time as it goes way too fast.

Tracey Beard, host mother for Sabine Peter (Germany) Bay City, MI

Gabriel Lopez (Brazil) with host sisters Aubrey and Ali.

Rookie of the Year

We have had so much fun introducing Adbu to our friends and new activities that he might not experience in Ethiopia.

Getting to play on the junior varsity baseball team has been one of the most unique experiences Adbu has had. He has had to learn how to throw a baseball, catch a ball with a glove, and hit the ball. He is doing quite well for an Ethiopian rookie.

This past weekend’s beautiful spring weather allowed us to take Adbu to a farm. We thought riding a horse would be a new experience for him, but we were pleasantly surprised to learn that he was quite comfortable on a horse, as he had ridden one at his grandfather’s home in Ethiopia.

We are looking forward to Adbu going to his first prom. His tuxedo fitting promises that he will cut quite a dashing figure among his high school friends.

Daisy Rearick, host mother for Abdulrazzaq Mohammed (Ethiopia) Kirkville, MO

It Takes Two

The Kisor family had two “daughters” this year at their home in Greencastle, Pennsylvania: FLEX student Ekaterina Kononova (Tajikistan) and YES student Sangini Shah (India).

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Angela Kazmier-Schaffer, host mother for Natia Dunia (Georgia) Lebanon, MO

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A Tribute to My Family (www.pax.org/yes.html)

Go to this web page to see the YouTube video Naizor Abdul-Salaam made to describe his life with the Jonson family in Georgia. “I’m seventeen and I feel on top of the world,” says the YES student from Ghana. “What is of major interest to me is to make a difference in people’s lives. And the Jonsons have really made a major impact on my life, which I am grateful to them for.”

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