A Storyteller’s Message of Peace and Unity

On April 3, Salamatu Mohammed entranced a crowd with a story at Children of the Well, a youth storytelling event in Troy, New York. In a discussion with TimesUnion.com reporter Azra Haqqie, Salamatu explained that she learned the art of storytelling from her maternal grandmother in Ghana. “Every time I would ask her a question, instead of answering the question, she would tell me a story.”

Her host mother, Siri Allison, who is also a storyteller, encouraged her to perfect her craft by participating in weekly storytelling events. In March, the accomplished Ghanaian YES student was chosen as one of six youth storytellers to speak at the Nazareth College Global Citizen Conference.

For this recent April event, Salamatu told a story titled “If God Doesn’t Kill Me, No One Else Can” about a kind man, a king, money and a ring. “It is a story about how great God is and how He is the master of everything,” Salamatu reveals. “No one can kill me except God was the message. You’ve got to have faith.”

Salamatu explains her greater hope, “My goal is to promote peace between all the people in the world, uniting them by stories. It is my wish that no one fight in this world.”

Unexpected Lessons, Delights and Laughter

She stepped into our lives with an infectious smile and sparkling eyes that seem never to have stopped shining all year. Perhaps this is the very best part of the exchange. Back in August, I wondered when the enthusiasm and glee would wear off. At Christmas break, there was some sadness, perhaps homesickness. Yet despite being separated from her family for so long, Amina has continued to be charming, warm and enthusiastic.

Coming to Ohio from Kazakhstan on a FLEX scholarship, Amina is curious, flexible, generous and confident. She finds something positive in most situations and laughs frequently. She talks to others with ease and asks questions when she doesn’t understand. Yet coupled with her sense of confidence is a deeply ingrained respect for her parents and family, her culture, her friends, and for us.

Amina has taught us the value of sharing what we have, what we think, what we like to do, our space and our time. Simply being here and having the normal needs of a teenager involved in various activities, she has taught us that it’s not so difficult to change habits, to do something in a new way or try something we’ve not done before — like to go to cross-country meets or choral events, attend Akron’s First Night, or tour Washington, DC. She has taught us by opening our hearts to a total stranger, unexpected lessons, delights and laughter will surely follow.

Denise and Alan Newman, host parents for Amina Sugirova (Kazakhstan) Akron, Ohio

Novice Teacher Wins Hearts

I am a person who is passionate about volunteering and I love kids. Fortunately, the local elementary school allows me to be an “Indonesian teacher” for the after school enrichment program students.

Twice a week I go there to teach about Indonesia. I share our musical instruments, read Indonesian folk stories, teach Indonesian crafts, etc. We eat Indonesian food, too! It is a big experience for me. Being a teacher is not easy but I really enjoy my time doing it. This activity brightens my days. The kids are adorable as well. They are so curious about my “different appearance” and what we do in my country. Another good thing is they like to fix my pronunciation, so I am getting other benefits!

My favorite part of teaching is when their facial expressions show that they learned something different. It is my happiness when the kids say “thank you Ms. Ayeshadira’ and hug me every time the class is over. I never imagined I could actualize my dream to be a teacher, here, in United States.

Ayeshadira Putri (Indonesia) Hosted by Wecorak family Charlotte, NC

Encore! Encore!

In California, these Morro Bay High School PAX exchange students received a thundering applause for their dance performance at a mock rock concert. Pictured are PAX exchange student Salamatu Mohammed on her performance.

Indonesian YES student Ayeshadira Putri with her pupils.

Alan and Denise Newman, FLEX student Amina Sugirova (Kazakhstan) and host sister Carly Newman.
Once Upon a Time...

Dorothee Nyga reads one of her favorite German stories to elementary school children. The German stories are especially popular among the younger generation. The children love to hear the stories in their native language.

Far from Malaysia

I came for the second semester of school, so it was a little bit hard to get used to American society. As the days passed by, things became better. I'm so lucky to have an awesome host family, the Taylors, and my American friends. I am now having fun.

Experience is the best teacher. When I knew that I would be in Florida, I was not as excited as before because there is no snow there. Snow was the first thing on my mind when I applied for this program. After a few weeks in Gainesville, I realized that snow could screw up our activities. I'm so grateful to be here because I can spend more time in outdoor activities.

For me, instead of missing family, I miss Malaysian food! But, American foods are awesome. For example, I really like the American hamburger because it is way bigger than the Malaysian hamburger.

So far, this program has taught me to be more respectful of other people and be aware of what is going on, and to appreciate others and love our planet. It also makes me realize how important it is to get to know other people outside of our community and to create strong camaraderie with them so that we can have world peace as a result.

Guest student Lusgam Ramli (Malaysia) Hosted by the Robinson family Gainesville, FL

Pass the Hammer

In Nettleton, Mississippi, Justin Griffith (Germany) built these giant racks to support bird nests. He has loved working in host father Randy Harlow’s workshop.

What a Year!

This year has not only made me more independent but has also made me even more mature, active, attentive, confident and interactive. It forced me to realize the importance of interacting with people and respecting other cultures.

I am grateful for the experiences that I will never forget. Thanks to the 统一 pep fest. It turned into a really awesome dance that we did was “Candy Dance” for the performers at a state competition. The last times, and even one time as the guest turn and all the hard dance techniques. The dance team is considered a sports activity.

I had such a great experience with the Van Cise family, and his coach, Tat. Tat got up to speed quickly. When he returns to Thailand, Tat plans to continue swimming at the pool in his Bangkok suburb.

Indonesian YES student Ditha is the third girl in the front row.

Dance Fever

I’m part of the varsity dance team at my school, Highland Park Senior High. Our dance team is considered a sports activity. The types of dance that we do are jazz dance and kick line, including split, Russian, triple turn and all the hard dance techniques.

I had such a great experience with the dance team. We already performed many times, and even one time as the guest performers at a state competition. The last dance that we did was “Candy Dance” for a pep fest. It turned into a really awesome dance performance. I’m so honored to be a part of this team, giving me such remarkable memories that I will never forget. Thanks to my host family, the Stone’s, who fully supported me being on the dance team, and cheering me on all the time. And definitely, thanks to the PAX program!

Pass the Hammer Hosted by the Stone family St. Paul, MN

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.

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Gain Grandparents, Too

My host mom’s mom lives a five minute walk away. For Christmas, the whole big family went there and I was counted as a granddaughter. Every holiday we spend time with relatives. These are wonderful American experiences. The next day after Christmas, I went to Grandma and Grandpa Freund’s and I got a bracelet engraved “Granddaughter” on the front and “love” on the back. I love talking to my host grandparents. I think I could travel in the U.S. any time I want but not every time could I get these beautiful memories. This is one of the things I love about the tiny town, Johnsburg.

Leelanau Jibbantal (Thailand) Hosted by the Freund family Johnsburg, MN

Japan: Keeping a Vigil as Disaster Unfolds

On March 11 my host dad told me the news about the earthquake in Japan. All of the news on the TV and Internet was about Japan. We saw many horrible pictures of what the tsunami did to Japan.

Fortunately, I could contact my family right after I saw the news. When I first contacted my family, my mom and sister were there, and all was fine. But my dad wasn’t home yet, and they couldn’t contact my grandma. I was so nervous. Some of my friends called. I was happy that I had made such great friends here. When I heard that my father and grandma were fine, I was so relieved. I was very anxious because I’m far away. But, I didn’t have time to think about it too much because my American family took care of me well.

I’m so glad that I’m staying with the Demberg family for this whole year. I really appreciate their kindness.

Ayumi Baba (Japan) Hosted by the Demberg family Westtown, NY

Dressed for Saudi Life

YES student Omar Al Naibat’s parents sent these outfits to his hosts in Fort Bliss, South Carolina. Host mother Monique Nicolli reports, “The little boys didn’t want to take them off!”

Scouts Honor

I used to be a part of the Ukrainian national scouting organization called Plast, so I decided to try scouting here in America. I joined the girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania, Troop #81250.

I enjoy being part of such a great troop. We learned new things at every meeting, and every night is full of joy and new discoveries. I even took part in a cookie sales and improved my business skills. I’ll use the things I learned to improve scouting in Ukraine. To help others here gain a better understanding, I made a presentation about Plast. The troop learned new facts and my traditions from it. It was really important for me to introduce my country, culture and scouting here in the U.S.

Kateryna Petrosvka (Ukraine) Hosted by the Fischer family Chambersburg, PA
Cheering My Team On at the State Champs

The state tournament was held a month ago. I can remember it clearly, because it was amazing. At the huge dome, I cheered for the basketball team as loud as I could. My throat was sore after cheering three days in a row, but I couldn’t stop yelling because we were losing by three points at the third quarter. Then my team started to win. The game-over bell rang. They won by 14 points. As soon as they could, the entire crowd rushed into the players! They hugged each other without recognizing who they were hugging. That was the best feeling in my life. No matter how many miles were run, it was unforgettable because we ran without really noticing that it was snowing. I was there with the members of the Interact Club. We raised more than $800.

Running to Raise Funds for Polio Vaccines

On April 9, I did a torch run to raise funds for the “End Polio” campaign. Fifty people participated that day, and every single person had to run 500 meters. The runners had to donate money - the amount depending on how many miles were run. It was unforgettable because we ran without really noticing that it was snowing. I was there with the members of my Interact Club. It was so much fun. I could see so many things that I usually just missed. Sometimes I fell asleep on the road. And yes, we made it! We got the first place. It was unforgettable because we ran without really noticing that it was snowing. The thing that really affected me, though, was the style of racing. Everyone was very supportive. I really like the skiing sensation, especially when you go fast.

Defining Moments

A Wilderness Venture

Indonesian Ade Utkabarum used her time in Washington State to develop her outdoor skills. The YES student learned how to rock climb and snow shoe, as well as how to make a fire without a lighter. Her growing moment came during a survival camping night when she built and slept in a snow cave. To eat, she had to catch a chicken, fry it, and cook it over a fire. She thanks her hosts, the Clay family, for being supportive.

Captured First Place at First Science Fair

It is pretty funny that my first science fair happened to be in America. I mean, even though I studied science in Indonesia, my major study is science, I’ve never done a fair at all.

Soaring with Song

March 26 was one of the unforgettable days in my life. My host parents’ church held a Young Women’s General Meeting at the hall, which had the capacity for 21,000 people. I was amazed by the other beautiful girls sitting in the audience who were watching our performance. My host parents’ church held a Young Women’s General Meeting at the hall, which had the capacity for 21,000 people. I was amazed by the other beautiful girls sitting in the audience who were watching our performance. I was so happy when the audience clapped and cheered us on in the theater. This was one of my greatest experiences ever.

Rookie Cross-Country Skier Makes His Mark

Cross-country skiing was a new experience for me because I come from a country that doesn’t have any snow. I saw real snow for the first time in November.

An Actor is Born

He’s the devil in disguise! Oh! Yes he is, rang the chorus. For my first musical play in my life, I had to walk with a walker and dress up like an old lady. I decided to join the drama club this year because I wanted to try new things. I’ve never sung or danced in front of an audience.

An Advocate for Health Care

Sheena Seth took to the podium and spoke to the Oregon governor and senators about the lack of funds for public school health centers. Drawing on her own experience, the Indian YES student cited needing a vaccine, which her school health center was able to provide. Moreover, she explained the critical functions that school-based health centers provide, especially for students who can’t afford insurance.

Conference Inspired Teen to Denounce Hate

With Walt Disney World in mind, a dream comes true. That’s exactly right. I never considered I’d get to go there, but on February 2, I flew from Washington where it was the freezing winter to Florida, the Sunshine State. I went there to join the Better World Conference held by the Civilization Exchange Foundation. We visited a mosque, church and synagogue and learned about Islam, Christianity and Judaism. We broke through stereotypes and built better perceptions and understandings of each other.

Painting Takes Top Award

Yulia Hobry’s painting of a mountain lion won first place in the Tuscarora Wildlife Education Project art contest. “It was my first time trying expressionism,” said Yuliya. The Horst family hosts the Ukrainian FLEX student in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania.

Defining the odds in golf, Rachata ‘Mek’ Sakpanrasm (Thailand) hit a hole-in-one for the Legacy High School Varsity Golf Team in Las Vegas, Nevada. Host parents Melissa and Bryan Thammavongsa couldn’t be prouder!
Deep in the woods, Maple Trees Stand Proud

The sap flows from their branches, ready to be harvested. The tradition of making maple syrup has been passed down through generations, and there’s a sense of pride in knowing that the syrup we enjoy is a result of the hard work and dedication of those who collect the sap.

Sensations of Sweetness

Maple syrup is a delight to the taste buds. Its rich, caramel-like flavor is a perfect complement to pancakes, waffles, and other breakfast treats. It’s also used in cooking, adding a unique taste to dishes like oatmeal, yogurt, and even savory dishes like chicken or fish.

A Local Tradition

Maple syrup production is not just a source of income for the Vermont community. It’s a connection to nature and a celebration of local heritage. Each year, Vermonters gather in the woods to harvest the sap and transform it into a sweet, delicious syrup. This tradition brings people together, fostering a sense of community and pride.

The Future of Maple Syrup

As technology advances, some farmers are exploring new methods of syrup production, such as using solar power to evaporate the sap. However, the time-honored methods of tapping trees, collecting the sap, and boiling it remain at the heart of the tradition. These methods are not only sustainable but also allow Vermonters to continue to enjoy the delicious maple syrup made from the sap of these maple trees.

In conclusion, the maple syrup harvest is a celebration of nature, community, and tradition. It’s a reminder of the connection between people and the land that nourishes us. As we enjoy the sweet taste of maple syrup, let’s also appreciate the hard work and dedication of those who make it possible.
**Massachusetts Madness**

Getting crazy are Irina Klimova (Russia), PAX Regional Director Lena Adely, Alex Vlasin (Ukraine), Elina Khusnullina (Russia) and Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines).

**Life in the Heartland**

The thing I will miss the most is my family, school and friends. I liked my school because I made a lot of good friends and the teachers are really nice. They usually asked me if I needed help in my studying.

I went to Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin. I had a lot of fun. When I went to Arizona with my family, we stopped at the Grand Canyon. They thought it was funny when I told them it was a dangerous trip.

**Thankful to Many**

I feel that I gained a lot of wisdom during this year, and I learned a lot about people. But the most important thing I learned is to be thankful and appreciative of the people who surround me. One year away from my family in Kyrgyzstan showed me how appreciative of them I should be. And now it’s time for me to thank my host family once more for letting me experience a real American family life. I know now how happy I should be for everything happening in my life, no matter if it is good or bad, because all of these things teach you a lesson in the end.

Meerim Beavea (Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Merrick family
West Richland, WA

**A Year of Exchange**

The dictionary meaning of exchange “is an act of giving one thing and receiving another.” When we say exchange, we think of exchanging a shirt or a book with a friend. However, I have exchanged one year of my life. I have exchanged my country, culture, language and many other things.

At first, the word “exchange” meant fear to me. Once I figured out I was really going to go to another country, I was scared. I felt like a little baby who didn’t want to leave her mother. I cried like one, too.

For the first two months, the fear was all around me. I thought about going back to my country every single day. I didn’t blame anyone. It was my choice to be here.

Some say time is the cure for anything. Now I believe that. When I made friends, I started getting over my problems.

I met wonderful people and added great memories by exchanging a little time in my life. For example, the first time it snowed here was my first snow! I ran outside in my pajamas, grabbed handfuls of snow and threw them on my sleeping host sister.

Another memory is when I told my coordinator that I did ballet, and she said she knew of a class. When I got there, many old pajamas, grabbed handfuls of snow and here was my first snow! I ran outside in my life. For example, the first time it snowed started getting over my problems.

Now I believe that. When I made friends, I should be for everything happening in my life, no matter if it is good or bad, because all of these things teach you a lesson in the end.

Meerim Beavea (Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Merrick family
West Richland, WA

**Finding Ourselves Amidst the Adventure**

Every day is like a small adventure for me. I’ve seen a lot of beautiful places. For example, my host mom, friend Klara and I went to Washington, DC. I don’t have enough words to describe how wonderful that place is! I fell in love with the architecture of the Library of Congress. We were lucky to be in DC when the cherry blossoms were in bloom.

One day my host dad and I went to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum near Cleveland. I saw famous people’s costumes, instruments, cars and other personal things. That day my goal was to find Michael Jackson’s glove! Eventually I found it. I felt joy, and on the other hand sadness, because he is gone.

This year I’m learning so many things. I’ve matured, become more responsible and learned to budget my money. I’ve realized how much my family means to me, and what it’s like to be so far away from home.

Thank you for giving us students this amazing opportunity to get to know more about American culture, and also not less important, to find ourselves, to figure out who we really are and what we can do to achieve our goals.

Amina Saginova (Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the Newman family
Akron, OH

**Discovering Colorado**

Oh no, not this rock...no, no, please, not this rock...you can make it, see you can Nika...oh no! Deep sigh. Yeah, I made it! Oooa, here goes another rock...

This was the conversation I had with myself while mountain hiking in Moab. Although we chose the “easy” path, it didn’t seem that way. But it was so much fun.

This all happened during spring break when my host family took us on a vacation to explore northern Colorado. On the first day we visited the Air Force Academy and the caves. The next day we went to sand dunes, my host relative’s house and a soak in the hot springs. We visited Mesa Verde and saw how the Native Americans lived in the mountains. Moreover, we had fun jumping from one state to another at the “Four Corners” site. I was in Arizona, Colorado, Utah and New Mexico at the same time. The following day we reached the Grand Canyon. Well, it’s grand indeed! I was afraid to look down.

I want to express great appreciation to my host family. I value all the effort that they put into this trip. I am grateful that I have such wonderful parents and sisters.

Veronika Pomonarenko (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Horton family
Fort Collins, CO

**Where the Civil War Began**

These students visited Fort Sumter, South Carolina where the first shots of the American Civil War took place. Pictured are: Sonya Hakobyan (Armenia), Felige da Silva (Brazil), Emilios Alanis Gutierrez (Mexico), Chia Yen Gan (Malaysia), Omar Al Nabati (Saudi Arabia), Zeha Mansuri (India), Tatjana Brezorac (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Tracy Bolin.
The Key to My New Found Confidence

The most important thing that I have gained from this experience is my confidence. I realized that you must have no fear to express yourself and feel confident and free to say, “I’m different and I have my own opinion.” In America, the country where everybody is so different and original, people respect your points of view and attitude.

At my school I felt different at first just because I’m from a different country. I was nervous that people wouldn’t be interested in my culture and me. When I began to understand and use English better, I felt freer, but still shy.

Then came the day when I made my first homeland presentation in government class.

The students listened very carefully. I could hear their reactions: “What?” “Oh my God, really?” “Wow!” “You’ve got to be kidding me!!!” “That’s awesome!” and so on. Then they asked me a lot of questions about Russian schools, teenagers and the many stereotypes that I talked about and their impact on both nations.

After that, I wanted to do more presentations in my classes. It really helped start conversations with many students. Later they would ask me: “What do you like about America the best?” or “Are our countries really so different?”

This spring my local coordinator took me to Columbus International School to talk about stereotypes and Russian culture in front of the whole school in the auditorium. I wasn’t afraid at all! I was excited about it and looked forward to it.

Now I feel free to ask questions, not only in school, but also in any store, restaurant or to a stranger on the street. Some would think that it’s because of my better English. But I say that it’s because of my new confidence and realization that you can’t wait until your fear disappears. It will never happen. You must feel scared and keep going on. Speak if needed, disagree, think different and be yourself.

Zarina Tuybayeva (Russia)
Hosted by the Whittaker family
Westerville, OH

Home Away from Home
From all around the globe with determination and fervent hope we seek to see how sweet Uncle Sam can be.

As we arrived ashore absence of what’s in store you know what’s always been our goal? To have fun and enlighten our soul.

Surely, though obstacles come our way life tries to keep us laid away man determines his fate as surely as a key unlocks a gate.

Leaving our friends and family behind our lives get more and more refined no matter how far we roam we are always home away from home.

John Asigbekeye (Ghana)
Hosted by the Payna-Meyer family
Puyallup, WA

Independence in Big Ways and Small
I have learned so many things from this experience and my host family. Some are simple things like laundry, chopping vegetables and fixing lunch for school. When I was in India, my mom used to do these things for me, but now I feel a sense of independence and confidence from doing my own work. My English speaking skills have definitely improved. It feels good that I can share my feelings and thoughts with my host family and that they trust me. The one thing that I will miss the most when I return to India is American food. When I first came, I hated bland food. Then, I started tasting new foods. Now I love cheese.

Sheena Sethi (India)
Hosted by India family
Portland, OR

What I’ve Gained...

Big Dreams Realized
Since I was a baby, I dreamed to see New York City with my own eyes. I did so on a Baltic Cruise. I felt like I was in a movie when I was in Times Square at night. Big lights, crowded streets, yellow taxis. I met many friends from all over the world, whom I love and am going to miss very much. Then we went to Washington, DC, a wonderful, charming place where you are surrounded with the history of this great country. I was lucky to be there during the cherry blossom time and fell in love with the Capital City.

This year gave me more than all my previous years have given. I’ve lived a U.S. teenager’s life, become more independent, and met life friends. I now have the sister I always wanted. PAX taught me to be the change I want to see in the world! It gave me a clear image of community, and how important our actions are to it. I experienced democracy in the U.S., and I want my country to reach the same level one day.

Lela Okonmelidze (Georgia)
Hosted by McDonnell family
Portland, OR

Grownup Now
Being in the United States helped me a lot with the experience of being separated from my parent. It has also helped me feel grownup. There were a lot of funny moments, especially with my host family. School is super cool, and I have a lot of friends. I’ve also had hard times here, but nothing is perfect so don’t give up. You just have to face those problems and defeat them.

Kamilla Iltabaeva (Tajikistan)
Hosted by the Crossch family
Lisbon, MO

Preparation to Be a Future Leader
Students of all backgrounds gathered in Orlando, Florida on February 2-6 for the Better Understanding for a Better World Conference. There were 70 participants from 32 different countries. At first, it seemed like we were all so different, but after we got to know each other, everyone realized how many things we have in common!

The next day we went to the Disney Epcot Park. It has pavilions where you can find shops and restaurants representing eleven countries. The workers in each pavilion are natives of that country. In Epcot we learned that sharing our culture makes our friendships stronger.

Later we tasted Coca-Cola from all over the world. In different countries it tastes different because the company makes it taste similar to the food in that country.

This conference, an attempt to unite all of us, gave us hope for a better tomorrow. Someone said, “Exchange students can do something politicians can’t do. We can share our country with people and help them understand us.”

My friend Ahmed from Egypt described our conference as “great times with great people, and added, “If you ever get home, you know that you have a family there.” Ohman from Saudi Arabia said, “I wouldn’t call you my friends, I would call you my family.”

My biggest dream is to initiate changes for the better. I think it’s possible because today’s youth are the leaders of tomorrow.

Roman Kohut (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Blunt family
Lee’s Summit, MO

A World of Family
Utah Cluster Leader Jamie Paskins’s kids love hanging out with Gertrude Barfi (Ghana), Dias Lastari (Indonesia), Azka Nafida (Indonesia), Salome Khamidulse (Georgia) and Pratima Pathgjan (India).

Lessons Beyond 2+2
Teachers teach you how the human body works, what is 2+2 when a country invaded another, but your exchange teaches you about yourself, people and how to solve problems. If it were not for PAX, I wouldn’t know those things and these successful communicators.

The magic words essential to everyday life: thank you and please.

-Cereal is for breakfast, lunch and night.

-Flip flops with socks, people in jammin walking in public, burping loud (but saying excuse me if you are polite)

-Food not holing while driving here.

-Drivers communicate via horns in Turkey.

-EVERYTHING being just $1 in Dollar Tree. We have the same kind of stores in Turkey but almost everything costs more.

Ozge Demirci (Turkey)
Hosted by the Servin family
Portland, OR

A New Attitude
How did I change? First, the U.S. gave me more determination. Having met lots of extraordinary people, I have a huge desire to achieve my goals. One of them is to create a volunteer club at my high school. Project back home will be to help orphans.

Secondly, I am confident, optimistic and flexible. I have changed mostly because the Americans I’ve met, like my host mom who is a very successful communicator.

My high school gave me the feeling of the diverse American “melting pot.”

New friends helped me to realize that pluralism is the American key to success.

When I was in Washington, DC as a participant at the FLEX Civic Education Workshop, our motto was “Out of Many–ONE!!” I would like to apply this concept to our world. We may come from different backgrounds, but we want common things: the desire to be happy, to live our lives and be successful.

This exchange year gave me a priceless opportunity to see the world from another perspective. As a result, the “new me” is more aware of life in different countries and more concerned about world events.

Olga Magneyeva (Russia)
Hosted by the Green-Storm family
Portland, OR

A Hundred Friends
Check out Arisa Chaisiri’s slide show (www.youtube.com/watch?v=7klmGkZlJfI). It is clear that laughter and good times reigned during the Thai student’s year with the Stockwell family in Provo, Utah.
Congrats to PAX Goes GREEN Winner Raquel Pujadas Rach (Spain) and Second Place Winner Ade Uktubara (Indonesia)

Spearheaded Recycling

After realizing that her high school created mountains of trash every day, PAX Goes GREEN first place winner Raquel Pujadas Rach (Spain) and a friend went to their principal with a plan to institute a recycling program in the school cafeteria. With his support, they spoke to the faculty, staff and student body to build momentum for their plan. Then, the team taught students how to recycle by going table to table with moveable bins in tow, explaining how to separate lunch refuse into paper, plastic and organic receptacles. “Changes are hard,” Raquel, 17, right, explained. With dogged determination, the pair turned around student objections. By Earth Day, their dream was a reality. Not only had they reduced the amount of trash produced at Mount Vernon High School, they inspired students to start recycling at home. PAX is proud to award Raquel with a $100 gift card. The Straus family hosts her in Mount Vernon, Washington.

Green Can Be Glamorous

Ade Uktubara found a use for old bottle caps and plastic bags: a party dress! At a fashion show, the crowd loved it. So does PAX who awarded the young designer the PAX Goes GREEN contest second place prize, a $75 gift card. The Clay family hosts the Indonesian YES student in Lynden, Washington.

PAX Students WORK TO PROTECT OUR PLANET

Should we wait for Superman to rescue the environment? This year’s PAX students say “no”. Like the PAX Goes Green contest winners above, these young people stepped up to the plate right now to be trustees of the Earth we share.

Changing Attitudes

This winter Artur Pak (Kazakhstan) put together a persuasive video full of climate change facts for his Wisconsin classmates. Then he challenged them. “What are you doing today to live better tomorrow?” The video outlines solutions that have been already developed such as electric plants powered by the Earth’s heat and technology that harnesses the energy of ocean waves. However, the FLEX student says, “to live better tomorrow, people must be motivated to implement these solutions now.”

Spearheaded Recycling

After realizing that her high school created mountains of trash every day, PAX Goes GREEN first place winner Raquel Pujadas Rach (Spain) and a friend went to their principal with a plan to institute a recycling program in the school cafeteria. With his support, they spoke to the faculty, staff and student body to build momentum for their plan. Then, the team taught students how to recycle by going table to table with moveable bins in tow, explaining how to separate lunch refuse into paper, plastic and organic receptacles. “Changes are hard,” Raquel, 17, right, explained. With dogged determination, the pair turned around student objections. By Earth Day, their dream was a reality. Not only had they reduced the amount of trash produced at Mount Vernon High School, they inspired students to start recycling at home. PAX is proud to award Raquel with a $100 gift card. The Straus family hosts her in Mount Vernon, Washington.

Changing Attitudes

This winter Artur Pak (Kazakhstan) put together a persuasive video full of climate change facts for his Wisconsin classmates. Then he challenged them. “What are you doing today to live better tomorrow?” The video outlines solutions that have been already developed such as electric plants powered by the Earth’s heat and technology that harnesses the energy of ocean waves. However, the FLEX student says, “to live better tomorrow, people must be motivated to implement these solutions now.”

It’s in the Bag in South Dakota

To do her share to take care of the planet, Lela Merabishvili (Georgia) crocheted a reusable tote bag out of plastic bags. “People I knew brought me plastic bags so that the bag would be more colorful and diverse,” she said. The FLEX student learned to crochet the bags from a YouTube video.

Art with Conscience

Aiperti Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan) became interested in creating art after her Virginia hosts, the Moriarty family, encouraged her to do something with some sticks they had collected together. After she made a table, the FLEX student moved on to using marmade materials as a way of recycling. Her creations include a lamp made out of wine bottles and a frame using wine corks.

From Junk to Jewelry

Like Aiperti, Indah Mahendra likes to rescue items from going into the trash. She enamelled soda cans tabs and then wove them together into gorgeous bracelets for her friends in Virginia and her homeland, Indonesia.

Composting is Easy

What’s to be done with fallen leaves, weeds, grass clippings, kitchen waste and horse manure? In Oregon, Irvan Fathurohman (Indonesia) made a step-by-step video of how organic materials like these can be turned into dirt with a composting unit.

Go on a Carbon Fast

Meanwhile in Missouri, Roman Kohut (Ukraine) prompted his fellow students to go on a “carbon fast” with a list a changes they can make in their every day lives. One example is walking to get to places. Alina Zastreia (Moldova) thought of this lifestyle change, too. When she realized she could reduce her daily carbon output with this simple act, Alina started walking home from her California school instead of getting rides. The FLEX student went on to organize her fellow biology class students and teacher to do a beach clean up one weekend.

FLEX student Nurzat Rakhmanberdieva (Kyrgyzstan) with elementary students.

Be an Earth Warrior

On St. Patrick’s Day in Central Wisconsin, Pussakon Phuthongdee (Thailand), Nurzat Rakhmanberdieva (Kyrgyzstan) and Sofia Furlan (Italy) made the color green mean more with their poster campaign and presentations. They urged people not to be passive environmentalists, but to be “Earth Warriors”.

Making the Most of Earth Day

On April 22 the alarm clocks went off at 4 a.m. for Coordinator Natalie Saltmarsh’s students in Gainesville, Florida. By 5 o’clock the students were baking bread and cooking eggs for day labor. After they served a sunrise breakfast, the cluster went for a nature walk before starting their other big project for the day: moving truckloads of organic soil for the installation of a garden at the Reichert House Youth Academy.

Dig This Tradition

Since its inception over forty years ago, Earth Day participants have planted seedlings to mark the day. This year Roman Kohut (Ukraine) planted Colorado spruce and red bud trees on his host family’s property in Missouri. Pratima Padghan (India) chose sunflowers for her Salt Lake City, Utah garden. Perhaps they will do the same next year, but in their homelands!

PAX congratuates all of the students who went green this year. Keep up the great work!

PAX Students Recognized

Members of the Williamsport School Board commend Alejna Ademi (Macedonia), Katrine Hansen (Denmark), Manilda Herradiyanti (Indonesia), Maria Moiseeva (Kyrgyzstan), Turkmenistan), Shabn Mialyion (Armenia), and Artysyn Solodovnikov (Kazakhstan). Pennsylvania Coordinator Ann Swift also reports that Shahen was selected as the March student of the month.

Science Scholar

Congratulations to Jon Ostoalaza from Spain who has been awarded an Energy Solutions Scholarship. This scholarship is given to students who display an interest in and aptitude for math and science. In order to apply, Jon had to submit his current and past grades, obtain letters of recommendation from two teachers and write an essay. The scholarship provides $2000 toward tuition at the university of his choice. Six schools, including the University of Utah and Brigham Young University agreed to provide matching funds. Jon plans to attain a degree in chemical engineering. His host family, Paul and Janet Doxey of Saint George, Utah are extremely proud of his accomplishment.

Riding High in Nevada

Bohan Wang (China), Seongjae Hong (South Korea), Annaebell Waldmann (Germany), Coordinator Margaret Hoppe and Yuri Ichinose (Japan) saddled up with host family members for a trail ride. For some, it was the first time on a horse.

Dancing with the Stars

At home I enjoyed dancing, but I couldn’t find anything similar in Searcy, so I decided to start a dance class. As my own little community service project, I taught teachers and students basic steps three times a week. The most important part was that we had a lot of fun and I got the opportunity to do something I really love - dance.

Aja Omerbasic (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Hosted by Reaper family, Searcy, AR
Found Balance and Love

This exchange year is the best year I've had in my eighteen years of life.

As the only child in my family in China, the most important thing for me to do was to study hard. However, in America, I learned how to find the balance between studying and playing. In other words, I learned how to be a human instead of a studying machine.

My American parents are so amazingly perfect for me that I feel I am their child who has been lost in other places for several years. I enjoyed being a kid to them and learned that I don’t need to be perfect as long as I try my best.

I learned even more from my older sister Jess. She is a girl who looks on the positive side of life, who loves to give to others, listen and makes me warm all the time. Additionally, I learned from her how to find healthy food in America!

Brought Us Smiles

Natthapat has taken every opportunity he has had to experience American life this year. He has traveled with us to places like Death Valley, expanded family gatherings, and has experienced many firsts. His usual response is, “I want to do that!” Seeing a young man experience his first snow, his first Christmas, his first camping, and much more has been a gift to us. He manages to embrace every moment in life and has brought us all many smiles. In this picture, Natthapat is giving a speech about Thailand to the Morro Bay Women’s Club. We love having Natthapat as part of our family and are looking forward to a life long friendship with him.

The Jones family, hosts for Natthapat Wongcharoenyong (Thailand) Morro Bay, CA

A Lily Among Poppies

Never having hosted a foreign exchange student before, we were fully of anticipation. From her native Japan, Kaho arrived beautiful, quiet, helpful and kind. We, on the other hand, were fast moving, dramatic, expressive and just plain loud! She was like a white lily in a bed of bright red poppies. However, it was love at first sight. We felt so lucky! We worked at being more like her, and I could not help becoming more like us, Italians. We eat pasta at least once a week, and she can eat with the best of us.

She is bright and academically talented. She is a good friend and wonderful sister to me. She enjoys horseback riding, animals and all sports. My being the coach of a FIRST robotics team was a big draw for Kaho. She quickly signed up to become a “Livonia Warrior”.

This past season, Kaho enjoyed building and programming the robot, the competitions, as well as being part of marketing and public relations. She helped take our robot, Armed and Dangerous, to the Michigan state competition.

Kaho’s contributions as a team member, family member and a student have been exemplary. We are so very proud of her!

Isolina Carlini, host mother for Kaho Hasabe (Japan) Livonia, MI

My little brother Harrison is a boy who loves to kiss others to show his love. At first I couldn’t get used to him, but now I’ve become “addicted” to his kisses. My big brother Ben taught me to take everything easy and enjoy life’s adventures. My little sister Ken is the cutest little child with the sweetest smiles. I learned how to be a good elder sister and a good future mother from her. When she hugs me, I can feel a strong love from her.

I found true happiness in America. I had great experiences as a carpenter, gardener, “shepherdess”, cook and so on. I learned how to show love and warmth. I learned to laugh and keep a positive attitude. The most important thing I gained is an American family who loves me and whom I love.

Suqi Lai (China) Hosted by the Fuller family Highland, UT

What’s Cooking?

In Ohio, host sister Adele Hardwick, Paula Fagundes (Brazil) and Morlin Steffens (Germany) prepared a feast to raise money for the Ethiopia Kids Culture Camp.

Our Indonesian Son

Muhammad Rizki came to live with us this last August and is going to Kennewick High School. He has enjoyed football, drama class and has brought home straight “A’s” in his classes. After writing an essay for PAX, he won a trip to Disney World. His mother in Indonesia must be so proud of her son. I know I am proud of his accomplishments here in America.

Rizki is trying to earn a hundred hours of community service. He is eager to learn all that America has to offer and takes pictures of everything, so that he will not forget even ONE of his experiences!

Rizki loves to make rice and I enjoy it every time. Our family has never eaten so much rice in all our lives as we have since last August. We now call it “Rizki Rice”. If I ever open a restaurant, I will put it on my menu!

Snow was a new experience for Rizki and he enjoyed a week of it in Montana. It was a thrill to experience his first sight of snow, as we take it for granted.

We cannot accommodate a lot of Rizki’s efforts to experience all he wants to do while he’s here, but his PAX leader, Renee Kerr, has helped out tremendously and we appreciate her.

This has been quite an experience for all, and it’s not over yet! We still have a lot of things to do and a lot of memories to be made before the day my “Indonesian son” returns to his own country.

Rhonda Martin, host mother for Muhammad Rizki (Indonesia) Kennewick, WA

Not in Our Wildest Dreams...

We had high hopes that hosting a student would be a wonderful experience, but we never imagined in our wildest dreams that it would be life changing. If there is such a thing as a “perfect” match, Seongjae Hong is it. This journey together has been so amazing. We couldn’t be happier. Thanks to the PAX family, our coordinator Margaret Hoppe, and Seongjae’s parents, for this rare opportunity. In the photo, we are wearing custom-made traditional hanbok, a gift from opportunity. In the photo, we are wearing Hoppe, and Seongjae’s parents, for this rare amazing. We couldn’t be happier. Thanks to it. This journey together has been so wonderful experience, but we never imagined in our wildest dreams that.

Each day I look forward to hanging out with my host family and spending some time together, watching TV, talking about our day or having dinner. They are the best.

Rima Beridze (Georgia)
Hosted by the Awad family
Powell, OH

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John and Lori Candalino, host parents for Seongjae Hong (South Korea)
Las Vegas, NV

Cute as a Button

Host mother Suzette Lopez of Sandpoint, Idaho writes, “Our bond with Glynnis Kim will always leave a lasting impression on our family.” She says little ones Zella and Jess particularly love playing with the buttons on the South Korean student’s cell phone and ipod.

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