



# PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools



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## Virtually Ending

While the last weeks and months have been challenging to say the least, the PAX community's response has been predictably positive. We are so grateful for that and so hoping this special issue will brighten your day.



Global Youth Service Day contest winner Tilyan tackled tough issues, virtually.

## Contest Winner: Tilyan from Pakistan

I decided to make a video as a virtual project for Global Youth Service Day to make people aware of an issue that really matters to me as a girl—menstrual hygiene. It is an issue that is barely discussed, and I want girls to know more about it and be confident about it since it is a part of our womanhood.

I advocate for women’s rights and empowerment as a young woman facing these issues in my everyday life in Pakistan. Many girls there aren’t allowed to do certain activities, eat certain food, socialize, or be a part of the community during their monthly because of norms and stigmas.

This video will have an impact on many lives and will change a lot of perspectives. It will help women and girls be empowered and confident, as typically menstruation is not a topic that is discussed. My video will also raise awareness in men and boys, and they can then educate their families.

I’ve shared this video on all my social media platforms, and I’ve gotten great responses from people who have watched it.

Honestly, for a girl like me it took courage to post this video since I had to think a lot about the reactions and response I might get. But I’m glad I took a chance and tackled an issue like menstrual hygiene that is very important but no one discusses.

I think it’s high time for us as young people and future leaders of our communities to work on social issues like this, and I am sure it will impact our society and change many lives!

—Tilyan (YES, Pakistan),  
hosted by the Messmann family (IN)

HELLO! If you are self-isolating, I can help.

My name is Anan (YES, Bangladesh)

I live locally at Schlegel family (WA)

My email address is xyz@gmail.com

If you are self-isolating due to COVID-19 I can help with:

- A friendly phone call       Posting mail  
 Urgent supplies

Just email me and I'll do my best to help you (for free!)

In Washington State, YES student Anan (Bangladesh) took a proactive approach to helping her community with this mini flyer.

## Global Youth Service Day



**Iulia and her host sister had a lot of fun adding some inspiration to their sidewalk.**

### Sidewalk Smiles

One project of mine was spreading positivity by writing encouraging words. Since we can still go out and walk, my host sister helped me decorate the sidewalk. We made a fun route for people walking and wrote messages to help anyone walking by. They enjoyed our fun route, smiled, laughed, thanked us, and told us that it really helped.

I am so glad I got to make someone's day better! Doing this made them happy, and it made me happy.

—*Iulia (FLEX, Romania), hosted by the Draheim-Budde family (WI)*

### Appreciating Essential Workers

In light of the crisis the pandemic has created, most of us have to quarantine ourselves. Amidst this chaos are some very brave people, working every day to make sure we can get what we need to survive and our countries don't go into ruin!

These people, although diligent, hardly get the praise or recognition they deserve for their services and how important they are for us! For our GYSD project, we decided to acknowledge and appreciate their service by baking cookies for the essential workers at my host mom's office, so they realize their value to our community. Hope and happiness is something we all need in times like these and I thought why not deliver it in the shape of chocolate chip cookies?

—*Hamad (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Everett family (IN)*



**Hamad and his double placement exchange brother Khojikobiljon (FLEX, Tajikistan) with their treats for essential workers**

### Well Wishes in Hard Times

Because of the COVID-19 situation, it was hard to volunteer outside. So, I decided to make and send some homemade cards to people affected by coronavirus.

It was a great experience, as it was something I had never done before. My host grandfather, father, and sister also helped me understand how to make the cards and how to write a get well message.

I made 30 cards. I also included get well wishes in my language so whoever gets the card can feel people from all over the world are there beside them as they struggle in this global pandemic.

I did not do a lot or something that will change a lot. But I believe I did something which will make a few people happy and that's what matters.

—*Pradipta (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Landeck family (IN)*



**Sending get well cards brightened up Pradipta's Global Youth Service Day.**

## Mask Makers

Some of our students have taken to the sewing machine during quarantine to make cloth face masks for their host communities. With the help of host families and internet instructions, they set out to help those in need!



It's been a lot of fun making them, and it feels really good to know how many people we are helping. With the situation that the whole world is going through, right now we all have to do what we can to help.

—Ane (Spain),  
hosted by the Vincent-Gonzalez family (TX)



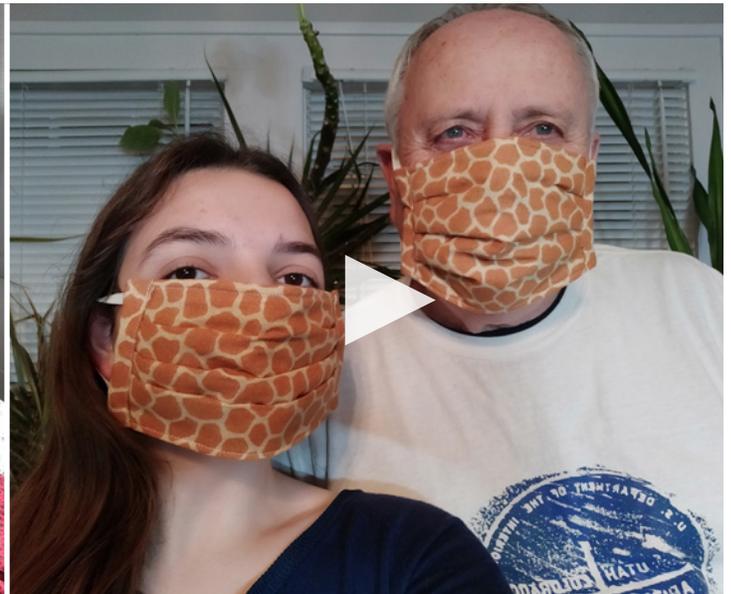
Thought maybe you would like to see what Marta from Spain and her host sister Lily are doing. Making masks for the hospital!

—Debbie Yoder (MI),  
host mom of Marta (Spain)



I realized that we are in this together. I realized that I do not have to be a doctor in order to help my community. Simple things like staying at home and making masks can make a great change.

—Isra (PAX Means Peace Scholar, Somaliland),  
hosted by the Miller family (WA)



My host sister is a nurse. She informed us that they needed masks. So, my host mom and I decided to sew some masks for them. Then, we began to sew masks for neighbors, my school's teachers, and lots of other friends!

—Sila (YES, Turkey),  
hosted by the Jackson family (TX)

## The Inspiring Women of My Exchange Year

Throughout this year, I learned and experienced a lot of new things. But the most important part was learning how strong women can be, and how I can be better than I am today. I want to recognize the women who impacted my life the most during my year in America.

I am grateful to my host mom Kathy Sturman for teaching me how to be mindful in my decision making and helping me find opportunities to introduce my culture to my host community. She was always there to help me, to share American culture and learn more about mine, and to get up early to drive me to swim practice. She is a strong, understanding, and intelligent woman who taught me a lot about America. She inspired me to make changes in Kyrgyzstan!

Rachael Gorsuch, my second host mom, taught me to appreciate things that we have today. She showed me how passionate, smart and open minded she is. She is always ready to help and is interested in learning more about other cultures. She taught me how to make the best out of a situation and be creative. She taught me that women can be strong and achieve anything they would like to achieve. She inspired me to be confident and follow my passion.

My community coordinator, Fariba Kazemi, is a great teacher and friend who taught me how to be independent and adjust to life in my host community. She is open, kind, and taught me to be smart and careful. She gave great advice and taught me not to be afraid of making mistakes. She inspired me to be a leader and help students like me in the future!

Lastly, the woman who believed in me and taught me to swim is one of my coaches, Lauren Lord. She gave her advice and support during hard times. She is a patient coach and a great teacher. She taught me how to stay emotionally strong even while participating in tough sports like swimming. She inspired me to believe in myself and my goals even when they feel hard to achieve.

Also, my host sisters and amazing friends impacted my life a lot! I am thankful to FLEX and PAX for this opportunity!

—Begimai (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan),  
hosted by the Gorsuch family (OH)



**Begimai and her first host mom and sisters in their Ohio kitchen after baking some Kyrgyz sweets in honor of International Women's Day**



## Rainbows of Hope

Sandra from Spain is our third exchange student. The pandemic has undoubtedly made this experience very unusual and very special. She is part of our family and holds a special place in our hearts.

We live in Queensbury, NY. Much of our area challenged people to create a rainbow display to give kids (adults enjoy this too!) something to hunt for on walks or rides.

We decided to make sure our rainbow was easily found and represented the promise and hope of brighter tomorrows! We had a lot of fun doing it together. We have loved our experiences with our students from Brazil, Italy, and now Spain. The experiences and the students have brought sunshine into our lives!

—Carolyn Londrigan (NY),  
host mom of Sandra (Spain)

**Sandra and her host family made sure their rainbow would be easy to spot!**



**Addina and her host mom model their Malaysian traditional pajamas.**

## A Special Farewell in Minnesota

As the snow of Minnesota melted, I accompanied my host sister and brother to their playroom—it was our quarantine routine. My host sister is a chatty kid, and as I watched over her, I just could not imagine not seeing her smile every morning. I was nervous when my host mom joined us in the playroom, because I had not figured out the best way to bid them farewell.

But the clock was ticking, and I could not wait any longer so I just brushed off my overthinking. I handed my host mom Malaysian traditional pajamas that we call *baju kelawar*. I can still see her wide, genuine smile. We put them on—I brought my own—and we took a picture.

She gave me a necklace with a tree of life pendant. It means so much to me because of the symbolism, and because it reminds me of that special day. Deep down, this whole journey reminds me a lot of my vulnerabilities that I plead for strength to overcome. But the most important thing I learned is that wherever I go there will always be people with pure hearts that understand me and offer me comfort regardless of how different we are.

—Addina (*YES, Malaysia*),  
hosted by the Schmitt family (MN)

## Leaving Early, Looking Back

Unfortunately, I had to leave the United States yesterday. Even though Egypt's borders are closed, the Egyptian Government sent an emergency plane to take us back to Egypt. We are currently being quarantined for two weeks to keep our families safe.

I was really sad to leave the United States before my program ends, but I understand that it was for our own safety. I'm going to miss my family so much. Even though I never expected my year to end this way, I can't imagine my year going any differently.

I'm always going to remember everything that happened to me here; it's a part of me that I will use to help me solve problems. For all the exchange students that have to leave the U.S. early, I'm so sorry you have to leave without saying goodbye to everyone you knew during this year. But try to remember that all of this is a unique experience that no one before has had to go through and that you learned a lot of new things. I'm glad I made the most of my time in the U.S. I learned a lot during this year. I feel like I became more open minded and independent and started thinking in different ways. I started seeing the bottom of people's iceberg instead of just seeing the top. This year is the best thing that ever happened to me!

Thanks to my family, coordinator, and my friends for making my year great. And to future exchange students, don't waste time and make the most of your year. When you look back at all you have done, it'll be worth it. That's the best part about being an exchange student: you may not stay in your exchange year forever, but it sure stays in you forever.

—Jomana (*YES, Egypt*),  
hosted by the Gorsuch family (OH)



**A special final photo at the end of a special year**



## A Fond Farewell

Naia came into our family eight months ago. She was a great addition to our family. She enjoyed playing on her school volleyball and Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) volleyball teams. She enjoyed camping, hiking, and biking with our family. We got to enjoy our spring break in Pigeon Ford, TN. We got our family pictures, celebrated Easter, and did the stained-glass cake challenge. We enjoyed making face masks to guarantee her safe trip back home.

With COVID-19 she had to head home earlier than expected. She made so many wonderful friends it was hard to say goodbye. I organized a farewell parade, and she was overwhelmed to see all her friends. We have stayed in touch every day since she got back home with her family. We miss her a lot; Naia has become part of our family. We look forward to her return once all this is over.

—Sandi Hillenbrand (IN), host mom of Naia (Spain)



## A Life-Changing Hosting Experience

Our year with Mustafa was a life-changing experience. He was a gift to my family. The three of us (me and my two boys) accepted Mustafa into our family with open arms.

Mustafa fit perfectly into our family. He is a basketball player like us. Mustafa shares so many values with my two boys and had many big brother conversations with them. My boys were able to experience firsthand the life of a Turkish teenager. Mustafa would share stories about his childhood and school experiences.

Since Mustafa's departure to his home country, we stay in touch via texting and live video chats a couple days a week. Mustafa and my youngest son created an unbreakable bond. Mustafa will forever be a part of our family. Our first vacation will be to Turkey to visit his family.

—Margaret Gultekin (VT),  
host mom of Mustafa (YES, Turkey)

**A goodbye hug between international brothers**



Click on any image to view full post

## We Want to Hear from You!

Whether you have considered hosting a high school exchange student, sending your teen abroad, having an exchange student at your school, working locally to support an international student, or you simply want to learn more about what it is we do, feel free to give us a call at 800.555.6211.

Already involved and have something to share for a future issue? Regardless of your relationship to PAX, we are always accepting interesting content (stories, photos, videos, etc.) at [paxpress@pax.org](mailto:paxpress@pax.org).

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