

Pax Press



Kaja with host brother James

A Better Experience Than We Imagined

Our family's journey began when Kaja Ehmke, age 16, from Hamburg, Germany, came into our lives. Kaja is a person beautiful on the inside and outside: thoughtful, compassionate, outgoing, nurturing, and best of all, genuine. Kaja makes our family want to be better, kinder, and more supportive. When I asked my son and daughter, ages 15 and 12, to describe their new sister in one word, my daughter said SPUNKY and my son said, "I have to use two words: *wahr familie*." In English it means TRUE FAMILY. Thank you, PAX, for sending this wonderful person to our family. I never could have anticipated how wonderful this semester would be and I wouldn't change a thing.

The Stevens, host family for Kaja Ehmke (Germany), Oakland, ME

Life Begins at the End of Our Comfort Zone

To be an exchange student is one of the best experiences. It is changing me into a better and more positive person that I had never imagined before. I've tried many new things and had many new experiences since the first day of my life here.

I can say that at first it wasn't easy since everything was so different compared to my home country, Indonesia. It's really out of my comfort zone. Here, I have responsibilities and chores. I am the only exchange student in my school so I have to be able to mingle with the students in my school. I miss my mom's cooking, etc.



Tarita is front left.

But as the time goes by, I realize that life begins at the end of our comfort zone. I have to survive no matter what kind of obstacles life gives to me and I realize it's important to always be positive. And through the hard work and the support from my host family and friends, now I enjoy my life here as an exchange student. I've become more mature in every way. I've learned how to make friends and how to share and serve other people by doing community service, which I've never done in Indonesia. I've learned how to appreciate and show respect to others, which is really important and meaningful. The moral values that I get from doing these things are really precious!

Tarita Margaretha (YES, Indonesia)

Hosted by the McAlister family
Troutman, NC

Host Father Becomes the Student on a Visit to Ukraine and Georgia

This past July I took the trip of a lifetime! I travelled to Ukraine and Georgia to visit five of my former PAX FLEX exchange students: Roman Kohut (2010-11 Ukraine), Vlad Petrov (2008-09 Ukraine), Igor Petruk (2005-06 Ukraine), Lado Sirdadze (2011-12 Georgia) and David Tuntiya (2009-10 Russia). I had never been out of the United States, so the trip started out a bit stressful, but it turned out to be the best time that I could have ever imagined! I now know how the students must feel travelling to another country, meeting their new family, and adjusting to a new way of life. I had all of those feelings. I must say that I was a bit nervous meeting my students' parents, but that was an awesome experience. I now know that I have an extended family abroad!

In the four weeks that I was there, my students personally took me across their beautiful countries showing me the sights that most tourists would never get to see. It was the most educational and enjoyable experience that I have ever had. I even got to



FLEX alums Lado Sirdadze and David Tuntiya were delighted to show their host father, Mel Blunt, their homeland.

attend a FLEX pre-departure orientation session for this year's students where I saw one of my students teaching!

I definitely recommend that host parents try to make one of these trips. You will see the wonderful bond that you had with your son or daughter grow into a friendship with their entire family!

Mel Blunt, host father for
Andrija Vujovic (A-SMYLE, Serbia)
Lee's Summit, MO

Peak Moment

Yuna Shibata, far left, recounts, "I went to Borestone Mountain for a hike with the Outing Club. I didn't feel like hiking that day because my legs were so sore from a cross-country meet, but my host sister organized this event so I went. I felt like going home many times on our way up the mountain because it was so steep. After the long hard path, we reached the top. My tired feeling was suddenly gone! The leaves of the trees were turning and there were so many colors. It was gorgeous! I had never seen such a beautiful view before." The McKee family hosts the Japanese student in Bangor, Maine.



Culinary Diplomacy

Being an "ambassador" is something to be proud of but it comes with great responsibility. A person becomes a representative of his/her country. So after adjusting and adapting to my new community, my first priority was to reflect upon the ways I could share my culture with my family. Several ways popped into my mind, but the one that seemed the best was to make food for them. So I made them a delicious spicy Pakistani dish called *qurma*. It was fun making and sharing it with my mom. Everybody liked it and now I cook Pakistani food once a week. It is neat that we are getting to know each other better by sharing both of our cultures.

Rida Rizwan (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Main family
De Pere, WI

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Pakistani YES student Mahrosh Shami with her host sister, Rachael Kohler

Newly Confident

While I have just been a month and a half in the U.S., I already realize that life can't get any better. I have a lovely host family who always tries their best to make me feel at home. They eat the food I cook for them and appreciate me for making it. They took me camping, which I had never done before. It was an awesome experience. They then surprised me with a trip to Disneyland in California. I love them for that! They're also helping me organize an *Eid* (a Muslim festival) party.

High school was always the thing I was scared of before coming here. In reality, it was nothing that I thought it would be. There are no popular kids, bullies or mean kids. Everyone is so nice and excited to learn more about my country. The wide range of subjects to choose from is the thing I love most about my high school. The place has given me the confidence to do things I thought I could never do. I was never as social as I am now. I start a conversation with everyone I meet.

The YES program has really made me learn how to put trust in myself and make things happen. If this is who I am in just a month, I wonder how better of a person I'll be in a year!

Mahrosh Shami (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Kohler family
Portland, OR

Car Culture

I have some stereotypes about Americans. One of my stereotypes is that people like to walk places like in the movies. I know, that's so funny! When I came to Alabama, I saw no people walking outside. If you want to go somewhere, you have to use a car. If you don't have a car, you can't go anywhere. I used public transportation a lot in my home country, Indonesia.

Now if I have an activity after school, I can't go home by myself by public transportation. I have to wait until my host family can pick me up. The good point about this lifestyle is we have more time together. Even if we have lots of activities, at least we're together when we're in the car. Maybe you think you can't do something fun in the car but we do. We like to share stories. These are simple moments that I won't forget.

Tiara Mulya (YES, Indonesia)
Hosted by the Ford-Caesar family
Birmingham, AL

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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Wild West Arizona

One of our first weekends as a host family to Diego, we decided to take our son Ryan, Diego, and their new friend Alessandro (from Italy) on a real "Wild West Adventure!"

We started with activities at the nearby Cave Creek Recreational Park. Then the next day, we traveled to Oak Creek Canyon in Sedona so Ryan, Diego and Alessandro could go swimming amidst the gorge's unique natural rock formations. The next day, they went with our friend Scott Sawyer to a park near Flagstaff. The last day of our trip, they

went boating and tubing at Lake Pleasant, in Anthem, Arizona. While tubing, they had never "flown" that high before!

The best part of this story was that a few weeks later, Diego surprised his friend Alessandro with a "We Survived!" birthday cake! Alessandro said it was the absolute BEST birthday cake he had ever had!

Vikki Gorman, host mother for
Diego Salcines Gomez (Spain)
Anthem, AZ



Twist and Tuck

In Henryetta, Oklahoma, Ahmed Obaid (YES, Yemen) taught Coordinator Thomas Burney how to wrap a *mashada*, also known as a headscarf.

The Spirit of Spain

Lucia is a very caring, tender-hearted young lady. We have learned a lot about the economic communities in Spain. She has cooked a Spanish omelet for us a couple times and it is delicious. The language translation is always difficult but we are working through it. We have enjoyed just getting to know her and her enthusiasm for America.

The Melior family, the host family for
Lucia Calderon (Spain)
Kennewick, WA

Learning About Germany

Tatjana is a very interesting young lady. We have learned a lot about her school system, her method of travel, her church service and her family. For example, one can't go to college whenever they want. They must go immediately after high school. She rides a bicycle basically everywhere and feels safe. Sports are after school. No lunch is served at school but she can take or purchase a snack.

One special moment is when she said "this is my new home and you are my new family" after being here for a couple of weeks.

Teresa Roberts, host mother for
Tatjana Pfeiffer (Germany)
Shannon, MS



Breaking News

"Aaaaand now...Here's Pieter Buis, reporting live with Breaking News from the Channel 8 Studio." This past September, PAX students saw a live news broadcast in Las Vegas, Nevada. Alina Michel (Germany), Charlotte Witzel (Germany), Lucia Garcia Ruiz (Spain), Marta Hernanz Marijuan (Spain), Pieter Buis (Netherlands), Jan Koehl (Germany) and Kristina Cabalova (Slovakia) met the anchors, experimented with the weather green screen and toured the building. Coordinator Margaret Hoppe remarked, "This was a successful night thanks to Deborah Avery, the Channel 8 National Sales Assistant and host mom to Alina."



A Taste of Honduras

Since my host mom was born and raised in Honduras, I am learning not only American culture but also Honduran culture. My host grandparents were visiting us from Honduras during the summer. This is a picture of me learning how to bake Honduran traditional sweet *pastelitos de piña* with grandma. I learned a lot from *abuelo* (grandpa) and *abuela* (grandma)! And I taught them how to fold Japanese *origami*, too! I love my amazing grandparents!

Honami Tanaka (Japan)
Hosted by the Cochran family
Missouri City, TX

Homesick but Happy

My host family is great, the school has everything I wished for, and my classmates are very friendly. Yet, I still can feel homesick. I miss Lebanon. I miss the streets, the cars and the noise. I miss the humid high temperature in summer and the cold rainy weather in winter. I miss the electricity cut-offs. I miss my dad's old car. I miss when my little sister and I fight for whom will watch television first. I miss finding my mother sitting on the couch in the partial sunlight that hits the kitchen, noticing she made a meal that I love, telling her about a test I aced, her hugging me and saying "I'm proud of you, son". I never thought that I would feel this homesick. But, it's worth it. I can experience things I always wanted to such as automotive technology, which is what I want to do when I grow up. And guitar. I practice basketball, track and swimming. I am volunteering. I am forming American friendships. This adventure is making me stronger, more confident, more mature, and more self-reliant than ever. I am living the American dream at age SIXTEEN, an opportunity thousands of teenagers all over the world would battle for.

Hussein Maziad (YES, Lebanon)
Hosted by the Ledbetter family
Cottonwood, AZ



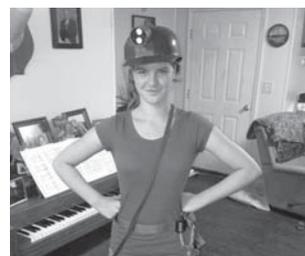
It's Great to Be a Gator

Guillermo Mendez and Mikel Zufia, both from Spain, were full of spirit at a Gators football game with Coordinator Susan James. Mikel recounts, "It was really fun and completely different from what we have in Spain for professional games. And this was not even professional since the team is an intercollegiate team for the University of Florida."



Bobcats and Bears

In New Hampshire, YES students Deniz Saraclar (Turkey) and Justice Magere (Kenya) scout for wildlife during a boat cruise on Squam Lake with Coordinator Carol Harry and her family.



Critter Catcher

German student Johanna Pelikan is outfitted as a "critter catcher", one of her host dad's side businesses in Clanton, Alabama. She was fascinated to learn that Don Short knows how to catch possums and raccoons.



Pony Express

With Jim and Liz Stitzel of Colfax, Indiana, Francesca Carraro (Italy) and Emely Aalbers (Belgium) toured the countryside the old fashioned way — by horseback!



Love in Any Language

"One thing my family has learned is God is love in any language," says Paola Aman's host father, Phillip Rinehart. "Every person has a unique story depending on where they spend their life. My kids have enjoyed seeing America through Paola's eyes, and it has allowed them to see what they take for granted." The Rineharts host the Ecuadorian student in Northport, Alabama.

Our Azerbaijan Student

When the only America you know is what you've seen through television and movies, you never imagine you'll be placed in an



American home with no television, with a family who doesn't watch movies. We are Christians, members of a conservative Mennonite church, with a limited private school education. When we opened our home to Nigar, we expected adjustments. We underestimated them.

I'm amazed at the ways God helps me understand Nigar's adjustments by parallel experiences in my life. I was frustrated when her thumb drive's virus crashed our computer just when I wanted to finish the girls' quarterly I edit. So this was how claustrophobic Nigar felt in our no-television, unplugged home. When she complained that her studies, with her limited periods of online access at the library, hindered her ability to keep abreast with her Facebook world, I could sympathize. Our own church family's fascination with our cultural adjustments, and my overwhelming busyness since she came, have prevented me from hearing about my church sisters' daily challenges, or maintaining correspondence with out-of-state friends. We blunder frequently as we learn how to parent a seventeen-year-old, while Nigar gets a crash course in living with five siblings under seven.

In all Nigar's phenomenal adjustments, we admire her resiliency. We are glad she feels safe here, in an America she never imagined. We are also grateful for the ways she has opened our world, making us better appreciate both the lifestyle we have chosen and the land in which we live.

Sheila J. Petre, host mother for Nigar Isayeva (FLEX, Azerbaijan) Mercersburg, PA



What's Cooking?

Daeyeop Kim, left, whips up a marinade for a Korean barbecued beef dish called *bulgogi*. His hosts are the Davis family in Tampa, Florida. Thanatchaporn Srichaphan, right, has become an expert at making her favorite American breakfast, pancakes! The Rose family hosts the Thai teen in St. Petersburg, Florida.



The Teachers Dressed Up, Too

In Utah, everyone wears costumes to school. Warisara Sooksnguan (Thailand) poses with her English teacher.



Vampire Diaries

Once it was dark, Pimchanok Ruangket from Thailand hit the Michigan streets with her host sister and brother.



Creepy Clown

Tunisian YES student Khoussay Kheili and his Colorado buddies went all out with scary make-up.



The Good Witch

Pintugan Kliengkerd from Thailand used her powers to transform the Friedrich barn for a family party in Michigan.



Aglow

In Wisconsin, Margarita Bicec (FLEX, Moldova) said, "I was surprised that my pumpkin actually came out nice!"



Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood

In Texas, Helen Schmitz (Germany) and Honami Tanaka (Japan) dressed like their favorite story characters for a party at the Stegmans, the hosts for their fellow student Marco Pauli (Switzerland).

Ghouls Night Out

Halloween stories



Ninjas to the Rescue

The Schmitt family showed their Finn student, Roosa Niemi, far right, how Halloween is done in Florida. Even the dog was dressed as a ninjat

Ready, Set, Carve

Indonesian YES student Nabila Izzati wrote, "Most families in America put out super scary decorations, but my host family in Wisconsin tried to make a change with cute decorations and pumpkins. We started by removing the pumpkin seeds, carving with a special knife and then placing candles inside. The candles make the pumpkins look awesome. I was on cloud nine."



First Jack O'Lanterns

With their creations in Alaska are Lucus Russell, Jelena Ristic (A-SMYLE, Serbia), Chanat Wanlayangkoon (Thailand), Makhmud Makhmedov (FLEX, Tajikistan) and Kareem Risha (YES, Palestine).

The Great Pumpkin Patch

In Minnesota, Coordinator Tracy Smith whisked her students off to an authentic pumpkin patch so they could find the perfect gourd. Pictured are Shirin Bakirdinova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), Erika Krismayanti (YES, Indonesia), Shayam Qureshi (YES, Pakistan), Yuliya Shmakova (FLEX, Russia), Moniruj Dhrubo (YES, Bangladesh) and Momen Salama (YES, Egypt).



Less Calories, More Fulfilling

In Montana, Amanda Hemlin from Sweden and her host brothers trick-or-treated for cows. More precisely, they asked for coins to help South Dakota ranchers who have suffered this year. Host mother Shayla Cox was proud to say they encouraged others to participate, too.

The Funniest Girl

Lily is the funniest girl ever. She is very opened minded and welcomes a good challenge. Lily loves to talk about her homeland. She's talked about her birthplace, Ohrid, and where she lives now, Kichevo. She told us about some of the struggles of her county and about the capitol of Macedonia – Skopje. She's talked about the religious differences between the various groups in her country. We are learning that although Lily is from a different part of the world, she is a lot like most American children. We are very happy to have Lily as a member of our family.



Got a Big Sister?

Kori Maple, age 6, now has two! She is pictured with Karin Watanabe from Japan, one of the two exchange students living with her family in Monon, Indiana this year. Host mother Cheri Maple writes, "They keep us laughing. They are always doing something spontaneous and they are always laughing and smiling. We just love them."

The Sukon family, hosts for Lebishka Seloska (YES, Macedonia) El Paso, TX



NEW HAMPSHIRE

Although Coordinator Linda Coffrey's students were socked in with fog during their hike, that didn't stop the good times. On top of the mountain are Sofie Arendshorst (Netherlands), Luisa Zimmer (Germany), Karima Omurova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), Lea Peiffer (Belgium), Lajla Ivanisevic (A-SMYLE, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ann-Laure Simon (Belgium), Miljana Mladenovic (A-SMYLE, Serbia), Febriani Rahmawati (YES, Indonesia), Imane Kassab (YES, Morocco) and Kiuru Kanyi (YES, Kenya).

IDAHO

It is interesting in Idaho because in so many ways it's exactly the same as in Germany, but then there are things that are the total opposite. One big difference is religion because most of the people here are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. So even the youth are very religious and enjoy the church. This is really different from my home country, but I think it's a really good thing. Church here is so different. For some of you it might sound weird, but yes, I am always excited and happy to go to church on Sundays, to learn something new about this religion and join the several activities it offers. I accepted the church as a big part of the culture here in Southeastern Idaho. Idaho already feels like a second home to me and I love being here.

Chiara Eidenmüller (Germany)

Hosted by the Bevan family
Blackfoot, ID



KANSAS

Claudia Solis Perez (Mexico) and host sister Brooke Wheeler are pictured at a family wedding they attended.

MICHIGAN

My host family is very open-minded. They help me the many times I need help with my lessons. They also tell me about Americans and let me know more about traditions.

Pimchanok Ruangket (Thailand)

Hosted by the Soltis family
North Adams, MI



Ana Calvo Monreal (Spain) with the Speller family in the Houston, Texas airport.

MISSISSIPPI

I really like school because people are so friendly. I am involved in great clubs where I am learning how events are planned and how everyone works as a team. My host sister, Alivia, is very involved in her community and state, and I am on the go every day of the week and most weekends. I have adjusted to eating and changing clothes in the car! The U.S. is very "instant". Even baking cookies is "instant". I haven't seen flour and sugar yet!

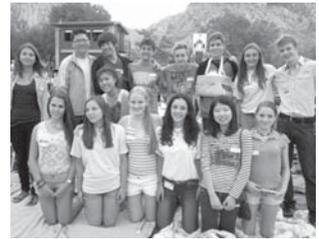
I never dreamed I'd be able to go to the

Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. It was AWESOME! I have also attended a "Color Run", parades, including the school homecoming parade, ballet events, and so much more.

When I first came to America, I knew what job career I wanted, but now, I'm not so sure what I want to do. This experience has allowed me to learn so much about life long decisions

Tatjana Pfeiffer (Germany)

Hosted by the Roberts family
Shannon, MS



NEVADA

In late August, fifteen PAX students and their host families got to know each other at a picnic and theater performance of "Legally Blond". Top row: Kristina Cabalova (Slovakia), Junkai Xie (China), Taehoon Roh (South Korea), Cao Ferreira (Brazil), Jan Koehl (Germany), Yannick Mausbach (Germany), Rocio Martin (Spain) and Pieter Buis (Netherlands). Bottom row: Alina Michel (Germany), Charlotte Witzel (Germany), Nuttanicha Yasamut (Thailand), Johanna Gummel (Germany), Marta Hernanz Marijuan (Spain), Yun Kyung Shin (South Korea) and Lucia Garcia Ruiz (Spain).

MONTANA

What surprised me here was the people. They were so nice and welcoming. They made me feel so at ease within the first week. Now I can call it "home". Life here is quite different from Peshawar in Pakistan, but since I adjusted I don't even notice the difference.

As soon as I started at Charles M. Russell High School, I joined the soccer team. It is by far the best decision I have made so far. It helped me socialize and make very good friends. The road trips were full of fun and I got to see other cities.

The nicest things my host family has done is bought really nice clothes for me for my birthday and then took me on a road trip to Gibson Reservoir in the Rocky Mountains. It is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen in my life.

Asad Khattak (YES, Pakistan)

Hosted by the McLaughlin family
Great Falls, MT



INDIANA

Pakistani YES student Raja Khan, second, painted his face to show his school spirit at the North White High - West Central High School football game! He is pictured with Anastasiya Nalivaiko (FLEX, Kazakhstan), Karin Watanabe (Japan), Coordinator Trudy Krintz and Tetiana Lysenko (FLEX, Ukraine).

WASHINGTON

In school everything is like in the movies, big and very fast paced. Activities require a lot of dedication. I'm on the school dance team. We work hard, but we are a big family. In French Club we had a trip to Spokane to see Les Miserables. Every week there is an American football game, a sport that we don't have in Spain. Teenagers can drive at age sixteen. A lot of things are so different!

My host family took me to Seattle for three days so I could get to know the city. We saw a lot and I had a lot of fun shopping with my host sister!

This experience is teaching me to be more independent, to make an effort to understand people, to be myself, to be open-minded and to try to share the best.

Lucia Calderon (Spain)

Hosted by the Melior family
Kennewick, WA



MAINE

This fall, Leon Szeliga (Germany), Nikita Kirsanov (FLEX, Russia) and Joscha Ansen (Germany) hit the amusement parks. In addition to playing hard, the trio is working hard at school. Host father Gil Roy reports, "They are all great students and have excellent grades. Nikita and Joscha joined the Math Club and Joscha has also joined the jazz band."

ALABAMA

First day in school: Wow, so big. Wow, they all are so different. Teachers are so sweet. Oh, ok, nobody can pronounce my last name, understandable. In fact I can't remember all your names, people. Oh, last period, finally. I have a headache. I couldn't understand anybody.

Now: School is perfect. The one thing that I don't like is waking up early. Finally I can understand people. My family is awesome. Love them!

Iulia Dzechis (FLEX, Moldova)

Hosted by the Scott family
Trussville, AL

TEXAS

The first thing that surprised me was the hot weather in El Paso. I did not expect it to be so hot. At school, I was positively surprised by the students and teachers who try to help me with everything. Otherwise, the life here is almost the same as in my homeland, Macedonia, so with those similarities, it was easy to adjust.

My host family does a lot of good stuff for me. We went to Ice Disney. It was a play with the Disney stars on ice. I had a lot of fun. The show was the one of the greatest things I've done.

This experience is helping me to be more independent, do things by myself, think more and do things right. One year here will help me learn how to make decisions that are the best for me, learn when I can give my opinion, learn how to respect rules and be a good student and person.

Lebishka Seloska (YES, Macedonia)

Hosted by the Sukon family
El Paso, TX



Febriani Rahmawati (YES, Indonesia), host mother Susan Dawson and Karima Omurova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan) at the Boston, Massachusetts airport.



Host mother Kathleen Stuffer and Ann Arkhipova (FLEX, Russia) at the Houston, Texas airport.

NEW MEXICO

Lots of things are different from my home country. In New Mexico spicy food is common. When I first tried it, I thought I had a fire in my mouth!

People here are different too. They say "Hi!" to a person walking in the street that they have never seen. It doesn't mean that people in Azerbaijan are not hospitable; on the contrary, the most significant feature of our nation is hospitality. It's just not common to greet strangers.

Everything in America is great in size: crockery, houses (we live in smaller apartments) and schools. My U.S. school has more than 1000 students while my school in Azerbaijan has 300 students.

For Americans it's common to have dogs for pets. People in Azerbaijan usually don't have pets, especially dogs. That's why in my first days here I was a little bit afraid when dogs came close to me and licked me. But now I like it.

The thing that I like the most in America is this feeling of freedom.

Lala Guliyeva (FLEX, Azerbaijan)
Hosted by the Monserrat family
Santa Fe, NM



GEORGIA

Coordinator Frankie Green's students dug into a gigantic pizza after spending the day playing putt-putt golf, arcade games and laser tag. Pictured are Pakjira Sanitsom (Thailand), Gonzalo Banon (Spain), Jenny Deubel (Germany) and Marie Groening (Germany).

COLORADO

The first thing my family did was take me up to the mountains. I enjoyed it so much as the view was so pretty. They also really understood that I was tired from travelling.

I went for the first time in my life to a church with my family. I loved how welcoming they were there. On that day the priest prayed for Egypt.

My sister is helping me to get involved in a lot of activities with her friends. I'm really enjoying my stay here in this community with my host family and with the nice people all around here, whether in my school or in the neighborhood.

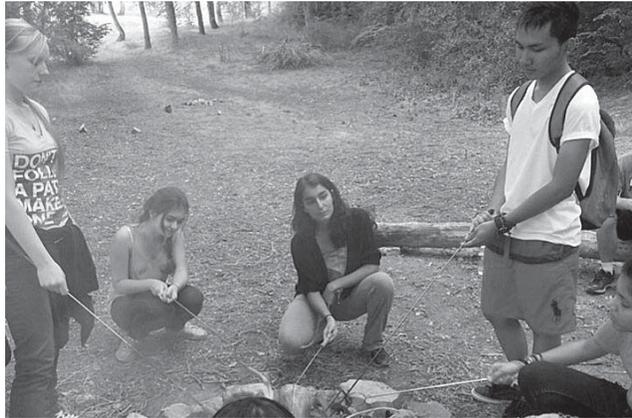
Even though I'm still in the beginning of my experience I can feel how I have changed a lot to become a more responsible person.

Basma Abdeen (YES, Egypt)
Hosted by the Schulte family
Fort Collins, CO



Nino with her high school principal

GOING PLACES



UTAH

"Dude! It's fun!" said one of the exchange students. It was the 21st of September when we set off for a hike to Pleasant Grove. It was organized by our local coordinators, Laurie Wilkinson and Ron Squire. We got to know each other and made friends. We went up the mountain and enjoyed an amazing view of a waterfall. The view of Utah Lake was breathtaking. After

the hike, we came down for a campfire with barbecued hotdogs and other stuff as well. It was, indeed, fun to spend time with the other exchange students who represented their countries, to learn about them and their culture, and to teach about mine.

Aleena Khan (YES, Pakistan)
Hosted by the Taula family
West Jordan, UT



VERMONT

Coordinator Kelley Cartularo and her students spent the day at the ECHO Lake Aquarium & Science Center. The teens were fascinated to learn that there are dozens of shipwrecks on the bottom of Lake Champlain, making the area an attraction for shipwreck divers. Pictured are Ana Garcia, Simona Rahi (YES, Lebanon), Regina Zummarrago Rosada (Mexico), Alix Lebaudy (France), Louise Barrabe (France), Mikel Perez (Spain), Amal Tili (YES, Tunisia), Pauline Hawig (Germany), Anna Benet-Bautista (Spain), Irene Gomez de Salaz (Spain), Philipp Puender (Germany) and Ahmed Aly (YES, Egypt).

OHIO

Westerville is a big city compared to mine. Everything is huge: the supermarket, the mall and the parks. I love it but the difficulty is that everything is far away. You can't walk there. My family is so kind and they always give me rides. They are the best family ever. One Saturday they wore the traditional clothes I brought them to church. Everybody asked me about Tunisia and I had a great time talking to them.

My family made me a big surprise. They are going to take me to Florida for Christmas and Boston and New York for Thanksgiving! I love them so much! I am really glad I was placed in Ohio with them.

Most surprising is that almost nobody here knows about Tunisia and they have a stereotype that all Africans are black and don't use technology or cars. "Do you know what Google is?" "Do you ride camels to school?" I showed him pictures of my school and all the cars in the lot.

Sarah Zaouali (YES, Tunisia)
Hosted by the Thomas family
Vonia, OH

NEBRASKA

Lots of things at my American high school are different from my country's. In class students ask questions about whatever they don't know, and they talk a lot like a debate. When sport teams have a game, they dress up or wear the school colors. Though we have dress code, I think there is a lot of freedom. The students wear whatever they like for clothes, jewelry and make up. At lunchtime, many students eat out or go back to their homes by their cars. This is what I am surprised and impressed with the most: students driving to school in America. It seems so cool to me.

Homecoming was awesome. During Spirit Week, the themes were superheroes, tacky, teachers and Throw Back Thursday. Actually, I felt a little embarrassed to dress up, but this is an experience that I can't do in my country, so I really enjoyed it. In my high school in Japan, we don't have dance parties, so I was nervous. But when I saw that everyone enjoyed dancing, I did too.

I've found many other differences. In the way of communication, it's important to share how you think and feel. If you don't do that, it is assumed that you don't feel anything about the situation. This way is totally different. In my country, sometimes it is thought that if you don't say anything, you can be understood. Sometimes I have difficulties with this.

Tomoko Kanke (Japan)
Hosted by the Graham family
Gering, NE

MISSOURI

I am here surrounded by amazing people. My first day was a little bit scary, but everyone helped me destroy my fears. What I was afraid of most was the first day at school. I thought there would be popular cliques and if I wasn't like them, then I would just have to stay away from them. That is what you see in movies. But I was totally wrong. My first day at school was one of my best days. Everyone was so friendly and eager to introduce a new world to me. In truth, I don't like weekends because I miss school, my friends and even my teachers.

Nino Lortkipanidze (FLEX, Georgia)
Hosted by the Nelson family
Richland, MO

OREGON

The school is so different from Belgian school. It's so much fun. Homecoming Spirit Week was just cool! Each day had a different theme. The homecoming assembly and parade were nice, too. After it was the football game with the prince and the princess. So American! I loved it. It was like the movies! And finally, there was the homecoming dance. The music was truly different from the music in Belgium and I didn't know how to dance to it. But when you are with your friends, it's always fun!

I'm really lucky to be in this town and in this family! I'm feeling like a real member of their family. I just want to thank them for all they do for me.

Céline Bonjean (Belgium)
Hosted by the Hiller Bielec family
Ashland, OR



FLORIDA

On Treasure Island are Kalyarat Jullapak (Thailand), Yan Li (China), Thanatchaporn Srichaphan (Thailand), Lea Hermange (France), William Nielsen (Sweden), Pablo Fuste (Spain), Pablo Ayo Trujillo (Spain), Justin Kronenberg (Germany), Pauline Weggen (Germany), Leire Erdociain (Spain), Roosa Niemi (Finland) and Coordinator Karen Rose.



The Color Run

In Mississippi, German Tatjana Pfeiffer, center, and host sister Alivia Roberts, fourth, participated in the Color Run. Minutes after this photo was taken, their pristine outfits were doused with colored powder.

Now a Football Fan

What surprised me most about school is that school is not just a place to study. It's the place where students spend most of their time doing sports and different kinds of activities. Many teenagers are busy with sports that they practice for two hours after school.

Sport is very popular among schools, especially American football! Before I had no idea about the game, but now I know everything about it. Every Friday we go to a game since my host brother plays. It is wonderful to watch and cheer your team.

Shirin Bakirdinova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Heimer family
Elkton, MN

Mitts Up!

In Houston, Texas, twenty exchange students learned about America's favorite pastime at an Astros baseball game that they attended with their host families and PAX Coordinators Sondra McPoland and Kristy McAuliffe. Everyone enjoyed the traditional stadium fare: all-you-can-eat popcorn, peanuts, hotdogs and nachos!



Conquered Fear

It was really hard to say goodbye to my family. The first week was the worst week ever. I think that is how it happens to every exchange student, even though the host family that receives you is really good. You just feel bad and homesick. Now that I'm used to it, I love this little town, the people in it, my school, my host family and my friends. But at the same time I also miss everything. That is how it can be. You're not sad or happy or excited or tired or scared, etc. You feel everything at the same time.

Guillermina Nicola (Argentina)
Hosted by the Knecht family
Antonito, CO



History Comes Alive

Dany Saputra poses by a tank at a World War II historical vehicles exhibit and airshow. He also met WW II veterans. The Chapman family hosts the Indonesian YES student in Orange, Massachusetts.

Seizing the Moment

A couple things have surprised me. Because Russia is the largest country in the world, I found it unusual that a lot of teenagers don't know where my homeland is on the map. I also found it amazing that American schools have their own clubs and sports. All of these activities provide young adults the opportunity to express themselves and develop leadership skills.

As for me, I joined the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) club, Yoga Club and the LION's club youth organization called LEO (Leadership Experience Opportunity). I also took dance classes and joined a dance club. I was pleasantly

surprised by how much I enjoy dance and how much my dancing has improved since I started with my dance teacher. We've already had some dance performances, including an important one called GALA on November 2. All of these performances require dedication and it has been a really challenging experience.

Sofya Ulanova (FLEX, Russia)
Hosted by the Lucas family
Palm Coast, FL



Sofya with her host parents



Bringing the World Into the Classroom

Indiana Coordinator Trudy Krintz thanks McCutcheon High School Principal John Becker for welcoming eight PAX exchange students into the student body this year: Doğukan Dogan (YES, Turkey), Niklas Holt (Germany), Marc Lopez Ventura (Spain), Filip Krstovic (A-SMYLE, Montenegro), Lukas Herb (Germany), Beatrice Martin (Italy), Mari Morikawa (Japan) and Pau Amo Riola (Spain).

A Soccer Success

Before I got here, I thought that Americans didn't like football because they have their own "football", but I was wrong. My school's soccer team is really good, so I was very excited to join it. They gave me a jersey. It felt good because I have been playing soccer for seven years but have never worn a jersey! Soccer practice was tougher than I had expected. I worked hard every day and tried my best not to skip any practices. As a result, I notice progress in my skills and fitness level. I found out that although soccer is not America's favorite sport, they are really good at it, and I discovered that sacrifice brings success. It was a terrific experience to be on the team. Perhaps when I go back, I can teach my friends at home some new things in soccer that they had never been aware of.

Karim Al Harake (YES, Lebanon)
Hosted by the Fournier family
Orange, MA



Lyubov Mylymuk is on the far right.

Marching Forward

At Cheboygan Area High School in Michigan we have 15 exchange students. All of us participated in the parade before the homecoming game. We were so proud to carry our national flags and be ambassadors of our countries. We smiled at everyone, gave high fives and just enjoyed the time. The parade connected us to people and it was something new for us.

It is only our second month here, but we have already found best friends, very nice teachers and other people, who always support us, help us to adapt, give us love and unforgettable memories. It is so fun and interesting to teach people some words in our languages, to share our culture and to immerse ourselves in the American lifestyle.

Lyubov Mylymuk (FLEX, Ukraine)
Hosted by Cavitt family
Cheboygan, MI

The Key to Happiness

I really like the American approach to learning. It is unusual but very interesting and effective. We talk about the important issues facing our world in my classes.

Once we had a conversation about what is happiness and what it means to us. The teacher asked us to make a collage with pictures that make us happy. Most students used pictures of food, social networks and clothes. My collage differed because I enclosed the photos of the most important people in my life, not things.

So, what makes this Ukrainian exchange student feel happy? I believe that only you can make your life better, all is in your hands, but you should be grateful for your life to your parents. Also learning something new and interesting, helping others, volunteering, reaching important goals and such simple but integral things as friends, animals and travelling make me feel happier.

However, I must also mention my second family with whom I am very close. They are the people who opened their door, gave me a shelter, teach me, entertain me, do their best so that I can feel good and comfortable. I say "thank you" to them because this family makes me feel extremely happy!

Think. What makes you feel happy?
Yuliya Petruk (FLEX, Ukraine)
Hosted by the Hoople family
Hortonville, WI

Nature's Wonders

Within 24 hours of their arrival in Anchorage, Chanut Wanlayangkoon of Thailand and FLEX student Makhmud Makhmedov of Tajikistan went on a cruise to see one of Alaska's most popular sites, the Portage Glacier! The students shout out their heartfelt thanks to host parents Marsha and Bill Spencer-Morgan.



Nourishing Others and Ourselves

Every Monday and Thursday night in Orange, Massachusetts, Winston Chayee, far right, and his fellow exchange students serve dinner to 60 seniors, most of whom live alone. One of the key organizers of these community suppers is Winston's host father, Cliff Fournier. The Liberian YES student urges every student to get involved in service projects. He explains, "I learn the culture of Americans by working with them and having fun together." For Winston, community work is also a way to thank the people who volunteered their services that ultimately enabled him to come on exchange.



Making the Grade

Coordinator Laura Puckett congratulates Alexandra Chitadze on her award for outstanding achievement at Hedgesville High School. The Fodor family hosts the Russian FLEX student in West Virginia.



Dance Fever

Patricia Meinking earned a very coveted spot on The Woodlands High School dance team, a nationally recognized troupe. The McPoland family hosts the German student in The Woodlands, Texas.



One Pitch at a Time

Russian FLEX student Alina Golubtsova, left, joined her school softball team. She is hosted by the Wilburn family in Holdenville, Oklahoma.

A Bird's Eye View

It's football season. When the school searched for someone to videotape the games and practices, I volunteered. So far, I love what I do. The football players are very friendly and funny as I get to know them. The coaches are also very friendly and say "nice job up top" when the game is over. One even lent me a home jersey to wear at the games and at school when there's a home game. It says number 34. They also gave me a very nice sweatshirt with a school logo on the front and the team name and also my name on the back.

I always say "I have the best seat in the game" even though I'm standing and videotaping the game up in the press box. The best things that I see up there filming are the touchdowns and the fans cheering on both sides of the field.

Datu Yoseff Pendatun (YES, Philippines)
Hosted by the Chapman Family
Orange, MA



On Stage

Pieter Buis, on the right, was one of two male cast members in *The Odd Couple* at his school in Las Vegas, Nevada. Coordinator Margaret Hoppe says the Dutch teen's commanding stage presence stole the show from the leading ladies! Special thanks go to his hosts, the Leonards, for getting Pieter to and from rehearsals.

Bursting with Spirit

Because of the spirit here at school, it is way more than just a place to learn. Of course you are studying in school but after school you can also be part of a team. About every three months there are dances and competitions. We were really surprised about the strong patriotism here, which we really like. The people here highly identify with their country and also their school. You can feel that best on a sports team and at the football games. I (Johann) played soccer for three months and I have never seen such team spirit and solidarity. It was amazing. The best thing our host family has done so far was a three-day trip to Yellowstone. It is the most impressive place we have ever seen. We are really glad to be able to have this experience here.

Johann Müller (Germany) and
Tamara Mirkovic (Serbia)
Hosted by the Thomson family
Blackfoot, ID



Way to Go, Rocío!

"I joined the cross-country team at Basic High School, and because of my good times, I was chosen to go to Costa Mesa, California for a cross-country race," Rocío Martin (Spain) tells us. "There were 300 high school students running, so I was very happy when I won a medal!" The Jaramillo family hosts the champion runner in Henderson, Nevada.



Department of State Chooses PAX Student for Honorable Mention

Congratulations to Ajit Singh from India who was chosen in October for an Honorable Mention by the Department of State. Since coming to the United States he has enthusiastically sampled new sports and activities, excelled in school and extracurricular activities and made many new friends. As an outstanding YES ambassador, he has done 30 hours of community service and given presentations on his home country.

In August, Ajit, who is blind, attended the orientation given by Mobility International, USA in Oregon, where he thoroughly enjoyed a ropes course in the woods, gardening and riding a tandem bike. After he arrived in his host state of Indiana his host family took him kayaking, canoeing, apple picking, rock climbing, horseback riding and on many other adventures. Ajit writes that these experiences opened "a new world" to him. As a student at the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ISBVI), Ajit has participated in the Chess Club, shot put and was elected vice president of the Student Council. In addition, he has earned an A+ in all his exams so far. He has enjoyed giving presentations on India in which he has discussed topics such as religions, languages, festivals, spicy food, sports, history and the federal system. Through the challenges he has met in the United States, Ajit writes, he "discovered a new independence and strength" in himself.

The Cooper family hosts Ajit in Noblesville, Indiana.

Global Teacher

Andrija Vujovic didn't wait until International Education Week, November 18-27, to start educating his community on Serbia. In October, he gave a presentation on Serbia to the Kiwanis Club. The A-SMYLE student lives with the Blunt family in Lee's Summit, Missouri.



Azat, second, at his homecoming dance

A Self-Directed Education

The education system in Kyrgyzstan and here is very different. I go to the Linworth Alternative Program. I was amazed by the absence of special uniforms and the right to choose subjects. In my country each subject is 45 minutes and between subjects we have 5 minutes free. In my American school, subjects continue for 90 minutes and then we



Another Touchdown!

In Shelburne, Vermont, Philipp Puender (Germany) has been having a banner season with the football team. During his first two months, he made three touchdowns! Host mother Holly Fournier also reports that he wore a pink armband during the October games in support of breast cancer research.

Artist in Action

At Bonanza High School I take a design craft class and I love it! My favorite activity is creating things. I made many projects in this class: mixed art, animal models and glass. For the stained glass project, I used models of gothic mosaics from the 12th-15th centuries. I got an award certificate for this project. I'm so proud of it!

Nuttanicha Yasamut (Thailand)
Hosted by the Nash family
Las Vegas, NV



More Than a Meal

Meals on Wheels is an organization that provides hot meals to seniors who no longer have the ability to make their own. On October 11, Boryun Kwon (South Korea), Maryna Titarenko (FLEX, Ukraine), Supawadi Tse (Thailand), Mervnur Cavdar (YES, Turkey), Yalonvenko Yekaterina (FLEX, Kazakhstan) and myself went to the Meals On Wheels Dining Center in Multnomah Village. This four-hour service project made my day complete, and I realized how wonderful it feels to help people in need. Seeing others smile because you helped them and made them feel that they are not alone is the BEST feeling you can have.

Sittie Ayeenah Arindig (YES, Philippines)
Hosted by the Karlsen family
Portland, OR



Ahead of the Pack

Emely Aalbers has been winning races and clocking her personal best times with the Jefferson High School cross-country team! The Vanaman family hosts the German teen in Lafayette, Indiana.



Next Stop: Wimbledon

Spaniard Pau Amo Riola, right, earned the Most Valuable Player award in tennis! "McCutcheon High School has 2000 students, which makes for stiff competition for anyone!" exclaims his coordinator, Trudy Krintz. The Shisler family hosts Pau in Lafayette, Indiana.



Kicker Shatters Record

Mikel Zuffa of Spain set a new Pedro Menendez High School record for the junior varsity kicker with the highest points in a season! Mikel scored 16 points in four games and was moved up to varsity. The Masters family hosts him in Elkton, Florida.



New Kid on the Block

Mireia Salvador Arrieta (Spain), pictured with the ball, knows her spikes and blocks! She is pretty excited to be on her high school volleyball team and they are even more excited to have her! The Winger family hosts her in Wellington, Kansas.



Suppakit, right, dressed in replica armor with his host family at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival. He also had the chance to ride a camel and eat giant turkey legs.

From Thailand to the Heartland

We've learned many things about our student's country and enjoyed the different meals he has made for us. Suppakit is doing wonderfully at school. Thai students must almost be at college level because it is so easy for him here!

Suppakit is for sure realizing the change in seasons. While in Thailand the low is only around 77 degrees, it has already reached 38 degrees here! We have already lit the wood stove this year. One of Suppakit's chores is to help carry wood in with the rest of the boys for heat.

It is our second year hosting and we love it. Every student is different. Getting to experience the different cultures, foods, clothing, etcetera is great. My kids look at Suppakit just as he was their own brother. They all help each other in the house, and Dylan and Suppakit help each other with homework. I can't wait until the first time Suppakit sees snow. It will be so exciting. Hosting is something I think everyone should at least try. It is such a great experience for your family and the student.

Devin Lara, host mother for Suppakit Krasetrakam (YES, Thailand) Keytesville, MO



More S'mores!

Roasting marshmallows at a family BBQ in Willis Lake, Texas are Jun Kikuchi (Japan), Jian Song (China), Hosung Lee (South Korea) and Ana Calvo Monreal (Spain).

Belgian Delight

We just had our two month anniversary with Céline. She quickly became a wonderful part of our family and together we have developed several new traditions like sharing a favorite song or music video after dinner. She fell in love with pumpkin bread and brought us Belgian chocolate. Giving a student a real American experience is a blast and an honor. Learning more about life for her and her family has been great and sometimes unexpected, too.

We have gotten more involved in the

community since Céline joined us and have had many fun outings. In fact we are doing many more fun and interesting things than we ever found time for in the past. She has proven to be a kind, warm and loving person and we are so lucky to have her as part of our family. We never had children but I would have been so proud to have had a daughter like her - and in a way, we do now. We look forward to seeing her life unfold over the coming years. Thanks, PAX!

Karen Hiller and Mike Bielec, hosts for Céline Bonjean (Belgium) Ashland, OR



Joscha cooks up a lobster like a real Mainer!

Pinch Me

I NEVER expected to be so thrilled with my first exchange student. My 17 year-old young man from Germany has brought so much happiness into my life.

We have been comparing our cultures. One day we went to *The Sausage Kitchen* where they sell all kinds of bratwurst. I had no idea there were so many kinds but with his help we bought some kinds that he recommended and boy, were they delicious!

Another time we bought a large pumpkin for Joscha to carve for the first time. He really enjoyed himself.

The other night I bought three Maine lobsters that he cooked and ate with a little instruction. He heard Maine had the best lobster and agreed after he finished his.

Eunice Spooner, host mother for Joscha Ansen (Germany) Sidney, ME



Yara, center, getting ready to march with flags in the Homecoming parade.

Wrapped Up in Idaho

In the two months since 15-year old Yara Jabbour Al Maalouf has been here, she has immersed herself in challenging classes and clubs such as debate (and was promoted to varsity level right away) and Model United Nations. But she's not only been studying! She participated in the homecoming events at Wood River High School, including the parade where she appeared on a float with other exchange students. She learned to ride a bicycle! She made her first tie-dye shirt. And she's been introduced to the art of pumpkin carving. Yara just started Taekwondo with her host

father and brother. And with her host mother and sister, she joined the Papoose Club, a non-profit organization that promotes and assists educational, cultural, and athletic growth for local children. Yara met Mayor Randy Hall of Ketchum while volunteering at the Papoose Club Pancake Breakfast. It has been a busy two months and we are looking forward to lots more fun and new experiences, like chopping down a Christmas tree in the mountains!

Anna Lutz Mathieu, host mother for Yara Jabbour Al Maalouf (YES, Lebanon) Hailey, ID

Lots of Laughter

Venera has brought so much to our lives. She immediately began teaching us about Kyrgyzstan. The first night in our home she showed us a video and within a couple of days she had prepared a traditional meal for us. She is learning from us as well. Venera says that we laugh a lot more than she expected.

The most enjoyable thing for us is having another child filling our house with love. We love the discussions about traditions. Our son

treats her just like his sister. He makes all sorts of crazy faces and noises. This is just the sort of thing that makes us all laugh. When I ask her if this is like her brother, she says, "Yes, of course." It is refreshing to hear that boys are the same the world over. We are gaining an appreciation for her culture and for our own. We feel like the year is flying by way too fast.

Jennifer Couling, host mother for Venera Ysmailova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan) Hanover, MI

Our Dynamic Duo

The best thing about our students this year is their willingness to try new things. We have gone to Yellowstone for the last six years but this is the first time we have gone camping in the snow. We showed the students how to make snowmen and left them at different spots in the park.

The Thomson family, hosts for Johann Müller (Germany) and Tamara Mirkovic (Serbia) Blackfoot, ID



Johann and Tamara were very grateful for the trip to Yellowstone National Park.

A Magic Moment

When Kate first arrived she enjoyed watching a TV show with us called *America's Got Talent*. She really liked the

teenage magician on it named Collins Key. She would say he is cute and would always smile when we talked about him. Well, a couple of weeks ago my husband saw that *America's Got Talent* was coming to Birmingham



Celebrity Collins Key with Kate

with a live show and who was one of the performers? Collins Key! So, even though her birthday was almost two months away, we purchased the tickets with the post-show "meet and greet" for her as a birthday present. She was excited when we gave the tickets to her but she was even more excited the day of the show. After the amazing show we got to meet the performers, even Collins Key! We talked with him for a minute. He is part Ukrainian and Polish, just like Kate. We think it is a match made in heaven!

Christi Wilson, host mother for Kateryna Belyayeva (FLEX, Ukraine) Helena, AL



We are Family

I really love my host family and school. My mom drives me to school and picks me up everyday. And she also takes me swimming after school. My dad teaches me about words. My sisters are very nice to me. They're all cute. I'm very happy with them. One thing that really impressed me is when my mom found me a date for the Homecoming dance.

Warisara Sooksnguan (Thailand) Hosted by the Lee family Washington, UT

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