Community Impact

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In Your Own Words: Community Impact

FLEX students have left their mark on their many United States host communities. Here are some of the wonderful contributions they have made.

Nicoleta Paladi
Moldova | Saratoga Springs, UT

When I came to America I was struck by people's openness and attitude to someone they had just met. I could not comprehend why everyone was smiling at me and asking “how are you,” but after some months I became one of them, and the number of things that I came to understand about ethics, social life, people, and change is endless.

I want to study International Law and Political Science. In Moldova there is a parliamentary republic, but here exists the concept of federalism, the Bill of Rights, the constitutional clauses, and so on. Also, in my high school I represent the Model United Nations Club, and this is a great opportunity for me to see Americans’ point of views in international issues. I was excited to meet Utah’s 4th district representative Jim Matheson who came to our high school.

Lastly our group of exchange students (representing nine countries) visited the Utah State Capitol. I loved the fact that the Senate and House of Representative sessions are opened to the public. We watched the process of passing a bill and I was struck by how the name of every politician appeared on the screen as soon as s/he voted. We met the lobbyists whose work reminded me of the power of persuasion, and Utah’s Attorney General, who as all the others impressed me by being down-to-earth, funny and serious in the same time, which is totally different from what I expected public figures to be. I will always be pleasantly surprised by Americans’ relaxed but at the same time engaged attitude in their work and personal life.

Having a chance to be here is a proof of deep human and cultural respect between countries, and a demonstration of unity even across oceans.

Anna Ereshchenko
Russia | Pearland, TX

I had the most amazing weekend in my entire life at the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards Camp. We had a unique opportunity to talk with the Rotarians who do an incredible job all over the world with their amazing projects. My favorite saying is “think globally, act locally.”

Anton Asylgareyev
Russia | Troy, NY

One of my volunteer experiences is working in a kindergarten class. It was really interesting to work with them as teacher. I was really amazed by my host mom, who works as a kindergarten teacher every day. It is a really tough work, and I really appreciate what all teachers do due to show and teach us something new.

Nurbakhsh Sabzaliev
Tajikistan | Des Moines, IA

To collect money for homeless and build community awareness about youth homelessness, 15 of us exchange students from nine countries built a house from cardboard in the Drake University football field. We then spent the night inside it.
My nice host mom is the president of the Autism Society in Ohio. Her organization holds a lot of sports and entertainments events for people with autism. It has changed my stereotypes about people with disabilities. In my country we have about 130,000 people who don’t have the same access to public transport or education system. I am proud of my country, but we still have some problems like the absence of equality between different people that I hope will change.

My friend’s mother works in a local museum in Brooklyn and let me raise the Tajik flag. This gave me so much pride and meant so much for me, because I don’t want only to represent my country but I also want to build good relationships between my country and other countries including the United States, the country that is hosting me and helping me to get so much knowledge. That day I took the first steps to building the base of my future profession, representing my country and building good relationships between all countries!

I want to say that it is only in the United States that I have understood what is it really means to be a volunteer. My volunteering experience at the Idaho Youth Ranch (IYR) has changed my life. I also volunteer at the Meridian Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council (MYAC). After everything I’ve done, I think I am ready to go back to my home country of Azerbaijan and be an ambassador of my country.

My American experience is wonderful so far, and I am happy being a part of United States culture and society. I get to see the life of Americans from the inside and this makes the huge difference between us exchange students and the usual tourists who come to see American life.

I have had the chance to volunteer in different community service projects, and I also got to visit the state Capitol with my Government class this February. Community service is an integral part of my exchange year. I have a goal to do over 100 hours of service. I always feel eager to help people without expecting anything in return. Why? Because I feel thankful to those people who have welcomed me here as a guest for a year and are so friendly to me. I learn about the United States and its culture from them; they share everything with me, so why would I not share my own culture, my own appreciation and help with them. This is such an easy way to show your gratefulness! And I feel happy about it. Even those small hardships which take place from time to time during our staying here, they cannot cover all the happiness we have inside!

Such student exchange programs as FLEX, who I am the finalist of, are extremely important and helpful and I feel happy to be a part of this!
Global Youth Service Day: April 11-13, 2014

Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) has come and passed. How did you participate in the largest service event worldwide? What will you do next year? Send your stories to raills@americancouncils.org. If you would like to learn more about GYSD visit www.gysd.org to learn about projects in your area. You can also post and share your own story, recruit volunteers, and be included in the GYSD regional and global project totals.

2014 Workshop for Youth Leaders in Teaching English (WYLTE) Highlights

The Workshop for Youth Leaders in Teaching of English (WYLTE), a program of the United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) was held in Washington, DC, March 30 - April 5, 2014. WYLTE hosted twenty-eight A-SMYLE, FLEX, and YES students and built on their United States experience through an intensive, week-long training program. Workshop sessions cultivated skills specific to teaching English, such as student-centered methodology, effective use of technology, classroom management, organization skills, and session design and delivery. Students also developed and practiced skills in public speaking, team-building, and goal-setting. WYLTE alumni are expected to return to their countries and organize English teaching opportunities in their home communities. The twenty-eight participants are from 19 countries: Armenia, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Yemen. Most have taught or tutored English in some capacity -- as individual tutors, teaching assistants, and substitutes, in children's programs, high school classes and clubs, and English Olympiads. Participants described a shared goal of giving back to their home countries through teaching and tutoring.
Going Home: Travel Info

You will be receiving your return travel packets soon! If you don’t receive a return travel packet ONE WEEK prior to your scheduled departure date, you MUST contact your placement organization and ask them for information.

TOP 3 FLEX TRAVEL MISTAKES

DO NOT LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU!

1. Leaving home without your PASSPORT
2. Leaving home TOO LATE and missing your flight
3. Missing your flight and LEAVING THE AIRPORT without getting a new flight assignment. (Do not leave the airport! Call us at 800-841-6460 for rebooking help!)

 Advice from You

Time flies! You have already been living and studying in the United States for eight months, and soon you will return home. At the same time, students across Eurasia are now being notified that they will be members of the 2014-15 FLEX class. In just a few short months, they will be attending a Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) to prepare for their year in the United States, just like you did almost one year ago. Think back on your time in America...What have you learned that might be helpful, constructive advice to share with these new FLEX-ers? Send your thoughts to: raills@americancouncils.org

Dear FLEX 2013-2014 students:

With the help of our website at flex.americancouncils.org you will be able to get the latest information about your travel such as:

• Airline contact information
• Baggage information
• Country-specific travel notes
• Return travel FAQs
• Security and packing tips
• Travel emergency and other guidelines

We encourage you to visit the website and wish you a nice trip home!

Your return travel packet includes:

• Your electronic ticket
• Three FLEX baggage tags
• A check for your second checked bag*
• FLEX travel brochure
• A memo to your host family
• A letter from the Alumni Coordinator in your home country
• Alumni brochure
• Home addresses of students from your country

*FLEX does not pay for a third checked bag or any overweight/oversize charges
100 FLEX students from across the United States came to Washington, DC to participate in the 20th year of the Civic Education Week (CEW). Students learned about “first freedoms,” universal rights, grassroots engagement, and many other valuable concepts. These ideas were explored through a series of engaging and interactive activities and meetings with special guest speakers including:

**Visit to the Newseum including a Media Ethics Seminar**
Students explored the impact that media has had in history around the world, and learned about the ethical issues that journalists face.

**Alumni Leadership Discussion**
FLEX alumni Laylo Sabzalieva ’07 (California/Tajikistan), Natia Sharikadze ’08 (Michigan/Georgia), and Ksenia Chonii ’07 (Iowa/Ukraine) spoke to the students throughout the week about their successes as alumni and how to become engaged in their communities.

**United States Department of State Briefing and Panel Discussion**
The students had the chance to ask questions of policy experts and take part in a “reverse panel” whereby the experts quizzed the students about their experiences in the United States.
Visit to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Students had the opportunity to ask Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis, Director of the Global Women’s Leadership Initiative and Alison Byrsk, Professor at the University of California Santa Barbara, questions about gender equality in governments and civic organizations worldwide.

Hill Day
Students spent the day on Capitol Hill meeting with the staff of the senators and representatives of their host communities. The meetings with staff stretched to 45 minutes as the staffers were extremely impressed to hear FLEX students’ views on the United States and the world.

Grassroots Project Development
Students divided into groups to reach consensus on identifying an important issue. Each group then outlined options to address the problem along with potential outcomes, and developed a corresponding action plan. Working as a team, students developed realistic and creative ways to market their plans and make them a reality.
Tsiala, a World Link student from Georgia, is committed to sharing Georgian culture and traditions with her host community, school, family and friends. In all, she has given 25 presentations, during which she performed traditional dances and shared her favorite Georgian recipes and dishes. Tsiala is an excellent student and is a member of the Future Business Leaders of America, Key Club, Interact Club and Red Cross Club.

Tsiala’s dedication does not stop there, she is quick to seek out volunteer opportunities and enjoys finding new and interesting ways to volunteer in her community; so far she has served 188 community service hours. She works with a variety of organizations, but most of her time is spent helping in the Rescue Mission where she sorts donated clothing and distributes them to residents in need. She also sorts food and serves meals in a food kitchen.

During the holiday season, to bring joy to less fortunate children and families she volunteered at a local church to decorate cookies and wrap presents for a free toy giveaway. On Christmas Eve she worked in the Interact Club Christmas store where she packaged and distributed food donations and helped children choose a special gift for Christmas.

Tsiala is described as a person who finds the positive in every situation. Her local coordinator wrote, “Tsiala appreciates everything about her time in America and recognizes how much others have put into her experience. She exudes joy and enthusiasm for her school, friends, and especially her host family.”

Gavharkhon, a World Link FLEX student from Tajikistan, is committed to all aspects of the FLEX program. She works hard on developing her leadership skills, and is an excellent student as well as a talented singer. Gavharkhon sings at local community events in Tajik and in English, is a member of her school choir, and was selected as a member of the ensemble for High School Musical. In addition to joining the Key Club, Math Club, Math Team, and Pre-law Club, Gavharkhon has also earned a position on her school’s award-winning winter color guard team and recently won the Kiwanis Speaker Award.

Gavharkhon enjoys sharing Tajik culture with her host community and classmates. She even held a party for 30 friends and neighbors and performed traditional Tajik dances, served national food and gave each guest a gift from Tajikistan.

Gavharkhon is a dedicated volunteer; so far, she has worked over 178 hours of community service, which included raising funds for cancer research with the Ribbons of Hope organization and participating in a church fundraiser that raised more than $1000. Gavharkhon also serves food to local residents in need, teaches children in church through puppet shows and volunteers at the veterans’ home and nursing homes by singing, celebrating holidays and giving presents.

She is especially proud of her work with the American Red Cross where she served as a seminar assistant for the Red Cross Fire Safety Fair. Her experiences have inspired her to promote teen volunteerism when she returns home to Tajikistan.
Alumni Spotlight

• **Laylo Sabzalieva ’07, Tajikistan**: Laylo (pictured to the right on www.bradleyherald.com) implemented a community water supply project in Gorno-Badakhshan which brought clean drinking water to town residents for the first time.

• **Dinara Tanasheva ’94, Kazakhstan**: Currently a law partner at Ernst and Young; Dinara is the first Kazakh legal partner among “Big 4” companies in the country.

• **Yulia Simonova ’02, Russia**: Yulia works as an advocate for disability rights and was chosen to light the Paralympics torch in Sochi this year.

Visit [www.bradleyherald.com](http://www.bradleyherald.com) for more inspiration!
Photo Contest
Winners and selected submissions

Holiday Winner!
Thank you all the students that participated by submitted photos for the following categories:
Best Holiday Photo
Best Volunteer Moment
Showing Your School Spirit
Whether or not you are traveling to Washington on June 4 to participate in the June 5 FLEX reception, we ask all interested students, host families and placement organization staff to share with us pictures (with brief descriptions) of the family, school and community service moments that made the biggest impression during this exchange year, to be displayed at the reception. Submissions can be sent to: raills@americanCouncils.org