

A Day of Learning, Skating, and Snowfall Fun

By Karen Joseph, Host Mother and ASSE Area Representative

Our ASSE/World Heritage students from Latvia, Tajikistan, Republic of Georgia, Spain, Germany, and Italy kicked off an unforgettable January day of learning at the US District Court of Western Michigan. The students were immersed in an interactive presentation by defense attorney Nick Dondzila, who demonstrated that serving on a jury is far from boring. They also heard from Federal Magistrate Judge Berens, two Federal Marshals, and a staff member who coordinates jury work.

After the court visit, the group enjoyed delicious empanadas at Pochi's Colombian Cafe before heading to Rosa Parks Circle for ice skating. As snow began to fall, the outing turned into an impromptu sleepover for the Lansing-area kids, making the day even more memorable.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- A Day of Learning, Skating, and Snowfall Fun
- Indonesia Meets Texas: My Story of Gratitude, Friendship, and Fun
- World Heritage Students Highlights
- Photo Gallery
- ... and more

Indonesia Meets Texas: My Story of Gratitude, Friendship, and Fun

Written by Azalea Abdullah, YES Scholarship Exchange Student

Hi, my name is Azalea and I am a 17-year old YES Scholarship exchange student from Indonesia. My journey at Junior Huntsville High School in Texas has been nothing short of amazing! One goal that I have set for myself for my exchange year is to help build an imaginary bridge between the United States and my country of Indonesia, so that we can all gain a better understanding of each other's perspectives about the world.

Since my arrival last August, I've been sharing my Indonesian culture while also embracing Texan traditions. I gave a cultural presentation to over 400 people, taught them traditional dances and songs, and cooked Indonesian dishes like Indonesian fried rice and vegetable fritters for my host family. At the same time, I've enjoyed experiencing Texas culture by wearing mums at football games, eating Whataburger, and watching rodeos with friends.

Studying at Huntsville High School has been so exciting. Because I love trying new things, I've joined several after-school activities. I play golf, help the yearbook team, take culinary classes, and even participate in theatre! Each activity has helped me learn new skills, meet great people, and make wonderful memories.

I am so lucky to have a loving host family. My host parents, Shiloh and Larry Crocker, and my host siblings

make me feel at home and always take me on fun adventures. We love traveling, camping, and hiking together, especially during school breaks. These moments bring us closer and make my exchange year even more special.

I've also been active in my community where I have already completed dozens of volunteering hours. I helped at a pumpkin patch with a church youth group (they called me the "Small Mighty One" because I carried so many pumpkins!), and even modeled at an Indonesian festival in Sugar Land.

This exchange program has truly inspired me to dream bigger. The kindness and understanding I've experienced here have shown me how powerful connections between people can be, and it's a lesson I'll carry with me forever.



Editor's Box

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has contributed articles and photos to ASSE News! Your submissions make this newsletter possible. We'd love to hear from you—whether you're a student, host family, or Area Representative. Share your experiences, and you might be featured in an upcoming issue or on our ASSE/World Heritage social media channels. Don't have the time or desire to write an article but still want to share something exciting? No problem! Just email or call us with your news, and we'll take it from there. Photos are encouraged to be sent by email to sgreer@asse.com.

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Looking forward to hearing from you!
Until next edition,
Sonia Greer, ASSE/World Heritage News Editor

Photo Gallery



Meet Arailym (Ari), a FLEX Scholarship student from Kazakhstan, and our volunteering STAR! Ari has already dedicated over 100 hours to community service, making a real impact. From the moment she joined her local Mayor's Youth Council at the start of her exchange program, she has been actively involved in various volunteering events and projects. One of her standout contributions is KnitWits, her own project where she combined her passion for crocheting with a cause. Ari crocheted 35 pairs of cozy socks and hats to help babies in need. Great job, Ari!

Ari is hosted by Marjorie and Bruno Haustein in North Little Rock, Arkansas, who are also hosting Munisa, a FLEX Scholarship student from Uzbekistan. Thank you for supporting these wonderful exchange students!



ASSE Area Coordinator Donna Baldwin and her husband, along with Area Representative Michelle Hatcher, enjoyed the annual community service event where ASSE/WH exchange students, host parents, and host siblings come together to volunteer at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. The event is a highlight not only for the fun of spending time together as a group, but also for the joy of seeing the number of meals they've helped prepare. This year, eight exchange students from seven different countries participated: Jasmina and Mehrinoz (Meri) from Uzbekistan, Altynai from Kyrgyzstan, Simon from Germany, Fahrel from Indonesia, Mihai from Moldova, Nylane from France, and Julia from Poland.



ASSE FLEX Scholarship exchange student Nushin from Tajikistan making a delicious traditional dish called Osh (also known as Plov). It is considered to be the national dish of both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. There is a saying that the one who has managed to cook a real Osh, will be able to cook any other dish.

Nushin is hosted by Area Representative Karen Joseph and her husband Mark, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Thank you ASSE Area Representatives Chan Elder and Eileen Davis for organizing a wonderful trip to the Virginia General Assembly in beautiful Richmond, VA for our amazing FLEX, YES, and CBYX scholarship students. The students had a fantastic time meeting with Senator Lashrece Aird who took time out from her busy day to talk with our students. Our students also had a chance to tour the State Capitol building. They completed their busy day by visiting the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. What a day!

Moritz, a lively 16-year-old ASSE/WH exchange student from Germany, has been enthusiastically volunteering with his host brother's little league teams since his arrival. He quickly embraced the active lifestyle of his host family, Amy and Travis Stevens, of Blanchard, Oklahoma. The community has greatly appreciated his support, and his experience with younger siblings back home, made volunteering feel like second nature to him.



ASSE Area Representative Shares Her Passion for Student Exchange

In its February issue, South Jersey Magazine, a regional lifestyle publication, featured an article on student exchange programs. Our local Area Representative, Eileen Snyder, seized the opportunity to showcase ASSE/WH exchange students. Well done, Eileen! We hope this serves as an inspiration to others to share the incredible work they're doing in their communities, as well as highlight our remarkable exchange students and their wonderful host families.

Eileen Snyder, a resident of Haddon Township, New Jersey, has been on multiple sides of the equation, since she and her husband have hosted several students themselves and she also now serves as one of our dedicated Area Representatives recruiting host families and supporting placements from Cape May to Princeton.

"It was something I always wanted to do," she says of hosting. "I love learning about the different cultures and traditions and holidays, and just what teenagers are like in other countries. As a host and a representative, I've had

students from very exotic places like Serbia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the more traditional European countries like Italy, Spain, Germany, France. It's been quite an education for me, which has been nice".

"It's just a great experience, and all types of people can host students. I don't have children of my own, but as a representative I have hosts with small children, adult children, empty-nesters, same-sex parents. It's a great experience if you have children because they get to learn about other cultures and they get to make a lifelong friendship. I think those are the most successful matches, although I've had families with no children that have been great matches too. ... It's a very unique way to educate your children about other places and other cultures, other types of food, and you really don't have to leave your own home—all of that comes to you. I have seen many strong friendships cultivated that last long after the experience is over, with many hosts visiting their student's home in the future."



Eileen with her husband, Pablo, and their exchange student, Balthasar from Germany

Kameron's Story of the Life-Changing Benefits of Studying Abroad and How She Unlocked a World of Opportunities

Kameron Hillman's journey from a young, driven exchange student to a dedicated military service member is a testament to her passion for cultural exploration, personal growth, and service to her country. Her remarkable journey truly began in 2019 when she became the recipient of the prestigious ASSE Walter Danielsen scholarship, which allowed her to study abroad in Italy with a full scholarship.

Though Kameron's exchange program was unexpectedly cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the six months she spent living in Italy were transformative. Kameron immersed herself in the Italian language and culture, living with a host family and attending a local high school. The experience shaped her in profound ways, influencing both her personal and academic future. A hometown magazine, in Dunkirk, New York, even featured her reflections on her exchange experience, showcasing her growth and maturity. Drawing from her study abroad experience, Kameron wrote *The Exchange Student Survival Guide* in 2021, a comprehensive book filled with advice, stories, and guidance for future exchange students.

Kameron continued to pursue her academic and professional ambitions after returning home. She graduated from Houghton University, double majoring in International Relations and Communications. Knowing how much her high-school foreign-exchange experience had enriched her as a person, she decided to participate in another study abroad program – this time as an Honor Student in London, England. In 2023, Kameron took the next step in her journey by joining the U.S. Army, where she currently serves as a Military Police officer. Her military service has allowed her to continue her travels across the country, gaining valuable life experiences and leadership skills along the way.

Kameron's mother, reflecting on her daughter's incredible accomplishments, believes that her time studying abroad played a significant role in shaping her into the capable, empathetic individual she is today. She says they will forever be grateful to ASSE for giving Kameron the opportunity of a lifetime. "Kameron is the kind of person who will continue to impact the community and the world positively," she said, emphasizing the importance of global connections in helping individuals find their place in the world.

From the moment she set foot in Italy, Kameron embraced every opportunity to immerse herself in new cultures, and her journey continues to inspire those around her. Kameron's story is a powerful reminder of the life-changing potential of studying abroad, and how it can shape not only personal growth but also one's ability to contribute to the broader world.



Kameron is now a proud service member of the US military



Kameron with her host family in Italy.



Kameron enjoying her college scholarship study-abroad opportunity in England.

Be a Shark, Not a Shrimp! My French Exchange Student's Journey in Wrestling

By Rachelle Durrant, ASSE Host Mother and Area Representative

I wanted to share the incredible journey of my French ASSE/WH exchange student, Anissa Laamouri, and her experience with American high school wrestling. Though she had a background in judo from France, Anissa, or Issa for short, had never wrestled before coming to the US. She was open to trying something new—and ended up surprising everyone, including herself.

Issa quickly became a force on the mat. In her very first tournament, she took 3rd place out of 17 girls, and by the end of the season, she had earned a varsity spot on our team and finished with an impressive record. She took 2nd place in the state championship tournament for her weight bracket and was ranked in the top five wrestlers for the state for her weight class. What amazed me most was how she fell in love with the sport, despite only having one season to compete. She's already looking for a wrestling club to join when she returns to France.

Early in the season, Issa earned the nickname "Shark." In her first match against a non-Uintah wrestler, she had a dual with one of the best female wrestlers in Utah. Needless to say, it was a quick match and Issa lost. "I was a shrimp in that match. I need to be a shark, not a shrimp." From then on, "Be a shark, not a shrimp" became our team motto. Anissa fully embraced it, sporting a shark-themed blanket we gave her for Christmas, socks from a teammate, and even choosing the "Jaws" theme for her walkout music.

Watching Anissa grow through this experience has been amazing. It's a perfect example of what exchange is all about—finding new passions and unexpected talents, embracing new cultures, and creating unforgettable memories. I'm so proud of her, and I can't wait to see where this journey takes her next.

Editor's Note: Rachelle and Mark Durrant are also hosting Aziza Ramazan, a FLEX Scholarship student from Kazakhstan.



World Heritage Exchange Students Shine as Local TV Celebrities!



Four World Heritage exchange students at Abingdon High School in Abingdon, Virginia, recently stepped into the spotlight—literally! Lizzie Stampfer from Germany, Zhamila Omorova from Kyrgyzstan, Valentyn Boichuk from Ukraine, and Yuloh Um from South Korea were featured in a special News 5 TV report, highlighting their incredible cultural journey in beautiful Southwest Virginia.

The students shared their unique experiences, from adjusting to cultural differences to getting involved in local activities. Yuloh, who's enjoying the local choir scene, joked about the "height difference" between him and his fellow students. Zhamila enthusiastically spoke about sharing her Kyrgyzstani culture with others, while Valentyn reflected on how eye-opening his time in the U.S. has been, offering a fresh perspective on life far from home.

The TV feature showcased how these students are not only here to learn, but also teaching us about their rich cultures. Their positive energy and passion for their experiences have turned them into local celebrities! Valentyn was even invited by a local radio station for an in-depth interview about his experience in Virginia, the current situation in his home country of Ukraine, and so much more. With all the excitement surrounding them, it's clear that these four are leaving a lasting impact, both in the classroom and on the screen.

A big shout-out to our exchange students for representing World Heritage with pride, as well as to their host families and teachers who are making this unforgettable journey possible! A special thank you goes to Jordan Blackson, World Heritage Area Representative and Social Studies teacher at Abingdon High School, who has hosted 14 exchange students over the past 10 years, including Lizzie and Zhamila!

Adventure, Sunshine, Learning, and Laughter: The Hawaii Experience

ASSE/World Heritage exchange students from across the country set off on an unforgettable adventure to Hawaii, organized by our travel partner, WorldStrides Educational Travel and Experiences, and chaperoned by some of our amazing and dedicated Area Representatives. This incredible trip blended cultural, historical, and natural experiences, offering students valuable lessons that go far beyond the classroom.

The two recent Hawaii trips included visits to significant historical sites, such as the State House and the iconic statue of King Kamehameha. Students were deeply moved by their visit to the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, where they had a chance to reflect on the lasting impact on history. A trip to the Polynesian Cultural Center allowed our students to immerse themselves in the traditions of Polynesian cultures.

Students also had the chance to explore Hawaii's stunning natural beauty. At Kualoa Ranch, known for its Jurassic Park movie scenes, they enjoyed breathtaking views and learned about the area's fascinating history. A visit to Secret Island provided a relaxing day on the beach, filled with activities like volleyball, kayaking, and canoeing. The snorkeling excursion off of the world-famous Waikiki Beach provided many unforgettable moments.

The North American Field Trips offer ASSE/WH Exchange Students invaluable opportunities for personal growth, cultural understanding, and hands-on learning.



BRAVO to Our Courageous Thespians!



We are constantly in awe of our incredible ASSE/WH exchange students, who not only navigate the challenges of adjusting to a new country, community, school, and culture, but do it all while learning in a language that is not their own! And just when we think they can't impress us any more, they step out of their comfort zones and dive headfirst into something truly brave—acting in a school theater production!

It's not surprising there were butterflies in their stomachs before the curtains rose, but we know the sense of accomplishment they felt was worth every nerve. These students are not just learning lines—they're learning resilience, confidence, and the power of expression. Let's give a huge round of applause to some of our budding thespians: Azalea from Indonesia, who shone in her school's production of *The Princess and the Pea*, and Misha from Taiwan, Mean from Thailand, and his host brother, who all brought the magic of *The Lion King* to life at their school!

Bravo to all of our students for proving that the stage is the perfect place to grow, learn, and show the world just how bright they can shine!

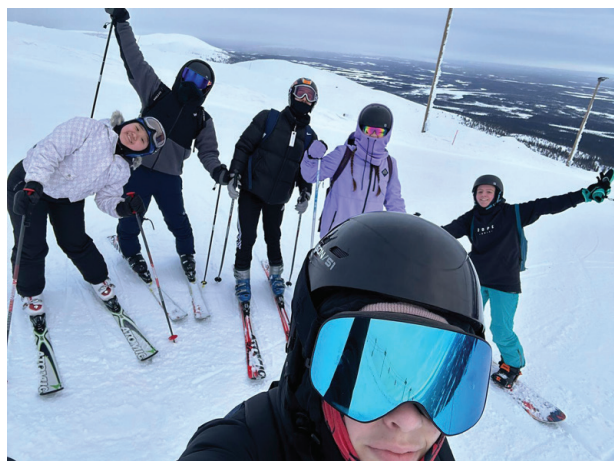


A Finnish Dream Come True!

When most people think about studying abroad, Finland might not be the first destination that comes to mind—but it should be! Finland offers a perfect blend of stunning nature, modern cities, and a world-class education system, making it the ideal choice for your exchange experience.

But don't just take our word for it. Here's what Cecilia, a former ASSE exchange student from Massachusetts, shared about her time in Finland: "I've had so many unforgettable experiences in Finland, including trips with the other ASSE exchange students to Tallinn, Estonia and Lapland. And my host family has been absolutely fantastic; my host mom shares my sense of humor! I especially love taking walks with my host dog, Riku. It's a great way to see the local area and unwind. With my free time, I've joined local theater productions and a badminton club. I've also discovered I love cooking and baking, and have come to appreciate the healthy local palate. My year in Finland has been truly unforgettable. From skiing in Lapland to picking blueberries in the forests, I've met amazing people and learned new traditions. Finland has become a second home to me, and this year will always be one of the best decisions I've made!"

One of the highlights of the study abroad program is the chance to explore Finland's incredible destinations. Recently, our students returned from an epic trip to Lapland, where they visited the Ylläs Ski Resort, known for its beautiful landscapes and great downhill skiing. They were also fortunate to witness the Northern Lights—an experience they'll never forget. Students also explored the Ice Village, a magical place made entirely of ice and snow. And yes, the real Santa Claus lives here in Lapland!



Did You Know?

- Finland has a population of 5.6 million, and 3.2 million saunas!
- It's home to 187,000 islands and 179,000 lakes.

- Finland's education system is world-renowned, and education is free for all!
- Finland has been ranked the Happiest Country in the World for seven years straight.