

YAEP UPDATE

Summer 2015

Our Experience in YAEP By Jarod Yancy, Andrew Yancy, & Ameerah Battle



YAEP Phoenix Students at the Announcement Ceremony

Each year, Phoenix Sister Cities (PSC) requests ambassadors to submit a brief statement of their Youth Ambassador experience. This year, Jarod Yancy, Andrew Yancy, and Ameerah Battle reflect on their summer with the Youth Ambassador Exchange Program (YAEP). Excerpts of their collaboration can be found below:

Jarod Yancy: I am honored to have had the opportunity to be a Phoenix Youth Ambassador and travel to Israel this summer. My Israeli host brother Yuval and his family took me in as if I was one of their own, and they introduced me to their culture in such a way that I now feel a connection to people halfway across the world. The relationships I formed with my fellow Youth Ambassador Jonathan and our Israeli counterparts Yuval and Meiri is a brotherhood that I believe will last a lifetime. . .

Not only was my trip abroad life changing, but the hosting calendar in Phoenix created some of my fondest memories. From bus rides to Disneyland at 2 in the morning, to creating our own prom, to having a pool party at my own home, the experiences

that I was able to have with all of the Youth Ambassadors and their counterparts allowed me to learn about several cultures around the world while simultaneously having the most fun in my life. Every time I hear the song "Stand By Me," I will always think of my international family and the memories we share.

Andrew Yancy: If someone told me a year ago that I would live with a family in the heart of China for three weeks, I would have never believed it. The idea of me traveling so far away from my friends and family to a country so unlike my own, would have seemed too outlandish to my former self. Yet, when the application opened last fall, I took a chance, and I cannot express how glad I am that I made that decision. I would have never guessed that this program would impact my life so greatly. It has made me a more confident, independent, and a culturally-aware person. I have made many friends and memories that will last me a life time, and I am truly thankful for that.

From the moment we stepped off the plane in Chengdu, we were treated like special guests. I could not believe how excited everyone was to meet us! Not only was I welcomed royally by my host brother Chen Long (Mars) and his parents, but also by the entire composition of our counterparts. They held a big party for Allison, Nahti and I at the school to welcome our arrival. During our three weeks we attended school with our counterparts, visited ancient Chinese temples and sites, the famous pandas, toured colleges, and attended the Dragon Boat Festival. My host parents did not speak English, but somehow we were able to communicate in a crazy sort of way. The day I left my host mother came into my room while I was packing, held out her phone and the screen in English said "I will miss you, Andrew".

Ameerah Battle: My trip to Taipei, Taiwan was beyond amazing! I recall sitting on the plane from San Francisco to Taipei, looking out the window, and thinking, "Wow... I can't believe I'm leaving home." While in Taiwan, I most enjoyed exploring Taipei City. My counterpart, Henry, showed me his city through his eyes and we traveled through city streets, visited green mountains, the beach, and many other places. I was educated on Taiwan's history in becoming a country, Taipei's education system and the Chinese language.

The one thing I will cherish the most was my last full day in Taiwan. The last day happened to be my 16th birthday. I have never been away from my family on my birthday but, I got to share it with my new friends from Poland, Latvia and Taiwan. The last day we met city officials and councilmen. Later we went to a lunch with all of the 12 youth ambassadors and their parents. The food was delicious, we laughed and told stories of what had happened within the past two weeks, and then they all surprised me with a birthday cake and gifts. The surprise birthday made me feel like I was at home.

This experience forever changed my life. I have learned so much about cultural differences and recognize that people are more alike than they are different. My host family introduced me to a whole new way of living and I appreciate the opportunity provided to me to bond with people from all over the world. I can now say that I have family from all different walks of life.

"The experiences that I was able to have with all of the Youth Ambassadors allowed me to learn about several cultures around the world while simultaneously having the most fun in my life."

*Jarod Yancy
Ramat-Gan, Israel 2015*

Fun for Everyone: *What it Takes to be a YAEP Family*

While the focus of YAEP is centered on the student and their growth as an ambassador, the program takes commitment, dedication and involvement from the entire family. Parents play a critical role in their child and their foreign counterpart's participation. It is important for the family to remain involved, take ownership of the program, and embrace the sharing of cultures. Throughout the program, each family grows closer and even parents get to enjoy those sweet teenager spoils by volunteering. Below is one parent's remarks on her family's experience with the program.



Victoria Jordan's family in Himeji, Japan



Taipei Cohort Selfie!

Jennifer Grace, parent of Phoenix Youth Ambassador Kyle Grace, reflects that the program allows for parents to discover things about themselves and others. *"YAEP was the busiest, most exciting, fun-filled, memory-making journey for our entire family, not just our ambassador son. The impact of this experience brought together families from all over the world, bonding us forever through the kids laughter, stories, and friendships."*

This sentiment was echoed by many families. One parent said *"my child and his counterpart became like brothers. It was great meeting him. We hope our friendship lasts a life time."* It was a genuine and transformative summer for all involved.

Work Hard to Play Hard

Being a Phoenix Sister Cities Youth Ambassador is not simply a summer vacation or an extended stay from a foreign friend – there is deeper meaning to being a part of YAEP. In order to experience the summer events, the students learn, plan, fundraise and prepare throughout the year for the opportunity to represent the City of Phoenix, the State of Arizona and the United States of America. The process first begins with submission of a detailed application and essay questions. Then, a selection panel of Phoenix Sister Cities representatives and previous YAEP alumni parents review the applications and select qualified candidates to interview.



The YAEP Ambassadors in their Halloween attire



Youth Ambassadors fundraising at a car wash

Once the interviews are completed, the selection process narrows to identify deserving candidates who will serve as Phoenix Sister Cities Youth Ambassadors. Once decision letters are mailed, an announcement ceremony is held, revealing the future travel destinations of the selected ambassadors.

Once the Youth Ambassadors are selected, preparation is vital to enjoying a successful YAEP summer. Throughout their months of preparation, the students attend academy training sessions to expand their knowledge of Phoenix Sister Cities, learn how to actively participate, and how to develop valuable life skills. For example, they learn what is expected when meeting a city official, the importance of punctuality, and even event coordinating.



The YAEP Ambassadors with Chairman Ralph Marchetta, celebrating graduation

A vital component of the preparation process is a heavily involved fundraising effort. This year, the program raised the majority of its funds through a letter writing campaign, car-wash-athon, as well as family organized fundraisers.

In addition, the academy sessions address travel, culture shock, public speaking, homesickness, safety, and budgeting. By participating in

Continued



Andrew Yancy, Allison George, and Nahti Keo pictured in a local newspaper article in Chengdu, China

Wear a Different Suit this Summer *Meeting a City Official*

Sister Cities International emerged from President Eisenhower's vision of achieving peace through a conscious effort to establish and maintain relationships across cultures, cities, and nations. Each sister city develops a special bond through these interpersonal relationships. Contrary to a typical summer vacation, YAEP allows high school students to engage in people-to-people relationships and have rewarding encounters with citizens and city officials from the countries they visited.



Youth Ambassadors meeting with Grenoble Representative Bernard Macret and alumni

In Grenoble, France, Phoenix Youth Ambassadors, Alec Videla, Clare Brown, and Kate Doherty were able to meet and speak with Grenoble Representative Bernard Macret. They presented him with a personalized Arizona Highways book as a token of goodwill. Alec Videla felt that meeting the city officials was "absolutely incredible," making him and his fellow ambassadors feel welcomed in France.



Betty Duarte with Councillor Johnny Flynn in Ennis, Ireland

Meanwhile in Ennis, Ireland, Betty Duarte, Emily Akins, and Paul Pachuca Romero shared a similar experience meet-

ing Councillor Johnny Flynn as well as former youth ambassadors from Ennis. They met over a lovely lunch featuring local specialties.



The YAEP Youth Ambassadors with Mayor Greg Stanton at Phoenix City Hall

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton graciously welcomed the international students with a small gathering at City Hall. He shared in their passion for travel and encouraged them to foster their international relationships. He presented each of the students with an Arizona Diamond-back cap. Meeting with city officials from around the world emphasized the importance of personal connections and reminded the students of their potential to someday become great leaders in their communities.

Hosting Calendar: *The American Experience*



Students at the Diamondbacks game

Before returning home, preparations are made for an American themed hosting calendar of which all 52 Phoenix and international students participate in various adventures and activities. Teens from around the world are brought to together to experience two weeks of events that represent a typical American teenage year. During their time in America, the international students are hosted by the families of the Phoenix students. On the third week of their stay, the host families entertain their students individually—taking them to visit friends, travel, and explore Arizona.

To begin their adventure, the Phoenix and international Youth Ambassadors participated in a welcome event “to break the ice” and encourage communication. The day began with a question-and-answer session with Phoenix Police Community Outreach, a tour of the Police Museum, and a guided tour of the Irish Cultural Center.

Day 2 brought with it the festivities and traditions of America’s popular holidays. A barbeque, pool party, complete with sparklers kicked off Independence Day, followed by decorating Valentine’s Day mailboxes and cards. For Halloween, the Youth Ambassadors dressed in their favorite costume and trick-or-treated around a local neighborhood.

Day 3 focused on engaging program alumni as the students of present and past programs enjoyed an eventful afternoon of fun in the sun at Wet N’ Wild.

Day 4 included a Global Friendship Event hosted by the Taipei Committee, a meet-and-greet with Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton, and an evening cheering on the Arizona Diamondbacks sporting face paint and posters representing each sister city to be featured on the Jumbo-tron.

Day 5 was high energy as the delegates toured ASU and engaged in fun team building challenges and games.

On **Day 6** the ambassadors and several brave volunteers departed on the much anticipated Disneyland adventure, including fireworks, parades, and plenty of rides. The group enjoyed a brief stopover at La Jolla Beach in California.



ASU Day



Taipei Global Friendship Workshop



Celebrating the 4th of July in style

Discoveries in Phoenix

On **Day 8** the Youth Ambassadors and their families earned a well-deserved day of rest.

On **Day 9** the delegates enjoyed a tour of the award-winning Musical Instrument Museum, where they learned about music and its influence on culture from all over the world, including instruments and musical styles specific to the countries of Phoenix's ten sister cities.

Day 10 marked another highly anticipated day trip the Grand Canyon. Students enjoyed a brief hike and interactive displays at the visitor's center. A stop in the quaint Route 66 town of Williams for lunch, and then the group moved on to enjoy the stunning red rocks of Sedona before heading home.

Day 11 included a beloved American high school tradition: Prom. Hosted at the Irish Cultural Center, the ambassadors enjoyed an evening of dance.

Day 12 was a free day to explore.

Day 13 included a breakfast hosted by the Global Chamber where several Youth Ambassadors were asked to speak. The afternoon allowed the group to give back to the community by preparing emergency supply boxes at St. Mary's Food Bank.

Day 14 celebrated the American tradition of Thanksgiving, complete with a turkey and a talent show. Students also gave cultural presentations from their respective cities to the families in attendance.

Day 15 was a laid back pool party that allowed for less structured bonding and cultural exchange.

Day 16 marked the saddest of days as the group celebrated their Farewell Fiesta at the Pueblo Grande Museum. The evening was full of mock awards, shirt signing, games, and singing.



Grand Canyon Visit



Prom!



Global Chamber Event



Thanksgiving

Connecting Cultures for Peace & Prosperity

Sister Cities International Writing Competition

As part of the Youth Ambassador Exchange Program (YAEP), it is important to embrace and share the strengths of participants. From unearthing hidden talents of singing at the Thanksgiving dinner talent show to enabling students to enter professional competitions, YAEP strives to help each student creatively express their international experiences.

One facet of Sister Cities International is the Young Artists and Authors Showcase. As described in the program, “Each year, the Showcase encourages youth to express the mission of Sister Cities International through original artwork and literature. A panel of judges selects the winners based on originality, composition, and theme interpretation.”

This year’s theme was *Connecting Communities for Peace and Prosperity*. Phoenix Sister Cities (PSC) incorporated this theme and encouraged all students to submit nationally and locally. There were many great local and national winners—including Phoenix student, Andrew Yancy, who was named a finalist for the poetry portion at the national level. Read his submission below:

Pursuit of Peace by: Andrew Yancy

We seem to continue an endless pursuit,
in which our simple goal is peace
yet our quest does not give fruit
for war still fails to cease

Our hindrance does not lie in our drive
and does not rest upon our zeal
for it is a peace that we strive
that ignorance tends to steal

It is prejudice that makes us blind
and disunity that gets in our way
making us unable to find
this harmony in which we say

Human equality is a truth,
and acceptance makes us stronger
unity must start with the youth
to ensure that peace lasts longer

As communities and nations began to connect
the plant of prosperity begins to grow
and where cooperation and agreement project
the flowers of peace start to show

It is impossible to bring world change alone
and to try so is insanity
for a person is but a single stone
in the mountain called humanity



Welcome Aboard!

Youth & Education Co-Chairs

In 2014, two outstanding individuals from the Phoenix Sister Cities Board of Directors were selected to serve as Youth & Education Co-Chairs. Their commitment to excellence has allowed the legacy of YAEP to thrive and their vision for the Youth & Education programs will surely leave a legacy of its own.



Melissa Werner: It's been an exciting year for me as a new co-chair of the Youth and Education Committee. The international exchange of students and educators is at the core of what Sister Cities International represents, so having the opportunity to take the lead on this particular committee within Phoenix Sister Cities is personally gratifying and humbling. As a former youth ambassador I was so happy to see a new crop of ambassadors join the ranks of hundreds of others who have participated in the Phoenix Sister Cities Youth Ambassador Exchange Program for more than 40 years. That's a long road of tradition and history to tread and this year's students did a tremendous job.

I look forward to the coming cycle of applications, interviews, workshops and preparation of students. This year was an opportunity to get my feet wet and, with a year of experience behind me, I know that we'll have an even better experience this coming year. We're looking forward to streamlining and modernizing the application process, reviewing how we prepare ambassadors and updating the All-American Hosting Calendar for next year.

In addition to the students who participated in the program, we were fortunate to find a great group of teachers for the Teach Abroad Program, some of whom have already started their tenure in Himeji, Japan. Soon, we'll begin to hear about their experiences in Himeji and how their work teaching Japanese students English is helping to change the world one life at a time. The participants' families and friends came together to say farewell in early August. They will have had almost a month in their new homes and I'm certain their day-to-day experiences have been exciting as part of this long standing tradition between Phoenix and Himeji.

Sandy Benson: As I reflect on our first year as co-chairs for the YAEP committee, it was exciting to be part of the process to select bright, talented, interesting and adaptable teenagers to represent Phoenix as ambassadors in our Sister Cities this summer. I am proud to say they represented Phoenix well! It was interesting to watch the students evolve from a disconnected bunch to a tight-knit group who welcomed their fellow ambassadors from the various Sister Cities. Many thanks to the parents of the ambassadors whose support helped ensure this year's program was a huge success!

Moving forward, my co-chair Melissa will spearhead the efforts around selecting the next class of ambassadors as I focus my efforts on connecting with our alumni both recent and past.



Heading Home: Not Goodbye but Until Next Time

Throughout YAEP, the ambassadors are continuously soaking up unique experiences and taking on new challenges. However, the toughest aspect of the program may be saying goodbye. Every student echoed words of how they will treasure the memories and friendships gained. There was never a true moment of goodbye, as they all promised to remain in contact and see each other again. Below are some heartfelt reflections from some of the ambassadors.

“We were ultimately the perfect group. We clicked together like we have been friends for years; we became family. I have never been closer to or felt more accepted by a group of teenagers before. It was really a special group of young people.” Emily Akins, Ennis 2015

“This summer I went to the other side of the world and had the pleasure of making new friends along the way.” Veronica Sepulveda, Taipei 2015

“Once a family, always a family—and I couldn’t have asked for a better one to share these memories with.” Olivia Craven, Hermosillo 2015

“My experience at Phoenix Sister Cities was one that gave me friendships, memories, and experiences that will last a lifetime. I am beyond grateful that I was able to participate in this wonderful program.”

Halle Lentz, Himeji 2015

“As the Youth & Education Program Assistant, I was afforded the chance to spend the summer of 2015 with some of the most exceptional students from around the world. Not only did these teenagers teach me about their country, but taught me the importance of cultural awareness, and the true meaning of Phoenix Sister Cities: building positive relationships with people from around the world.”

Emily Farrell, Youth & Education Program Assistant, Summer 2015



Orlaith Lyons of Ennis giving heartfelt good-byes at Sky Harbor



YAEP Alumni: Spotlight

Once a Phoenix Sister Cities Youth Ambassador, always a Phoenix Sister Cities Youth Ambassador.
See what one very special alumna has been up to:



Kayla Casey, Ennis 2013: Ever since reading *Left to Tell* by Immaculee Ilibagiza, and seeing how much she valued her education, my dream has been to teach English in Africa. This past summer, I got to live out that dream in Tanzania, thanks to an organization called GIVE Volunteers (Growth International Volunteer Excursions). While the program was only for two weeks, it clarified for me that I one day hope to be able to live and teach in a country like Tanzania. I left Phoenix on July 19th, not knowing exactly what to expect, and I returned on August 5th a changed person, with new friends from around the United States and Tanzania and a completely new perspective on life.

For about a week and a half, I, along with 12 other college students from around the United States, lived in a small village called Cairo on the eastern tip of the island of Zanzibar. We worked together with the villagers to construct a school, and we tutored some of the local teenage boys and young men in English. In our free time, we got to explore the village, support the locals by buying souvenirs at their shops, hang out on the beach, spend time with the children, and get to know the boys and the way they live.



On our days off, we got to go swimming with wild dolphins in the Indian Ocean, we walked through a forest that was home to wild red colobus monkeys, we went sailing from the northern tip of the island, and when we returned to the mainland we traveled to Arusha and got to go on a two-day safari, where we saw many elephants, giraffes, zebras, hippos, birds of all kinds, a rhino, a cheetah, and even a lioness!

During my time on the island, I got to experience what life in a small village in Africa is like -from eating on the floor with my right hand, to drinking water fresh out of a coconut etc. When the time came to leave the wonderful village of Cairo, I didn't want to say goodbye to the village, the island, or the wonderful people that were so welcoming to our group.

My two weeks in Africa, but especially my week and a half on Zanzibar, was the greatest, most incredible experience of my life; it was amazing, and eye-opening, and life-changing. The people of the village have NOTHING, but they are the happiest and most grateful peo-

ple I have ever met. My time in Cairo inspired me to change the way I live, to stop taking things for granted, to live my life more simply, and to be grateful for the things I do have. I know that the village and the people of Cairo will always be in my heart and mind, and I will always be able to call Cairo my home. I can even picture myself eventually moving to Zanzibar, building a house, and becoming a teacher in the school that I helped build with GIVE. But until then, I will continue to keep in touch with the boys that I got to know (via Facebook), continue working on their English with them, and continue to practice the basic Swahili that I learned in my time in Tanzania. I know that it's not goodbye, it's "badae" (which means "see you later" in Swahili. Hakuna Matata! (which actually means "no worries")



Phoenix Sister Cities

Calgary, Canada
Catania, Italy
Chengdu, China
Ennis, Ireland
Grenoble, France
Hermosillo, Mexico
Himeji, Japan
Prague, Czech Republic
Ramat-Gan, Israel
Prague, Czech Republic
Taipei, Taiwan

**Deadline
for
YAEP 2016:**

**December
18th, 2015**

5 p.m.



Phoenix Sister Cities
200 W. Washington
20th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Discover the 2016 Youth Ambassador Exchange Program

Phoenix Sister Cities is looking for high school sophomores and juniors who are residents of the City of Phoenix to serve as Youth Ambassadors for 2016!

The ideal Youth Ambassador is a leader excited by the opportunity to positively represent the City of Phoenix by traveling abroad, experiencing new cultures, and sharing their own customs with foreign counterparts.

Interested applicants are encouraged to visit the Phoenix Sister Cities website. Learn about the 2015 Youth Ambassadors' experiences by checking out their travel blogs and photos from their adventures listed online at: phoenixsistercities.org!



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Questions? Visit www.phoenixsistercities.org or contact Bethany Bennick at Bethany.Bennick@phoenix.gov