A NEW YEAR BEGINS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

The 2017-2018 YEAR Program participants arrived in Washington, D.C. on July 18th, 2017 for a five-day orientation to prepare them for their year in the United States. During the orientation, students participated in workshops and seminars addressing such topics as program requirements, American culture, campus life, academic integrity, health and safety, insurance, and tips for living with host families. In addition, participants took part in one of two community service projects benefitting the Baltimore Chapter of Project Linus and the Sunrise Senior Living Center of Falls Church, Virginia. Many students commented that these projects further motivated them to complete their required hours of volunteer work during the fall semester. Cultural outings, including a trip to Glen Echo Park for a night of contra dancing with the Friday Night Dancers and a tour of the national monuments of D.C., complimented the students’ experience in the U.S. capitol. The orientation also provided an important opportunity for participants to get to know their coordinators while bonding as a group.
On July 23rd, YEAR students departed Washington, D.C. to commence their month-long homestay experiences with their American host families. Students expressed both nervousness and excitement as they prepared to depart; however, many of those worries seemed to disappear when students were met by their hosts at the airport. During their homestays, students took part in family activities and events, learned about daily life in the U.S., strengthened their understanding of American idiomatic English, shared their culture, and began adjusting to daily life in the U.S. with the support of their families. Several students described what their experiences with a host family meant to them:

“I would’ve never thought that you can have so much in common with people who live on the opposite side of the world. But my host family and I were a perfect match. We were extremely comfortable with each other and I never felt like there’re any boundaries between us. I can write about my host family forever as we’ve become really good friends and they made me even more excited about this year in USA! I never felt homesick while staying with them as I already felt like home. I’m sure we’ll keep in touch for a long time. And hopefully, they’ll visit Russia someday and it’ll be my turn to be a host family!”

Elena, YEAR Student from Omsk
Hosted in Jamestown, NY
Jamestown Community College

“The idea of host family itself tells a lot. People you don’t know welcome you in their home, they’re ready to offer everything they have and do their best for someone who is hardly able to express himself in their language. Before I met my host family, the only thing I knew was “Lindsey, Kyle and Gunnar”. After I left them, all I know is that in a small city in the very heart of the country live the nicest people I’ve met.”

Azat, YEAR Student from Kazan
Hosted in Vermillion, SD
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

“First impressions are lasting impressions, everyone knows that. So for me, the experience of the real American life was represented by the host family I lived with. And those wonderful people made my first impression unbelievably great. It was definitely beyond all the expectations I could possibly have. I can’t even express how happy I was during this time. I really found people with whom I can talk about everything, ask for advice or just chat about everything that could bother me. Thank you, YEAR Program! Thank you, Ravi and Suzanne! See you very soon!”

Inna, YEAR Student from Nizhniy Sergi
Hosted in Bethlehem, PA,
Northampton Community College

“It’s wonderful that I had a chance to spend the whole month with my host family. I’m so thankful to them for a lot of fun and support. They did their best for me to feel myself at home and they succeeded in it. I’m so happy that they don’t live far from my dorm and we can still meet anytime to hang out together. Our evenings we spent were unforgettable. Lots of talks about American and Russian culture, lots of tasty food and lots of American films. To say nothing of various outdoors activities we did together. They became my second family.”

Artem, YEAR Student from Velikiy Novgorod
Hosted in Missoula, MT
University of Montana, Missoula

“I am endlessly happy to [have met] my host family. During the three weeks I was staying with them, we became real friends whom I can rely on. I appreciate it very much that my host parents welcomed me in their house, because not everyone will agree to let a stranger in his home. All the time I felt like my host parents were very glad to have me and like I was also becoming a part of their life. Every day I felt supported. Truly speaking, I was very sad on the day when I moved in a dorm because I didn’t want to leave my host parents. But we still communicate. One weekend we had a home pizza party and I slept over, and in the morning we had a Russian breakfast with blinis. My host parents became my first best friends in America and I am very thankful that I met them.”

Anastasia, YEAR Student from Arkhangelsk
Hosted in Morgantown, WV
West Virginia University
YEARS STUDENTS ARRIVE ON CAMPUS

Twenty-two host institutions and their respective communities welcomed YEARS students to campus for the 2017-18 academic year. Each host institution provided arriving students a series of orientation activities and welcome events to ease their transition from host families to campus life and to help them connect with peers.

Students expressed excitement about beginning their academic year with their new campus community:

“I am lucky to study in a small private school. What’s special about it? You get really close to people (students, professors and staff), simply because you meet them every day. Classes are REALLY small and you get as much attention as you need and plenty of help in your academics either in the class or outside the class.”

Anna, YEARS Student from Saransk
Alma College, MI

“CSI. I would never have thought that these 3 letters would mean so much to me but the College of Southern Idaho has changed everything. This lovely place has everything to make one’s college years fun yet productive.”

Alyona, YEARS Student from Volzhsky
College of Southern Idaho, ID

“FVTC is a perfect place for all kinds of learning achievements. Seriously, never in my life have I seen an educational institution with so many wonderful resources and opportunities enabling students to improve and succeed in an environment of friendship and true inspiration.”

Anastasiia, YEARS Student from Vyborg
Fox Valley Technical College, WI

“My favorite thing about JCC is the professors, whom I’m lucky to have. I’m impressed with their competence, their approach, and their willingness to help all students succeed, to learn something useful and to support students no matter what.”

Darina, YEARS Student from Tomsk
Jamestown Community College, NY
SPEAKING OF HOST FAMILIES...

“Let’s be frank: all my life I’ve been extremely shy,” says Inna, a YEAR student from Moscow at Northwest College in Wyoming. However, this year she has decided to change that. Thus, when asked by her international student coordinator at Northwest College to attend a Rotary meeting in the neighboring town to speak about her experience living with a host family, Inna agreed. “At first I was frightened,” she admits, “but a second later I understood that it was my chance to practice public speaking skills.”

Inna reports that this was her first time speaking in public outside the classroom. To develop her speaking skills this year, Inna decided to take a public speaking class at her college during the fall semester. She believes that the lessons learned in her class, coupled with her motivation to share her host family experience, prepared her to speak to her audience of 50 people. In her speech, Inna said, “Having a host family has not only become a contribution to my American experience, but also changed my life as an exchange student... [it] is not only a chance to learn more about American culture, it’s also a way to not feel alone in a foreign country. It’s nice to know that there are people who you can come to, without any special occasion, and talk about everything.”

After her speech, Inna was thrilled to be received with smiles, applause, and many questions from her engaged audience. From this experience, Inna already feels more confident in her abilities to speak in public and is excited to continue growing throughout the rest of her year. Above all, she is thankful to her host family for supporting her in her goal to push herself out of her comfort zone and develop new skills during her year in the United States. In summation, Inna says, “It was a small speech, in a small town, in front of a small audience. But I was there, representing international students, and I hope it is only the beginning.”

DISCOVERING ARIZONA

“Before coming here, I always thought of Arizona as a big desert,” admits Anastasia, a YEAR student from Omsk studying at Northern Arizona University.

Throughout her life back in Omsk, a city of over a million people and one of the ten largest cities in Russia, Anastasia didn’t get the chance to travel much, except to other major cities in Russia. Thus, coming to Arizona was a significant change of environment. However, it wasn’t long before she began to value the beauty and diversity of the state that she will call home for the year.

Anastasia writes that she has learned to appreciate nature from her time in Arizona. This is her first experience exploring small towns and natural areas, during which time she has learned about the history of the state and the preservation of the Indian reservations around Arizona. “I didn’t expect to travel so much around my state before coming here, because I didn’t know much about it and how many beautiful places it has!” she says. During the semester, Anastasia has become acquainted with the nature and landscape of both the northern and southern parts of the state. During her homestay in Tucson, she explored the southern part of the state with her host family, impressed by the deserts full of cacti and palm trees. Once she arrived on her campus at NAU, she was instantly astonished by how her surroundings changed. “Flagstaff is very chilly, green, and full of pine trees,” Anastasia observes. “It still amazes me how nature and climate can be different within one state.” Invigorated by a newfound love of exploring her state, Anastasia has visited the Grand Canyon, Antelope Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, and Lake Powell with other international students since her arrival to her university.

“...These places are just breathtaking for me - I couldn’t be happier about my placement in Arizona!”
ACCESSIBLE ADVENTURES

Oksana, a YEAR student from Voronezh currently studying at the University of Wyoming faced far greater challenges than most when she decided to travel to the U.S. Due to a spinal cord development defect, she relies on a wheelchair for much of her mobility. “The YEAR Program is the best way to become adventurous for me and try something new, something I could not try before,” she says. Oksana did not know what to expect for her year abroad, and the decision to leave behind familiar resources and support networks to study abroad for an entire year was not an easy one.

“I’ve been in the USA for only a few months, but I have changed my way of thinking and living. In my case, being in a wheelchair, adventures were something almost impossible. Before, trying new experiences, I had to check hundreds of times if this or that thing was accessible. In the USA I don’t even think about the accessibility and can try everything, because I know: people themselves are always eager to help [me] to be involved in every activity even if it looks inaccessible for a wheelchair.”

Oksana reports that she has been continuously surprised by the many new things she has been able to do this semester. “For example,” she says, “I have never thought that one day I will be in America and hike in winter in one of the national parks, try paddle boarding in one of the state parks, go camping, and participate in team games just because people always want me to be involved. Going to the other city - yes, why not? Roller coasters - sure, let’s just do it!”

Oksana writes that she already feels more confident in her abilities due to the new experiences she has had. She adds, “YEAR gives me an opportunity to be adventurous and inspired, forget that I use a wheelchair and forget about things I had to check before doing something back home, because now I understand that it is better at least to try than not to try and regret that you lost a chance to be a part of an adventure. The program gives me this chance to change my life and share these adventures and experience with everyone.”

BECOMING A LEADER

Anastasiia, a YEAR student from Vyborg studying at Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin, has been excited by her host institution’s emphasis on encouraging leadership through its curriculum and student organizations.

“Since I have always felt that I have leadership skills that I’d like to develop, I decided not to reject any opportunity which can lead me to my goal.”

And with this goal in mind, Anastasiia decided to join the international student club, where she opted to run for the position of club president. Anastasiia was thrilled when at her second meeting, she was elected! “The support of people who voted for me brought me a lot of happiness and self-esteem and made me as confident and inspired as I’ve ever been!” she says.

As president, Anastasiia reports that it is her job to lead the weekly meetings, organize events, and to encourage collaboration between the American and international students in the group. She is proud of the role that the organization plays in advancing global perspectives at the college. Anastasiia looks forward to further developing her leadership skills while promoting cultural diversity through new activities in the spring semester.
STRIKE UP THE BAND

For Bella, a student from Bratsk, the number one item on her packing list was her saxophone. “I’ve been playing saxophone since I was 12 years old,” says Bella, “and I knew, if I go to the USA, I will bring my saxophone. And I did it - it was my carry-on bag!”

Bella explains that after graduating from music school in Russia, there were few opportunities for her to continue playing as most universities in Russia do not have formal musical groups or performance opportunities. Having heard that university bands were quite popular in the United States, Bella knew this was a perfect way for her to get involved at her host institution, the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. “At the University of Minnesota, there are a lot of different bands (I think, more than 20) and orchestras for everyone,” says Bella. “Regardless [of] your major and musical background, you can find what is good for you.” After carefully reviewing the musical opportunities available, Bella made the decision to take part in the Athletic Gopher Pep Band and the Maroon Campus Band. These two groups have given Bella very distinct experiences. To be admitted into the Athletic Gopher Pep Band, Bella was required to audition, whereas the Maroon Campus Band is open to all interested student musicians. Bella explains that the Athletic Gopher Pep Band performs at the university’s hockey, volleyball, and basketball events, inspiring energy and team spirit on the court. During the semester, Bella has played at about ten sporting events on campus, as well as in two performances in the university’s concert halls.

“I think, in some ways, bands help me to understand American culture through American music and the musicians’ approach to performance,” says Bella. “There are a lot of differences between band in Russia and here. At home, we draw more attention to sound, to music composition, to its sense. Here it is important as well, but at the same time, we add some actions to it, which make our performance more expressive.”

“I can’t say it is better or worse, it is just not the same and I’m enjoying the difference.”
A MODEL STUDENT

A YEAR student from Kazan studying at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan, Diana explains that she never intended to enroll in her university’s Model UN course, and only hesitantly agreed when her first-choice class for the fall turned out to be full. However, despite Diana’s initial fears about the challenges it would present, Model UN has turned out to be one of the best experiences of her YEAR.

The course began in September and concluded with the Model UN Conference in Chicago on November 18th - 21st, during which the students put their classroom studies to use. Diana reflects on her feelings throughout the course of the semester: “I remember me at the first class in September and now, and I can definitely say it’s a big difference. In the beginning I knew nothing: I didn’t know any procedures of the UN, I didn’t know how to make motions, how to write resolutions, I was afraid of public speaking and I felt uncomfortable because of my English skills. But now, after three months in this class and after the conference in Chicago I can say I’m really proud of myself and I overcame all my fears and doubts. Our professor was always trying to push on our fears, he was trying to make us feel uncomfortable and get us out of our comfort zones, so this class was really useful for self-improvement.”

Diana recalls that the four-day conference quickly became a point of excitement rather than dread. On the day it arrived, she felt prepared to serve on her assigned committee. Diana and her partner represented the topics of human trafficking and the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. During the conference they spent long hours writing resolutions, caucusing with other delegates, and making motions. Diana says that she even made a speech in front of the over 300 attendees. She finished the conference completely exhausted but proud of her progress over the semester, having grown from a reluctant public speaker with little understanding of the UN into an active, engaged, confident, and knowledgeable delegate.

“I can definitely say that the Model UN class was the greatest experience in my life. I learned a lot, I improved my English and public speaking skills, and moreover I gained my inner confidence and I now feel I can do anything.”

YEAR STUDENT ON AIR

When YEAR student Ekaterina came from her hometown of Korolev to West Virginia University, she was eager to gain new knowledge in the many spheres of journalism, her major. However, she never expected that this would lead her to becoming a DJ on West Virginia University’s radio station, U92.

“I have always been interested in TV and radio journalism,” explains Ekaterina. “But I had no chance to try this field back in Russia. You can imagine how happy I was to find out that WVU had a college radio station!” Ekaterina reports that she applied as soon as she learned about the opportunity, after which she was asked to come in for an interview. Ekaterina confesses that she was a bit nervous, as she’d never had a formal interview before. Not long after, however, she received an invitation to join the radio station. After she finished training, Ekaterina began announcing songs live on the air. She explains that although there is a list that determines the order of genres to be played, it is up to her to choose the songs from each genre. And she doesn’t only choose the songs – she also announces the weather and campus events. “I thought it would freak me out,” she admits, “but to my own surprise, I felt more than comfortable, even though English is not my first language.” Ekaterina is thankful to have had this valuable professional development experience and looks forward to exploring a possible career in radio journalism.
CULTURAL AMBASSADORS

YEAR students have proven themselves committed to their roles as cultural ambassadors, not only during International Education Week but throughout the semester. From dinners and presentations to dances and tea parties, YEAR participants have found creative ways to showcase their Russian culture.

Gulnaz, a YEAR student from Ufa studying at the University of Missouri, Columbia, reports that she gave six cultural presentations in one day at Hancock Middle School in St. Louis where her host mom works, allowing her to share her culture with over 100 students. Gulnaz states that while she expected each presentation to last only twenty minutes, her audience was so engaged and full of questions that each presentation took up the entire class period. Gulnaz confirms that the students learned many new things from her lesson, as she tested them on their knowledge of Russia before and after her presentation, and found improvement in their results every time. “At the end of the lesson both teachers and students said that they got to know a lot of interesting information and they enjoyed learning more about Russia,” says Gulnaz. “I was happy to make this presentation and I got so many positive emotions. The children were excited and curious, which means that the goal of the lesson was achieved!”

YEAR students at Alma College, the University of South Dakota, and Saginaw Valley State University have been busy cooking traditional Russian treats for eager crowds at their host institutions. At Alma College in Michigan, YEAR students Anna, Irina, and Marina dished up Russian salads, blini, breads, and borscht for their international student club. In South Dakota, YEAR students Alina, Margarita, and Ilya presented Russian foods, music, and dance for a Russian Tea Party hosted by the university’s Russian professor. Meanwhile, at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan, students Salavat, Diana, and Ekaterina honored their national cuisine during International Education Week and succeeded in preparing copious amounts of Russian food for the 2,000 attendees at their host institution’s International Food Festival. Salavat reports that the guests especially enjoyed their charlotte apple-pie, borscht, and Olivier salad. “We are very proud of this event,” reports Salavat, “as we cooked tasty food, enjoyed the process of serving it and, according to votes of visitors, our country won “the best servers” nomination!”

At Fox Valley Technical College, students Anastasiia, Azat, Dmitrii, and Shakhnoza tutored students of Russian in Appleton, WI, giving lessons in grammar and vocabulary. “Students enjoy when we are coming, because it is interesting for them to hear native Russian speakers,” writes YEAR student Dmitrii. “Moreover, we teach them Russian culture - for example food, education system, and basic lifestyle.” At West Virginia University, YEAR student Daniil has also used his school’s Russian classes as a platform for sharing culture and language. A native of Moscow, Daniil reports that he has attended about seven Russian classes during the semester, during which he discussed Russian culture and helped students with their Russian language studies. Daniil says that his favorite Russian class to visit was a course focused on traditional and modern Russian music. A musician himself, Daniil gladly accepted the invitation to perform some traditional Russian acoustic songs with fellow YEAR student Anastasia for the class. “What made me happy and kept me coming to these classes was how curious and genuinely interested the students seemed,” says Daniil.

YEAR students have conducted countless other cultural presentations throughout the semester at their host institutions. YEAR student Irina of Alma College explains what it means to her to be a cultural ambassador:

“• When you think about ‘an ambassador,’ most people imagine a busy person in a suit flying from one negotiation to another… But no, here we are cultural ambassadors and we don’t need airplanes and suits to share our culture, traditions, history, and life with people. In the morning during breakfast or just while walking you tell people new things about your country. Every time we find unique features between Russian, American, and other countries’ cultures. During class we share different perspectives on the same topic, we listen to each other, and understand. That’s how people’s diplomacy works.”
VAULTING INTO VOLUNTEERING

Artem, a YEAR student from Velikiy Novgorod studying at the University of Montana, Missoula, reports that he first stepped into a gym thirteen years ago. Since that day, gymnastics has become his greatest passion, and the one that he pledged to share with others during his year in the United States.

During his first week in Missoula, Artem’s host family brought him to the gym that would become like a second home to him. “That was my paradise!” declares Artem. “All the coaches looked like a family and I immediately got a desire to become a part of this family.” There, Artem met the director, David, who introduced him to the kids and brought Artem on as a volunteer coach. “I am helping David to coach children from eight to fourteen years old and now we are preparing them for the competitions that will be held in two months,” reports Artem. “All of them are in love with gymnastics so it is a great pleasure to work with them.”

Artem has enjoyed serving as a cultural ambassador, volunteer, and mentor during his time at the gym. He explains that he has been able to tell the children about Russian gymnastics and has even shared various exercises that he knows from back home. “I am looking forward to the competitive season to see how both David and I succeed in mixing Russian and American methods of teaching and coaching children together,” he says. Artem adds that the children are always asking him questions about Russian culture, and that several have even begun studying Russian! As a dedicated volunteer, Artem has spent over 80 hours volunteering with the children at the gym over the course of the first semester. “This volunteer job has become an important part of my life,” he says. But for Artem, the best part of the experience has been the impact he feels he’s left on the people there. Artem has become someone that the kids look up to, and he has seen their excitement about gymnastics grow from having him there. He has enjoyed working with them and supporting them not only in their practice but also in their personal lives, as he has become a confidant for the young people he coaches. Artem has truly found a special way to create an impact in Missoula.
SINGING FROM THE HEART

Elizaveta, a YEAR student from Zlatoust studying at American University in Washington, D.C., found a unique way to engage with American culture this year. Having taken voice lessons for eight years, she was eager to join a musical group during her year – however, she never expected to join the university gospel choir.

But when she happened upon the gospel choir practice one day, Elizaveta promptly decided to audition. Shortly after, she was invited to begin rehearsing with the group. “My feelings?” She writes. “All of the good American films I have watched with beautiful churches and a choir inside with powerful voices and astounding songs might not be only films for me. I might start having the same experience: being in an atmosphere of praising and passion of music, singing a good mixture of both jazz and blues. How could I have imagined that I could have a chance to be fully immersed in a country, which is considered to be a place where this kind of music was born?”

The gospel choir has become a close-knit group of friends for Elizaveta, while simultaneously serving as an invaluable learning experience. Elizaveta explains that their conductor always takes the time to explain the historical significance of the songs they sing. “The gospel music is an incredibly important factor in developing jazz and blues, but also it is an enormous part of the African-American culture and traditions,” she says. “Being surrounded by the people who are passionate about this music because it is a part of the culture – it is one of the most amazing things happening to me.” Throughout the course of the semester, Elizaveta has performed four times with the group. She has especially enjoyed their concerts in the Baptist church, which she explains is an experience she never would have had in Russia.

“This has been one of the important parts of my YEAR, because I have a chance to be connected with the American culture, singing and learning music I could not have a chance to learn in Russia," reflects Elizaveta. “I once saw people singing these wonderful and inspiring songs in churches in films and could not even imagine that I will do the same!”

A DREAM COMES TRUE

Since she was a little girl, YEAR student Anzhelika from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk enjoyed putting on short plays for her parents, dreaming of one day acting in a real theater performance. That dream inspired Anzhelika’s number one goal for her time in the United States: to join a drama club.

When she arrived at Jamestown Community College in New York, she didn’t waste time before connecting with JCC’s theater group. Soon, Anzhelika had signed up to audition for their fall performance of ‘Hairspray.’ Anzhelika recalls, “Auditioning for Hairspray was really nervous for me – I knew that this show was very important for the theatre and I also knew that it was very important to me.” She was ecstatic when she, along with fellow YEAR students Elena and Darina, all landed small roles in the play – perfect for their first time in a real performance, explains Anzhelika. She reports that she played the role of Tammy on the Corny Collins Show, which was a fun role that brought her many new friendships along the way.

Thus began the theater experience that Anzhelika had long dreamt of. Rehearsals commenced at the beginning of September and culminated in seven performances during the first two weekends in November. Anzhelika fondly remembers the thrill she felt when the curtains went up and she saw the full audience before them. She reports that a favorite moment from the performances was when they received a standing ovation for one of their songs in the middle of the show. “That was unforgettable!” she proclaims. Anzhelika is overjoyed to have had the chance to be a part of this performance and looks forward to auditioning for JCC’s spring play. “I’m really grateful for having this opportunity to be closer to my dream,” she says.
YEARS STUDENTS GIVE BACK

During their first semester, all YEAR participants succeeded in completing their 20 required hours of community service, with many going above and beyond the requirement. In total, the group contributed over 1,700 hours of service to their communities. “Community means a lot here,” reflects YEAR student Salavat of Saginaw Valley State University. “Americans clearly realize that they belong to some close and helpful group of people who live around them. My favorite thing about communities is that people do volunteering activities to make the life of their neighborhood better; they do it from the bottom of their hearts, without any egoistic ambitions.” That idea of giving back to one’s community touched many YEAR students deeply and inspired them to find their own way to make an impact.

Ekaterina, a student from Nizhny Novgorod at West Virginia University, choose to volunteer her time at the WVU Nursery School. As her future career plan is to become a teacher, Ekaterina was eager to contribute her volunteer hours to working with kids. Ekaterina explains that she would wake up at 7:30 every Tuesday morning to head to the nursery and see her group of three-year olds. “I cannot explain how much their smiles meant to me and how blessed I was seeing them every time I started my volunteering duties,” she says. At the nursery, she would join the children in games, conversations, crafts, or songs. Teachers at the nursery were also very glad to see Ekaterina, as they were short staffed on Tuesdays. Ekaterina reflects on her experience: “I think that volunteering is the best way to become a better version of yourself. While working with the kids as a teacher, I felt how I improve myself and how I invest in myself. I am sure I will be thankful for this experience when I work as a teacher in the future. You don’t always have to expect to get a reward for your work immediately, because life can surprise you by rewarding you at the moment when you don’t expect it to happen.”

YEAR participant Kristina also allowed her area of interest to shine through in her volunteer work. A student from Barnaul at Northcentral Technical College in Wisconsin majoring in Video Production, Kristina used her skills to create a promotional video for the local high school’s performance of “The Odd Couple.” Kristina explains that such performances are important sources of funding for the school as well as entertainment for the community. They were thus delighted when Kristina volunteered to create a video advertisement to be shown on television for their play. She says she spent around ten hours shooting video at their rehearsals and editing the footage. When the project was complete, she received high praise from the directors, who were thankful for her support of their play. They later informed Kristina that attendance had increased from the previous year due to their promotional efforts. “I am happy that I had an opportunity to work with talented young actors and apply my video production skills to help the community!” she says.

Several YEAR students at the University of South Dakota felt their perspectives on volunteering change through their community service experiences. YEAR student Alisa from Chelyabinsk began her volunteer hours unsure of what she could contribute. However, after spending 18 hours at the Welcome Table in Vermillion, which provides hot

Ekaterina volunteers at the WVU Nursery

Kristina gets videography experience in her host community
meals to those in need, Alisa began to feel that the experience made a real impact not only on her, but on those it served. Before she knew it, she was performing all of the various tasks of the organization and even started getting to know the regular guests. Meanwhile, Alina, a fellow YEAR student at the University of South Dakota and a native of Ulyanovsk, expressed a similar change of heart from her experience helping to organize photography classes for students with disabilities. While this was a new demographic for Alina, she quickly learned from the teachers what methods of communication to employ with the students as they helped them learn the ins and outs of photography. Alina writes: “I understood that although they cannot perform all the tasks as we are used to, it does not mean that they want other people to do it instead of them. The thing they need is to not be excluded from the community and such volunteers like us can help them to [learn] skills that help them in daily life. After a couple of weeks doing photography classes I realized that my time dedicated to that work really matters and I stopped thinking about it as an obligation but as contribution to the community I live in.”

While all YEAR students demonstrated a strong commitment to giving back to their communities, it was YEAR students Artem (Velikiy Novgorod) of the University of Montana, Missoula and Dmitrii (Pokachki) of Fox Valley Technical College who dedicated the highest number of hours to community service this semester. While Artem reached 80 hours volunteering at the gym, Dmitrii was close behind, having spent 60 hours exploring a variety of volunteer opportunities, each of which provided insight into the local culture and community. From helping to clean up Lambeau Field, volunteering at a haunted house, and picking vegetables at a local farm to serving as a guide for Fox Valley’s open house, picking grapes at a local winery, and organiz-