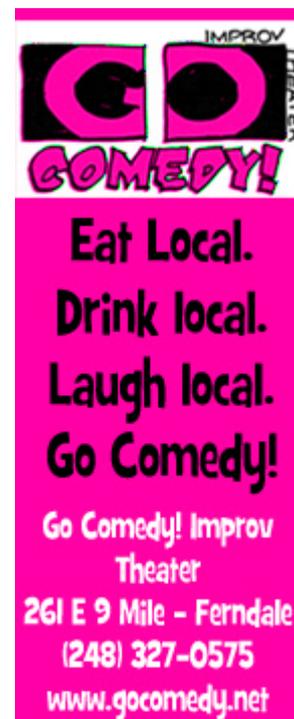




Rochester Families

ies Reflect on Hosting International Students



(Debi Wilkelis, International Coordinator Educatius International, July 22, 2017)

Rochester, MI – The last of the international high school students have returned home over the weekend. I am an International Coordinator with Educatius International and supervise students through the agency while they are studying in the USA over the school year. My first two thank you's from them came by email and text. It warms my heart to know I have made a difference in a young life and hopefully, been an ambassador from our country to theirs. But the story does not end here. I want to share with you a couple other stories from the host family point of view.

The Senac family in Avondale school district hosted Taro, a

young man with the Japanese student group.
Here is Lori Senac's story:



SaveMIcity is a statewide initiative that aims to fix Michigan's broken system for funding communities.



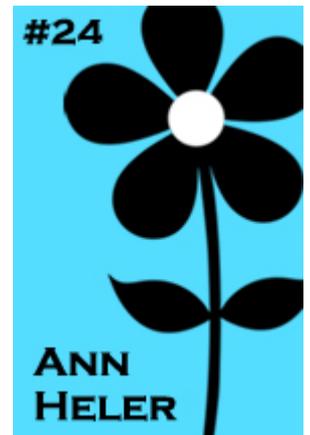
Learn more and join the saveMIcity team at savemicity.org/join

We were not even thinking about hosting a student. My son came home asking to host Taro. He was in a welcome family and my son said he believed that we would be a good host home and that we could make a difference in his life while he was in the USA. Our family had a discussion about adding a family member, we agreed it would be a good idea.

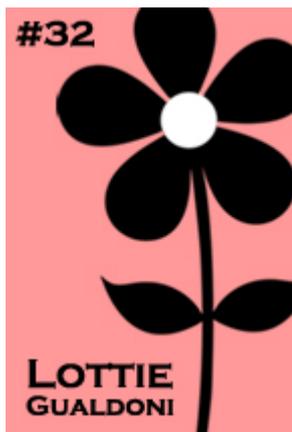
We had just "downsized" to a smaller house and we weren't sure there would be enough room, but it all worked out great. We also were not sure culturally what to expect, and how we would all get along. These fears were soon overcome by just talking, getting to know each other and discussing any expectations or issues.

There have been so many good memories of Taro. My son got to experience what having a 'brother was like' and soon become

best buds. After the first month he became one of the family. We had so many laughs, helping Taro with his pronunciations of English words, singing his favorite American songs in the car, and just watching him experience everyday in America from his eyes.



We definitely feel we changed his life. It's great when you can give back and share your life with others. I told Taro that I will always be his Michigan Mom! He left each of us a beautiful letter when he left hand told us how much he appreciated being with us – That was really special. He told me how much I inspired him and that he had the best 9 months of his life. I think this changed both of our lives.



We plan to stay in contact. In fact, I was just texting him tonight letting him know I was thinking about him and that we missed him. I believe that we will see him again one day.

The experience was easier and sometimes more difficult than expected. It was challenging having another person living

with you that you are responsible for, learning how to live together, but over time it became smoother. Communication is key- We all learned how to work together and it became easier. I do believe that our lives have been enriched by this experience, and we are grateful for being available to be a host family for Taro.

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The Van Dan Elzen family hosted Giulia who attended Rochester Stony Creek High School this year. Giulia was an Italian student who also graduated this year.

Chris travels internationally quite often and we have many people from others countries over for dinner. We thought that having a school age person would be enjoyable for our family. We have talked about it for many years and with one daughter going away for college- it worked out well with space in the house.

I worried if our student would like us, if we would like her, will she be happy here, will she feel accepted into our family.... those sorts of things. We were very fortunate with



Giulia because she fit right in and was very comfortable speaking with us and asking us for anything she may need or not understand. Our children are not athletic. Giulia was on the swim team and basketball team. It was very exciting for us to go to her games with posters and be able to yell and cheer her on! A lot of the little things that we did together were tons of fun. We didn't have to plan big extravagant trips or go to unique places to make memories.

Hosting certainly changed our lives. We do plan on staying in contact. We were able to meet Giulia's parents on a few occasions and we are looking forward to visiting them in Italy!

I don't think this experience was more easy or difficult than I would have expected- just different. The whole family has to make adjustments. A stranger is becoming part of your family. I gave Giulia about 2 weeks to settle in and sort things out- she was treated as a guest for a bit. Then, she became a daughter. The guidelines and expectations that we have for our own children were extended to Giulia as well. It was difficult at times to do that, but our family is a team and we work together. If there was a behavior by Giulia that I wouldn't accept from my own children, then I would talk

about it with her and we would figure things out.



My first, and probably most important, recommendation would be to make sure the entire family is agreed about hosting! Family life can be hectic and stressful and adding a new person to the mix will add to the hecticness! That being said, I would recommend having an open and honest relationship with the student. If something is bothering you about her behavior or actions, talk about it. If something is bothering her about anything, she should be able to talk to you about it and feel comfortable doing so. Many times I used the words "I'm bringing this up to you because I care for you and I want the best for you". You will need to be flexible and understanding. At times, you may be pushed outside your comfort zone with the new experiences- but it is a growing experience! I have 4 children of my own and at times, I felt as if I did more parenting in 10 months than I have in 20 years! It is incredible how tight of a bond you can build with

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a complete stranger in such a short amount of time. Giulia came to us as a stranger, but left us as a daughter. New experiences, new adventures! It will be a wild and exciting time that will stay in your heart forever!

□These are only two of the many families in Oakland county who have hosted. If you are interested in hosting an international student for a semester or two, please contact:

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