



My Story

Following a rude awakening from aircraft turbulence, my eyes snapped open only to gaze into an endless sea of brown. The ground outside was blanketed in brown sand, and the lack of infrastructure present revealed its desolate location. It seemed isolated from the world, the baseball fields and car dealerships seen from the United States were replaced with gigantic reservoirs of grainy soil, seeming to extend out to the edge of the Earth. Eventually the plane touched down and I planted my feet on Lanzhou soil, a place I did not know anything about. A few hours later, following more transportation, I arrived at Gansu where I would be teaching alongside my other peers. My initial impressions of the new environment was sparse at best. I enjoyed the quietness of the environment, the seclusion from social media and other distractions that I could not escape in the United States. It introduced me to a modest lifestyle that I found comfort in, a comfort I still sometimes miss back in North Carolina. The first day of class was stressful, but ultimately very pleasurable. The kids were engaging and welcoming. Just 24 hours before this exchange I was in Chicago, scrambling to compose a slideshow on airport wifi that would impress the kids. Once I stepped into the classroom and began talking to the children, the fears I had before melted away. Even though I was the one teaching, I learned the most that day. Prior to the trip I had known nothing below the middle-class. I worked at a golf course where the members belonged to the top 1% in the wealth pyramid, and paid more for their golf membership initiation fee than a teacher's annual salary. Furthermore, I grew up in a family of stable income, with both parents holding computer programming jobs in Research Triangle Park. The only time I heard about children lacking school supplies and life necessities was on the news, or in an article I had to analyze in my English class. I could not begin to fathom the economic situation these kids were in, nor could I comprehend why they seemed so happy in their everyday lives.





2018 RACL Xuezhou (Julia) Nan Volunteer Scholarship

My Story (continue...)

Before the trip, I occasionally felt unfortunate that I was born into the middle-class. Scrolling through my instagram feed and finding photos of teenagers driving Ferrari's and high-schoolers residing in a Beverly Hills mansions frequently had me in envy. But after this trip I was overcome with a feeling of guilt and gratitude. I no longer looked up to the super-rich and wondered why I was not born into wealth, rather now I ask why should I get to go to school with proper supplies and necessities while the kids in Gansu do not? I will never forget entering a classroom full of children that have worn the same uniform for months on end with a brand new Polo Ralph Lauren button-down. I will never forget watching a child drink noodle soup out of a plastic bag or attempt to take notes despite having no school supplies. I will never forget



gazing at the mold hanging from my bunk bed before I dozed off, or the unsanitary nature of the bathrooms. Since the trip, My feelings of jealousy of the upper-class have not returned, and these thoughts have been replaced with feelings of gratitude for what I already have. My time spent at Gansu flew by, and before I knew it I had to say goodbye to an area that had found a fond place within my heart. But more than a goodbye, it was hard for me to thank the kids and the location enough for what it had done for me. Not only did the trip teach me gratitude and give me a break from social media, it also allowed me to witness a new perspective on the world. Whether it was playing basketball with the students and staff, or sitting in their dorms talking about their plans for the future, I gained insight on how they view the world. From the outside looking in, it is easy for people like me to assume that they are poor, sad children who live a dreary life. But they are not, these kids are happy and energetic, excited to talk to you about their day and their plans for college. One child told me he aspired to attend Harvard one day and spend a night at my house where I could show him the customs of American culture. Another talked to me about his plans of owning a Lamborghini one day. Frequently in the United States, we hear stories about celebrities and movie stars committing suicide due to depression, but these figures live blessed lives compared to the students in Gansu. These kids show that happiness does not revolve around materialistic objects and money, shown through their positive attitude everyday despite their economic situation. It was a viewpoint that provides clarity to everyday life, and demonstrates the minimal impact extrinsic factors really have on your mental well-being. After saying a hard goodbye to the

kids and the environment of Gansu, I caught a flight back to Shanghai. The following afternoon, my Dad's relative invited us out for afternoon tea and I went along to say hi. During the meeting, the lady asked me about how my trip to Gansu went, and I told her the same story I have already told you. I was expecting the usual response of "Oh wow! You did such a great deed, the world needs more people like you" but her reaction was really quite the opposite. She stated how I did more harm than good, how by showing the kids in Gansu how I live makes them feel worse about their financial state. I agreed with it to be polite, but I was a little hurt and taken aback. I felt as if I had just done a good act by spending time with the kids, but her argument became more and more logical as I thought about it. As much as I did not want to believe it was true, she was partially right. Although I may have inspired a few kids to work hard in school and possibly make it to the United States, I may have made a few others feel bad at their current situation as well- similar to the effect my instagram feed of exotic cars and large houses had on me. This thought bothered me for quite some time, but eventually I decided to take some course of action. The lessons I learned from Gansu prompted me to start my own nonprofit organization, benefiting underprivileged children. Currently, after achieving legal status, we are running a raffle in which proceeds will benefit those exact kids in China. By providing them funds to buy school supplies and life necessities, hopefully they will be able to pursue their goal of coming to America and chasing their dreams. Without this trip I would have never realized how grateful I should really be, and would not have the vast arsenal of life-lessons I received from the kids. Furthermore, I would have never discovered the platform I have now through my nonprofit, an organization that I now care for deeply. Although this essay was intended to try and retell the experiences I had at Gansu, these words on paper do not do it justice. They say "to get it you had to be there", and that phrase is extremely applicable for this situation. You had to be there to have the revelations I had, to learn the lessons I have received, you simply had to be there.



2018 RACL Xuezhou (Julia) Nan Volunteer Scholarship

My Story

Over my lifetime, I've participated in and organized various volunteer activities. For example, I have been a teaching assistant at Cary Chinese School, and I have coordinated the high school volunteers at CAFA's Taste of China Festival. However, none of these match up, in terms of enjoyment and enrichment, to a service project that I participated in over the summer of 2018. I went to Shennongjia, China, as a part of 1000 Mile Initiative's Teaching in China Program. I lived and taught at a Chinese boarding school for two weeks. Before the actual trip, there was a lot of preparation to be done. My mother was the leader of the program, and I was her right hand. She coordinated the parents, and I coordinated the team of student-teachers. I helped relay messages from my mother to the team and I answered their questions. The team met four times to prepare our material. The first meeting was dedicated to meeting each other and assigning topics to teach. The next meeting was dedicated to introducing a rough plan on what we're to cover. Finally, the last two meetings were dedicated to practice teaching. At the meetings, you didn't know what it was actually like to teach a class of 50 Chinese students. Thus, when it was time to actually teach at Shennongjia, we would likely have to adjust our teaching style and approach. Teaching at first, I admit, was a struggle. I had no idea how to talk in front of a class without seeming extremely awkward. I taught American Culture, which can be very interesting, but I taught it in a way that made my class as boring as it could get. Alas, as I taught more and more, I was able to experiment with different teaching methods, and eventually, I figured out what worked and what didn't, and my lessons got more interactive and interesting. Teaching was only a minor part of the trip. What really mattered was the interaction with the students. Since the Chinese students were quite close to us in age—they were middle schoolers—it was pretty easy to communicate with them. Even though they had class from 7 in the morning to 8 at night, there were still periods of free time in between and at night where we could have fun together. I



played soccer, basketball, and volleyball with them. I talked about cultural differences with them. I ate lunch and dinner with them. As I bonded with the students, I learned that they aren't allowed to use cell phones during the day at all—they'll get physically punished if they do. Instead of finding joy in their phones, they find joy in the simple things of talking, games, sports, music, and learning. They simply live in the moment and enjoy being around each other, which is very inspiring. They inspired me, and I wanted to return the favor. I learned that many of the Chinese students wished to move to the US. This could be achieved through academic excellence. I wanted to help them achieve their dream, but the question was how? Friendship. The thought of a being able to reunite with a good friend overseas might just give the Chinese students another reason to study hard. And, so I became friends with them. I bonded with them. I exchanged WeChats with them. To this day, I still talk with some of them through WeChat. One of my biggest takeaways from this trip was of how warm the Chinese students were. Chinese people are stereotypically quiet and shy, so I was pleasantly surprised by how open the students were. They asked for signatures, they wrote us notes, they served us watermelon, they even gifted us with food, books, and origami. Never in my life had I been treated like such a celebrity, and it was truly a unique and wonderful experience. This trip has created memories that will be a part of me for as long as I live. It was so enriching to be able to connect with students like us, but living thousands of miles away and speaking a different language. It was very humbling to be able to inspire so many students to study harder so they could move to the US to meet us. I will forever cherish this experience, and I can't wait to teach again next year.



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My Story

The Impact Volunteering Has Had On Me

Learning Chinese has always been a huge part of my life. Coming from a family with parents who immigrated from China, Chinese language and culture has always been just as prominent in my life as American culture has. I attended Chinese school at RACL for more than ten years and I was able to learn about Chinese history, culture, and language. Throughout my many years of attending RACL, I have been able to see the impact volunteers have on the RACL family and community. A large majority of those helping RACL to function are volunteers with dedication and passion for educating the community about Chinese Culture. Seeing the impact volunteering has on the community inspired me to take on various volunteering positions. In the



summer of 2017 and 2018, I was a part of the 给予爱 summer program in which we travelled to 甘肃 China to teach middle school students music, English, science, US culture, and film. Everyday in class, we tried to teach the students something they had not seen before, hoping to expand their views on the world. In English class, I taught them about English grammar and gave them extra practice on what they needed help with in class. Outside of class, we were able to form friendships with the students and gain valuable experiences from one another. We often conversed and played various games with the students. We often chatted about what our daily lives were like and how they differed from each other. I was even told by some of the students that we had inspired them to study harder to make it to the US for a brighter future for themselves and their families. The students helped me to realize that hard work can push you to achieve great things. By volunteering in 甘肃, we were able to impact the students not necessarily materialistically, but in a mental and emotional way. They were able to gain experiences to broaden their perspective on life and many students learned that there was so much more in the world than the small village some of them had never stepped outside of. I also volunteer as the chief editor for the RACL school newspaper. For the school paper, I have interviewed various parents/volunteers regarding their careers and why they volunteer at RACL. We interviewed NC State University Professor Xie, a parent volunteer, about why he continuously dedicates his time to RACL and the impact RACL has on the community. The newspaper also reports the latest news to the faculty and parents such as community events, essay competitions, and recaps on various galas and performances put on by school students. Volunteering in the community always has and will remain important to me. I have learned that volunteering can give another individual a chance at a better life or even a better outlook on life. Even if you might not be giving someone something materialistic, benefitting someone mentally is far more valuable. Volunteering is a way to gain new experiences from people with different beliefs and backgrounds, which is why receiving this award would be an honor. Volunteering will always remain a cherished event/activity and is something that has taught me so much about the world and how people can help one another even across borders.



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My Story

As a volunteer at the Raleigh Academy of Chinese Language, I have gained many skills that I will use throughout my life to further academic, personal and professional growth. Two years ago, I began volunteering as a Chinese teaching assistant for one of the second grade classes. Since it was my first experience working in the classroom, I decided to choose a lower-level course; at the same time, I still wanted to challenge myself and become the best assistant that I could be. Given the importance of this role, I was extremely nervous on the first day of class. However, I vividly remember how the children's warm smiles took away all of my worries. They listened to my introduction and readily welcomed me into this new community. As an assistant, some of my responsibilities include facilitating group activities and grading weekly assignments. Over time, I found that teaching is often one of the best ways to grow my own understanding of the Chinese language. In addition, I frequently spoke in front of class, which helped me become more confident in my public speaking skills. The classroom provided a comforting environment for me to practice presenting on a weekly basis. By communicating with younger students in my second-language, I was able to turn one of my weak points into one of my greatest strengths. Regardless of where I go in life, I know that I will be able to apply these leadership skills. Aside from being a teaching assistant, I am also a member of the young journalist organization that writes newsletters for the school. As a group, we must identify important events, activities and information to include in the publications. By collaborating with my team members, I have produced quality content that has been distributed throughout the school. Due to the nature of these collective efforts, I have learned how to contribute my ideas while resolving potential conflicts and challenges within the organization. Being a reporter has also taught me how to properly manage my time in order to meet specific deadlines, as well as interact with adults and administration. By observing more experienced members, I have learned how to work more efficiently and productively. Overall, I believe these interpersonal skills are essential for working with others in an academic or professional setting.



While unaffiliated with Raleigh Academy of Chinese Language, I am also a zither player that performs at many school-sponsored events, including the Dragon Boat Festival and New Years Gala. Through my passion for music, I have been able to connect with Chinese culture and understand the rich history behind this instrument. Additionally, performing with large groups has taught me how to work with other musicians in order to produce the final work of art. However, since I must also work as a reporter at these events, it is often difficult to balance my responsibilities. As a result, I have learned to allocate my time between performing and reporting, as well as to prioritize what needs to be done first. In the real world, people have all sorts of responsibilities, so these experiences have taught me how to manage my stress while excelling in my commitments. In the course of these two years, my participation at the Raleigh Academy of Chinese Language has taught me skills that will assist in my future career. I am genuinely thankful for the opportunities I have been given and look forward to continue contributions to the Chinese community.

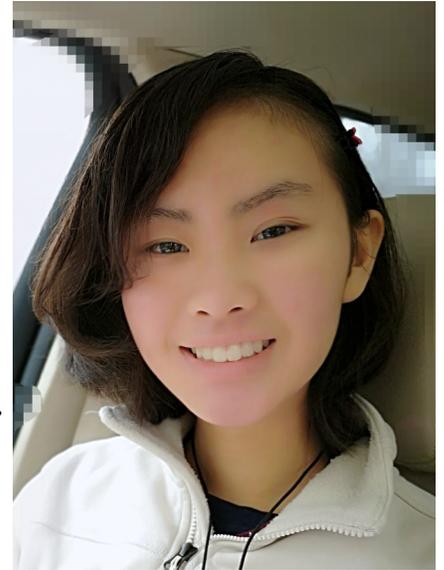
Elizabeth Huang 黄荔之 Cary Chinese School



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My Story

My favorite experience/project of this year would have to be volunteering at the Brown Bag Ministry Organization at St. Andrew's Church. I have been volunteering at the church for around 1 ½ years now, and am happy to say that I don't plan on stopping anytime soon. When I first joined the organization, I was rather doubtful. I wasn't exactly Christian, and thought it would be rather awkward practicing a religion I was not a part of as part of by volunteering at a church. Now, I've come to see that the religion is only a small part of Brown Bag's purpose. The organization's motive is religion, its purpose is serving the underprivileged. As silly as it sounds, I've learned that you don't need to share anything in common to be part of a common cause. Brown Bag is a Christian organization, yes; however, anyone is free to come and help package food as well as distribute it to the underprivileged around the Triangle. You grow close to the people there and harbor a feeling of togetherness, despite race, gender, ethnicity, background, etc. I've made a few new friends, young and old,



by going every Saturday to volunteer. It has improved me as a person, and given me a chance to give back to my community. Within the organization, my most memorable moment would probably be when I went downtown to help distribute the lunch and fresh vegetables. To be honest, I was scared out of my wits. I had never interacted with these people before, and was definitely out of my comfort zone. I was afraid of the so called "violent" natures of the underprivileged. Spoiler alert: I didn't need to be. These people weren't any different from me, or you. They were simply human, just put into more unfortunate circumstances. It was enlightening to come to an understanding of the people there; they acted like any other person I would know, polite, positive, and I am very happy to be serving.



My Story

Being a teacher's assistant for a competitive math class at RACL is a precious moment that I can remember for my lifetime. The first class I taught was in the fall of 2018. I walked into the classroom and saw six kids ready to learn with their notebooks out. Seeing their eager faces boosted my self-confidence. The lesson I had prepared with the teacher for that day was on geometry. As I progressed through the lesson, I noticed that each student was at a different level. Some would fly through the problems, knowing the answer to every question, while others would struggle to understand basic concepts. As the teacher went over the next problem, I would personally go and explain the previous math problem to the struggling students. Watching them comprehend the solution was a heartwarming experience. This is why being a teacher's assistant is my favorite volunteer project.





My Story

我是Kevin Cui, 一名来自Camelot Academy 高中十年的学生。我在中国完成初中业后来美国求学, 长期在国内的语言学习让我具备了扎实的中文基础, 这也得以让我获得初来此地就到凯瑞中文学校做义工的机会。能用我的中文为华人社区服务, 让我感到十分荣幸和自豪。从九年级开始, 到现在总共一年半的任职期间, 在中文学校做课堂助教的经验让我受益匪浅, 在贡献出自己的一份力量和发扬中国文化的同时, 也极大地丰富了我的眼界和知识。课上同学们积极的态度和活泼生动的课堂互动总能给我的助教经历填上绚烂的一笔。在这一年半的时间里, 我有幸一直跟随银娜娜老师共同接触二年级到八年级的同学们。除了帮助老师为同学们修改作业和练习中的错误, 还辅助老师维持课堂纪律。课后我还积极帮助老师整理教材, 清洁教室。努力让自己助教的角色发挥到最好。针对二年级的学生年龄较小, 课上精力不集中且缺乏学习耐心的问题。我积极配合老师, 和孩子们一起参与到银老师的课堂互动中来。并帮助学生在分组阅读练习中纠正语音。并和老师、同学们建立了深深的友谊



而在八年级做助教, 则帮助老师记录学生们在课堂抢答问题的激战中所夺得的分数, 再帮助老师计算结果。在课文对话学习的角色扮演环节中, 我也积极帮助老师将课堂的氛围推向高潮。做助教这一年半以来, 同学们对中文热情的高涨和他们在新颖的学习方法中收获的成就感和自信, 也一样激励着我更加努力。我也从同学妙语连珠的发言和回答问题的奇思妙想中体会到同学们敏捷的思维和独到见解。通过这一年半的助教经历, 和我对中文学校的课堂教学与学生氛围的观察, 我深深感慨中美教育体系的差异。在此地积极活跃的气氛与国内沉稳扎实的作风形成强烈的反差。如今在凯瑞中文学校里, 两者的优势都在课堂上被绽放了出来, 在同学们充分地发挥自我的同时也巩固了中文知识的学习。更是让我体会到学校中文教学的重要性和必要性。在此, 我向凯瑞中文学校的学校领导们和银娜娜老师表达衷心的感谢, 我感到万份荣幸能为中文学校贡献出自己的一份力量。弘扬中国文化的同时也极大地丰富了我的阅历, 同学们的进步和对课程的热爱也是对老师和助教工作的极大肯定, 这也是一直激励我一直走下去的动力! 希望我可以在中文学校的助教岗位继续不断地学习和感受, 并奉献自己。这也是更新自我, 自我充电, 充分发挥自我优点, 不断完善自我, 提高自我的过程。

Jonathan Zhao 赵天行

CAFA



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My Story

Volunteering is a wonderful way of getting involved and giving back to your community. To me, it is a very rewarding experience because it helps me learn and build social skills. Through volunteering, not only have I gained lots of experience, I have also met many new people. Many of the people I met from volunteer activities have become close friends. I have volunteered at numerous events, from being a teacher's assistant for a STEM class to participating in the Dragon Boat Festival.



One of my favorite volunteering activities was being a host at the Chapel Hill Light Up Festival. I introduced important figures and announced performers. This gave me valuable experience on organizing people and helped me develop my public speaking skill. I also made new friends with the fellow volunteers who helped beside me. From volunteering, I have gained lots of valuable



experience. From building social skills to meeting new people, volunteering is a very rewarding activity. A great way to get involved and give back to your community, volunteering also helps build your own reputation, as it is a good way to show how dedicated you are. I spend a lot of my time volunteering and really enjoy it.

Belinda Wang 李宣仪 Chapel Hill Chinese School



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My Story

“I’m right-handed.” That’s what one of my piano students, Leo, said to me when I asked him to play the left hand part of the passage. I couldn’t help but chuckle a bit and explained that we would be using both of our hands to play the piano. I volunteered to be his left hand while he played with his right. He grinned, seemingly impressed by our teamwork and started playing with his left hand like a newly discovered toy. The glee on his face imprinted in my memory bank and really made my weekly trips to teach worthwhile. The joy of teaching encouraged me to dedicate my summers in the following years to volunteer at the American School of Asian Culture, teaching nonnative speakers to read, write, and speak Mandarin. In many ways, this is similar to teaching someone how to read, play, and make music. I found a perfect bridge to bring music and language together. Unlike English, Chinese is a tonal language, so putting words into a song beautifully resolves the pressure of perfect pronunciation. When I shared a Chinese children’s song called “Counting Ducks” with my students, the light-hearted lyrics caught everyone’s attention. They happily read and sang without knowing they had already learned 66 Chinese words. To me, being educated is not just having the ability to think critically and independently. It is also having the courage and dedication to share and spread knowledge. Being educated means having a greater ability and power to influence others. The fact that my schooling has the power to help and benefit others is empowering and inspiring. Charlemagne once said “To have another language is to possess a second soul.” I fortunately possess three souls that I value immensely—music, English, and Chinese; they have brought me so many enlightening opportunities to touch people’s life and enriched me with cultural and social awareness.



Demi Wang 王宣予 Chapel Hill Chinese School



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Studio K was my second family and my home away from home. I would work tirelessly four days a week, in hopes of becoming one of the lead roles. My dream was interrupted when my mother had to relocate because of a new job. I felt my dazzling dance world fall apart, as there wouldn't ever be another studio that could bring me as much color to my life. Without the heart to jump into a new studio right away, I started volunteering as a teaching assistant for dance classes at RTP Children's Dance Club. Teaching the little girls Chinese folk dances was heartwarming, as I felt an indescribable connection with the movements and the music. Influenced by this experience, I founded and ran the NC Youth Performance Team in 9th grade. To cultivate awareness of and appreciation for Asian culture in American audiences, I led my team to perform at various festivals, galas, and community celebrations by collaborating with local schools, businesses, and charities. Through this real world exploration, I was able to connect with



and empower young Asian-American dancers to embrace their ethnic background by reinforcing the connections to their cultural heritage. Realizing how much influence one could contribute to change and engage the world, I started actively seeking for new opportunities that would better my community. On this new path in becoming the lead role of my own life, I combined my keen interest in performing arts and my experience with various cultural celebrations to design an event that would bring the community together and fundraise in a fun, sociable, and meaningful way. I call this talent show fundraiser "The Shooting Star Gala," a celebration of talents in our school system by showcasing their visual and performing arts. Dance propelled me to get out of my comfort zone, encouraging me to work with my new connections and resources more actively and confidently. Following detailed discussions over procedure drafting, personnel recruiting, and venue researching, I witnessed the potential multiplication of the amount of money the fundraiser could raise and the increase of interest in local schools to participate. This process of turning a thought into action is truly empowering. My one-person quest to make a difference in my community has grown to be an attainable project supported by the talent in my community.



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在今年夏天，我在位于Chapel Hill 的名叫American School of Asian Culture的暑假中文学校进行了一个月的义工活动。在这一个月的时间里，我与这里的孩子们共同度过了一段有趣的时光。在每天的早晨，孩子们会在教室里进行活动，我会和我们一起阅读和做游戏。有一些孩子喜欢下国际象棋，所以通常会跟他们下上几局。在下棋的时候，我发现有些孩子们虽然才刚刚上过一段时间的课，但是他们都表现得很大胆并且可以想到一些不一样的办法来帮助他们渡过难关。



通常，在室内的活动结束后，老师会带着孩子们走出教室，到户外进行活动。户外活动会在公园里进行，老师会将他们带到那里，然后由我们看护。看着孩子在阳光下跑动的样子，我不禁回忆起我在和他们一样大的时候，也像他们那样，无忧无虑得在公园里嬉戏。到了10:30，我们会回到学校上课，我的任务是教孩子们中文，首先我会让他们一起跟着我朗读课文，在他们读熟了以后，我会教他们写字。经历过这一个月义工活动后，我很高兴并享受着和孩子们在一起的时光。在这段时光里，我发现了每一个孩子都是与众不同的，有的聪明伶俐，有的乖巧可爱。与此同时我也深深地感受到了他们脸上的笑容是那么的阳光和温暖，所以我将会把更多的时间投入到与孩子们共处的时间里。



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When I first come to U.S., I thought I'm going to live in a new and strange environment where Chinese culture has not yet been developed. The Chinese community helped my parents and I create relationship with others, which let them fit in to the society. Even though I'm only at 7th grade when I came here, a sense of "China is my hometown" has already stucked in my mind. Everything starts from I go to the CCS . I'm very glad that I can still experience Chinese culture and contribute as much as I can to improve the community. Surprisingly, I actually learned lots of things that I've never known when I was in China, such as the Chinese waist drum, Hulusi, etc. When I'm performing or going to a parade, sometimes I feel like I'm representing my country, and I don't feel violated at all, that is why I'm so passionate about this community. I'm looking forward to work more for this friendly community.