

MAKING FAMILY LIFE MORE FUN

Sharing Cultures, Building Lasting Friendships With Muslim Exchange Students

(NAPSA)—For most Americans, news reports of conflicts in the Middle East are simply updates from a faraway land. Not so for more than 600 families across the United States who opened their homes this year to Muslim teenagers participating in a unique exchange program. Sponsored by the U.S. State Department, the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program brings high school students from predominantly Muslim countries to the United States in order to help foster understanding between U.S. and Muslim cultures in a post-Sept. 11 world.

For the Hinkle family in California, the YES Program gave them a new perspective and a new family member when they hosted 15-year-old Palestinian exchange student Mohammed.

“To be exposed to Mohammed’s views and culture, seeing his side of the world—that’s what we’ll take away as host parents,” said Joshua Hinkle, Mohammed’s host father.

“My host parents are very interested in culture and they really like to learn about other countries,” says Mohammed. “They really wanted to give me a great experience and they wanted me to know what Americans think.”

Since the YES program began in 2002, a consortium of partners led by AYUSA Global Youth Exchange has administered the program. In the first four years, more than 2,000 American families and Muslim youth have participated. High school students are recruited from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

“The Youth Exchange and Study program gives American



International Students in the Youth Exchange and Study Program.

families the opportunity to bring the world into their home by hosting students excited and prepared to jump into the life of an American teen,” said Mary Karam, director of the YES program through AYUSA Global Youth Exchange.

Dana, a YES student from Jordan with the ASSE International Student Exchange Programs, flourished in her high school in Minnesota. She participated in her school’s model United Nations club and even started an Arabic club with 19 members, a number of whom want to visit her in Jordan.

“We would encourage other families to host a YES student, particularly if they are interested in other cultures and willing to embrace a new member of the family,” said Dana’s host parent Rachael Scherer. “Hosting Dana really allowed us to learn about another culture but also realize that teenagers are teenagers—whatever the nationality or culture.”

To learn more about hosting a YES student through AYUSA Global Youth Exchange and its consortium of partners, visit www.AYUSA.org or call 1-888-55-AYUSA.