EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM
AMERICAN IMMIGRATION LAW FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is sent to all active participants in the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF) J-1 Training Program. Please review the information below and remember to always contact AILF if you have questions or concerns about your training program or non-immigrant status. If you are no longer participating in our program, please notify us. If you have a question for AILF, please do not reply to this message, but instead send your question to exchange@ailf.org.

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Please Report a Change in Your Address

Please be aware that AILF is required to report any changes in your U.S. home address in the U.S. government's Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database.

We ask that you report any residential address changes to us within 7 days of your move so that we can enter the information within the government imposed deadline.

Failure to update your address could result in termination of your J-1 visa status. We are responsible for sending you a slew of important documents, such as DS-2019 forms, insurance cards and other correspodence.

Please remember to contact AILF as soon as possible if you change your U.S. address. Thanks!

facebook

AILF's Exchange Visitor Program is on Facebook!

If you are already on Facebook, look up our group "**AILF J-1 Exchange Visitor Program**" and request to join. We promise we'll accept you.

AND you can also add us as a friend: "Ailf Evp". While it's fun and informative to receive this newsletter, the AILF J-1 Exchange Visitor Program group is a great way to interact one-on-one with other trainees and interns. You can post pictures, discuss your experiences and make new friends from all over the world!

Find us at www.facebook.com. It's free and easy to join. Plus you will never know who you might meet or the experiences you could share.

EXCHANGE VISITOR OF THE MONTH

Cassandra Raby Feeds Her Love of Animals

Cassandra Raby volunteering at the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston, MA.

The Exchange Visitor Program is proud to announce Cassandra Raby as this month's Exchange Visitor of the Month. Each month, we select an exchange visitor who has made an effort to get involved in his/her community and explore American culture.

Raby, 22, of Leeds, England is a J-1 exchange visitor in Lexington, Massachusetts in the field of biomedical technology. Cassandra was very excited to have the opportunity to live and train in the United States. A citizen of the United Kingdom, Cassandra had not expected to find many differences between the U.S. and her home culture and was surprised to discover so many cultural distinctions.

In her free time, Cassandra uses her background in Zoology to volunteer at the Franklin Park Zoo.

"Mostly the volunteer work involves cleaning/feeding and maintenance of the zoo," Raby said, "but I also educate the public and handle some animals."

Cassandra's current animal charges include new ducklings and a young barn owl. Community involvement and volunteering has added another dimension to Cassandra's understanding of the U.S.

In addition to her volunteer activities, Cassandra has also taken advantage of her Massachusetts location to experience the strong regional culture of New England, a portion of the U.S. comprised of the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Cassandra's recent activities have included a Boston Red Sox baseball game and travel to nearby Northeastern cities. Cassandra is looking forward to autumn and the opportunity to attend a New England Patriots football game.

While Cassandra has been learning all she can about American culture, she has also made sure to share her culture with those around her.

"I use comparisons between England and America to share more about my country. This can be from comparing language differences to differences in food, stores and the weather."

Seven months into her exchange experience, Cassandra is having a great time: "The training itself has certainly been invaluable to my future careers, and experiencing life in another country has allowed me to become more open-minded and enthusiastic about being around new people." Cassandra believes that having such an open-minded attitude is part of what makes a successful J-1 exchange visitor. Being "prepared to explore strange and new situations" is also a must!

Understanding American Culture

Celebrating Labor Day in America

Part of the fun of living in another country is experiencing and understanding national holidays. This year, September 7th marks Labor Day in the United States. Labor Day is a federal holiday, which means that the federal government, the post office and many places of business will not be open for business.

Inspired by labor festivals in neighboring Canada, Labor Day saw its start in the United States in New York City in 1882. The day was set aside in recognition and celebration of the growing labor union movement and was used to further advocate for the rights of American workers. It was not until 1894 that Congress declared the first Monday in September as national Labor Day.

Today, fewer than 15% of Americans hold membership in a labor union, and Labor Day has taken on a much less organized labor-related role in American society. The holiday now marks the unofficial end of the summer season. This marker has a lot to do with the American education system, in which many primary and secondary schools have traditionally reopened for the new school year after the holiday. The weekend also falls in the beginning of September when cooler autumn weather begins to arrive in many places around the country.

Your town or city may hold a parade or a fireworks display in celebration of Labor Day, but in general, this is a holiday celebrated on an individual level. Many American families are free from work and/or school on Labor Day, and spend the day celebrating at final summer parties, gathering around food and friends at a backyard barbeque. Many others take advantage of the three day weekend the holiday affords to take a last trip to the beach or the mountains. Finally, Labor Day gives many a much needed excuse to just rest at home.

One quirky cultural part of Labor Day is a long-standing idea that it is the last weekend to wear white, or particularly summery clothing. So remember, after September 7, it's time to put away the white shoes and pants! White shirts and winter coats are still ok though.

Many of you will have a vacation day from your training site on Labor Day. Celebrate with us this weekend, American style, and get out there and have some fun in the sun before the autumn weather arrives!

Seeing Home Through New Eyes

What is the most challenging part of an exchange visitor program? Adapting to a new country? Learning new skills? Making new friends? Eating strange foods? Being polite through all the questions about your home country? Being away from your family during holidays? Making embarrassing mistakes with American English? Dealing with American banks, landlords, or transportation? While each of these examples require the J-1 trainee or intern to use flexibility and a sense of humor, we believe that the greatest challenge of an exchange experience is going home.

During your J-1 program, even the seemingly boring moments are filled with new experiences. After all, the cultural differences, new ideas, and new people are what you came to the United States to find. At first, you probably spent a lot of time noticing similarities between the US and your home; then you began noticing the differences. Some you have accepted and embraced. Others have left you proud of your own culture. Slowly, you have come to accept life in your American community as your own. But within a few short months, you'll wake up one morning and it will be time to return to your own country.

After the initial euphoria of being home—seeing family and friends, eating foods you couldn't find in the US, hearing and speaking your language or local accent, and unpacking your memories—comes the challenge. You want to tell your family and friends about your experience in the US; they've heard enough on this subject and want to tell you their own news. While you've had an exciting experience in the US, the lives of your family and friends have also moved on. You want to tell them about people you met in America; they want to tell you about people you've never met that are now a part of their lives. You see your home community in a new way. Why are the streets so narrow? Why is the shower water colder? Why is the car so much smaller? Why is the news about America so biased? By looking at your home through the eyes of an "outside insider," you experience your country in a new way. When you comment on what you see, it can be taken as criticism.

Here are a few tips for dealing with the "reverse culture shock" of going home. 1) Take ten minutes a day to write a journal of your observations about being home. This will give you a place to express your experience when your family and friends can't relate to your thoughts. 2) Ask about what has been happening in the lives of your family and friends before you volunteer information about your life in America: reassure them that you value what they have been doing while you were away. 3) Keep to the "short version" when talking about your experience. It's better to wait for questions than bore people with details. 4) Remember, home will feel like home again. But you will always see it in a new way.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The best way to contact us with address changes, questions or suggestions is via email. Please send your message to exchange@ailf.org. We welcome any and all newsletter suggestions or comments.

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