



Madison International Partners' Newsletter

"The Global Mind"

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Internationals give back amidst covid 19 pandemic

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We are all in this Together!

By J.R Watchou, MIP Executive Director

We are living unprecedented times: First, the covid 19 has turned out to be one of the deadliest pandemics affecting the world like we never seen before in our lifetime. Then the killing of George Floyd which has come as a brutal reminder of the racial injustice that still exists in our society. We are all struggling to make sense of these events.

The covid 19 pandemic has forced the US and the world into a shutdown and has claimed more than 110,000 American lives. It has forced campuses to close and move to online teachings. Madison International Partners was also compelled to adjust to the moment. We anticipate that the fall season which is usually our busiest one, will be different this year as incoming international students and visiting scholars, universities, and other higher education institutions are struggling to determine their strategy for this fall.

Our regular activities such as International Cooking and Dinner, field trips, and other outdoors events have been cancelled. We have moved program such as English Conversation Time, Global Spouse Circle, and Citizenship Class to online formats. At the demand of internationals who wanted to stay socially connected, we had to increase the frequency of English Conversation Time from one occurrence per week to 3 occurrences a week as many of them have been stuck in isolation in their apartments and dorms, unable to return home to be with their families for the summer. Some have felt victimized, stigmatized; or have even witness or experienced discriminations and xenophobic behaviors related to the origin of the covid 19 outbreak. Many of them have convey their fears and anxiety of going out by themselves because they think that they may be targeted. As a result, they have been very hesitant to leave their apartments or dorms. Madison International Partners has been there not only to provide support (provision of grocery gift cards to the most vulnerable among them) and reassurance, but also to remind them that such behaviors do not reflect the values of this country.

Many internationals recognize themselves in the current movement against systemic racial injustice sparked by the killing of Flyod George. They see this movement as a breath of hope that will help end racism, discriminations, and xenophobia in all its forms They too, are proud to say with all of us: BLACK LIVES MATTER!

Meet New MIP Board Members

The Board of Directors of Madison International Partners recently selected Eileen Wilson, Amy Stettner, and Olivia Rico-McKeen as its newest members. All three bring to the Board new energy, experience and determination to advance MIP mission. Meet below the new Board members:

Eileen Wilson

Eileen recently retired after almost 20 years with the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation. She worked in her way up from donor relations assistant to program coordinator until taking the helm as executive director for the last seven years. At the Foundation, she led efforts to improve health in the state by supporting a strong and diverse physician workforce and funding public health initiatives across Wisconsin.

During her time with the Foundation, she also volunteered on the Board of the McFarland Education Foundation to help increase their scholarship program and develop a signature event to engage the community.

Eileen and her husband now live in Oregon, Wis. and have three grown children, two of whom currently live overseas—one in Japan and one in Myanmar. They have both benefited from the kindness of people in those countries who have helped them acclimate to their new homes. She is grateful to those who helped and hope to be able to provide the same type of help and hospitality for visitors to the Madison area from other countries through involvement with Madison International Partners.

Amy Stettner

Amy is a Cancer Genetic Counselor and has worked for over 20 years in both clinical and laboratory settings, helping patients optimize their cancer screenings and treatments to their genetic makeup. Amy has a passion for meeting new people, visiting new places, and learning about different cultures. She was a member of the Mission Team at Asbury United Methodist church for many years and identified and promoted international missions, most notably, work being done by World Vision in Rwanda.

Olivia Rico-McKeen

Olivia Rico-McKeen, and my pronouns are she, her(s). I am a mother to my intelligent, strong-willed, fun and humorous 4-yr-old daughter, Mayabell Zora. I am a doting person to my sweet, adorable 7-yr-old Boxer, Beatrix Bailey. I am a supportive life partner to my wonderful, caring spouse, Ryan Rico-McKeen. I am a wiser, older sister to three comical, feisty younger sisters ranging from 2 to 10 to 16 years younger. I am also a silly aunt to my curious, young niece, Zoey Marie. California-born, Florida-raised, on the beach was where I spent most of my days. Third generation on both my maternal and paternal sides of my family, I identify as bi-racial. I recognize my light-skinned privilege and acknowledge many only see my mother's Austrian heritage, though, some folks do recognize my Mexican heritage, as well. I am still trying to learn Español, and practice on Duolingo regularly. Professionally, I am a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator for Quartz Health Solutions. My position is new, just since March 2020, and I am still learning and growing in the role. I had about a decade of non-profit experience as a social service provider in the community with some involvement in various DE&I committee work prior to this new role. I am deeply committed to advancing the mission of Madison International Partners should I be chosen as a board member.

Grocery Gift Cards Giveaway to Help Internationals During the Covid 19 Crisis.

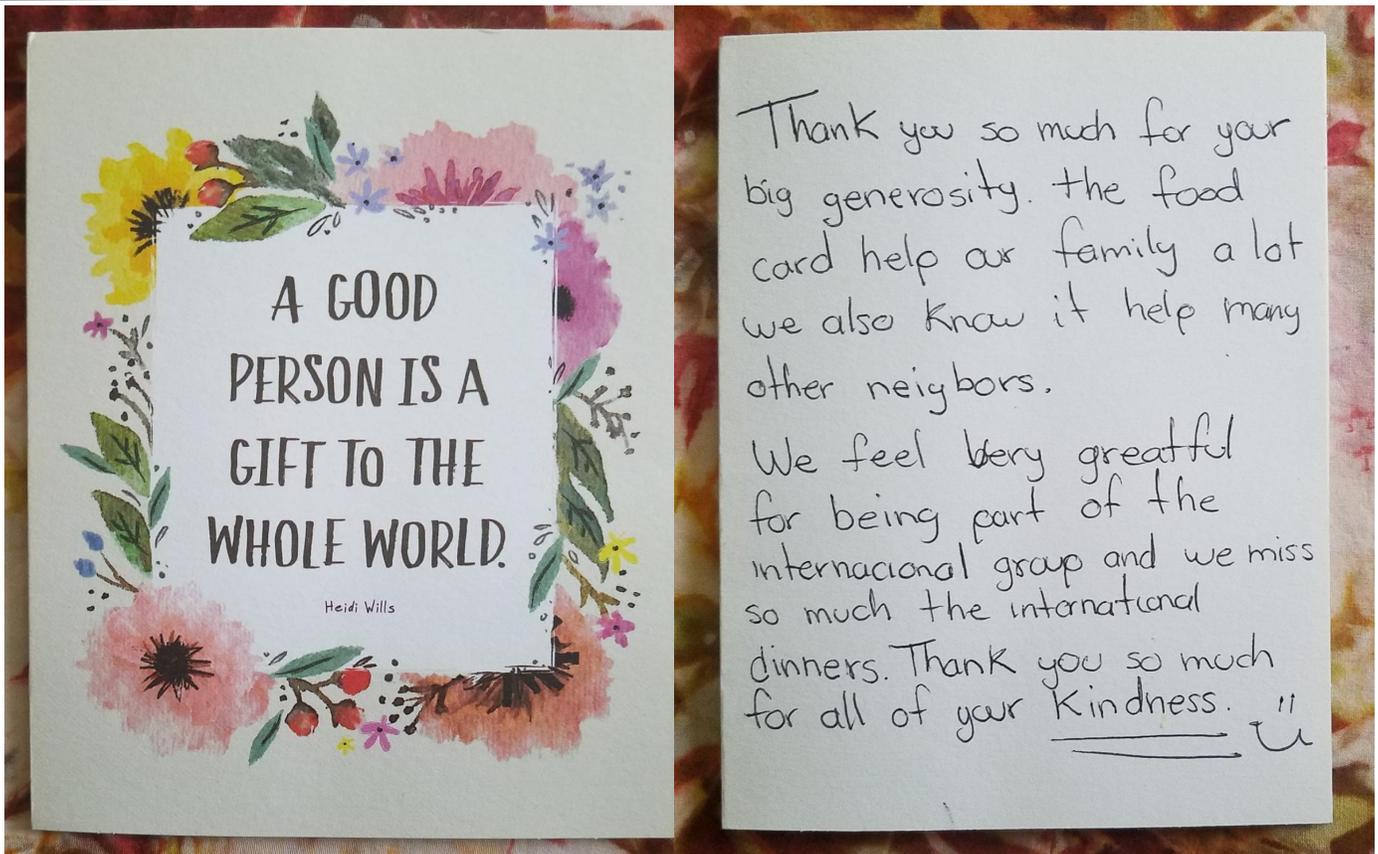
As a response to the hardships imposed to internationals in our community, and given the high demand that most food pantries faced in this time of crisis, we launched the grocery gift cards giveaway initiative which consists of sending grocery gift cards from stores like Woodman's, Pick' N Save, Madison Fresh Market, Capitol Market, and Festival Food to needy internationals. As soon as Madison International Partners supporters and volunteers became aware of the initiative, they massively contributed financially to make sure that there was enough funding available to provide those grocery gift cards. We are very grateful for such spontaneous generosity. To date, we have provided grocery gift cards to 184 internationals and families. The recipients of these gift cards very grateful and have sent me emails and thank you cards to express their gratitude. Below are an email except and one of the many thank you cards I received.

Thank you!

"I am writing to you so say "thank you so much" We received the gift card and we were very happy to know that Madison International Partners is always there for us".

With gratitude,

Gonzalo, Valentina and Azor! UW Madison International Graduate Student Family from Chile.



Marisol Gonzalez, UW international Graduate student from Mexico

Staying Connected in Time of Covid 19

By Brendan Caldwell, MIP Program Assistant # 2

Back in January, while preparing for International Cooking and Dinner the following day, we at Madison International Partners sat down to discuss the novel virus that had made its way over to the United States. Winter break was just ending and students from all over the world were flying into Madison for the beginning of the school year. If I recall correctly, only one presumptive positive had been found in the Midwest and it was at the O'Hare International Airport. None of us knew how serious this could get. No one in a position of authority had yet told us how to proceed.

The question was: do we cancel this event on the ever-so-slight chance that our participants could get sick? Last month's International Cooking and Dinner had to be cancelled. If we cancelled again, would we start to lose the community we had been building for years? Despite the worry that this could be disastrous for our organization, the decision was made that we had to cancel. It wasn't until the following week that it became clear just how wise a decision that had been.

For a week or two we were in limbo. All in-person MIP events had been cancelled for the foreseeable future, and without that we had very little to do. But pretty quickly Jean-Rene educated himself on Zoom and we started having our normal MIP events online. While there was certainly a sense of loss associated with having to go virtual, a major upside became instantly clear -- people could logon from literally anywhere in the world!

During our first online English Conversation Time, dozens of former participants joined our Zoom meeting. We got to hear first hand accounts of the situation in Michigan, Arizona, China, Brazil, Ecuador, Poland, Turkey, the list goes on and on. There was so much excitement and joy as older MIP members got to catch up with people they hadn't seen in years. It stood in stark contrast to all the fear and anxiety that permeated our community at the time.

After only a few weeks of hosting Global Spouse Circle and English Conversation Time on Zoom, we realized that many of our attendees wanted more opportunities to connect with our community. For some, the Friday evening time was inconvenient. For others, they simply had more free time than normal but felt more isolated. So we added two more weekly events, one on Monday and one on Wednesday. Sure enough, all of those events are well attended.

What began as an existential threat to MIP turned into a touching display of the resilience of our international community. It demonstrated that the bonds formed during our in-person events were real and deep. It is unclear when we will be able to resume our in-person events, but I for one hope that we maintain a piece of the online component as well. There is something special about it.



Global Spouse Circle Discovers Virtual Can Be Cozy, Too!

By Milli Lau, MIP Program Assistant #1

The coronavirus has raised anxiety in our society and forced us to go "virtual" in our Global Spouse meetings. However, that does not necessarily mean that we are not as close to one another as before. In fact, the quarantine or "stay at home" order has strengthened our participants' connection in many ways. During the virtual meetings, our participants share their gratefulness in knowing their family and friends are safe as well as their sadness when hearing so many people died in this pandemic period. They share information about the safety of other participants who cannot join our virtual meeting.

In a time when we may not have access to our usual support systems, Global Spouse Circle has been serving as a safe space to ask each other questions and to seek information, ideas, and suggestions. Whether it is about how to take care of a newborn baby or deal with the issue of a child who was refusing to brush his teeth, our experienced mothers and father are happy to offer their counsel. It is heartening to see how everyone is interested in sharing their ideas and experiences!

In addition, Global Spouse Circle has become a platform for participants to cope with stress and find new ways to have fun during the quarantine time. It has been enjoyable for our participants to share their cultural traditions and cuisine online. In the past few weeks, Liudmila, Pamela, and Erendira have demonstrated how to cook Cuban (Potajes Negros and Arroz Congris, Flan), Chilean (Pantrucca), and Mexican food (Banana Oatmeal Cookies and Potato Oatmeal Cookies). Watching and listening to each other in our homes as we demonstrate aspects of our culture and food online has actually added a cozy, relaxed, and friendly dimension to our discussions.

Meeting online has not stopped us from finding ways to get important community information to our Global Spouse participants. On May 21, we had two volunteer police officers, Jodi Nelson and Scott Keinfelt, from the Madison Police Department lead a presentation and discussion regarding police work and responding to emergencies. They confirmed police attitude towards xenophobia (it is not acceptable and the police will do their best to hold someone accountable for their actions) and reminded our participants about the language line in the police department for different language speakers. We also learned when to call the emergency phone line (911) and when it is better to use the non-emergency line; when in doubt, call the emergency line. In addition, we learned what to do if a police car stops your car and how to respond if an emergency vehicle (police, ambulance or fire truck) is coming up behind you with their lights and siren on. We also learned some safety tips and police idioms. Thank you, Madison Police Department, for helping us learn during these difficult times!



Sous Vide Flan (Cuba)



Pantrucas (Chile)

Volunteer Spotlight: Jenna Schroeder

Filling Your Tank Through Volunteerism.

I've been volunteering with MIP for about two and a half years and I love it! I've always enjoyed learning about other cultures and languages, meeting new people, and lending a helping hand. A bonus of volunteering with MIP is that I've also made some wonderful friendships.

In 2019, I participated in MIP's International Friendship Program, which connects native English speakers with international college students. I was matched up with my new friend, Yu, who was here for a year studying Law at UW. We had fun cooking together, going on hikes, apple picking, ice skating, and much more. It was so fun to see her enthusiasm for the Wisconsin outdoors — much different than the environment she was accustomed to in Shanghai. These days we keep in touch via email and hope to meet up again one day.

The program I participate in most frequently with MIP is English Conversation Time. Every Friday evening, individuals gather at Christ Presbyterian Church for a night of conversation with people from across the world. Groups are divided into 5-8 participants by level of proficiency and each group is led by one or two native English speakers. We have a rough outline of topics we can chat about. They typically include idioms, cultural events, upcoming holidays, and more. But what makes this night so fun is the evolution of the conversation and seeing the curiosity of everyone in the room. Wherever the night goes, there is always laughter, learning, and friendship to be found.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in March, we have been having ECT online via Zoom instead of meeting in person. This setting has created a unique opportunity that has brought past and present ECT participants together from around the world. It's nonetheless continued to be a joyful experience connecting from near and far during these very difficult days.

I believe we can all find a way to make a difference and connect to our community through issues or causes we are passionate about; I encourage you to think of how you can fulfill these passions. Grab a friend you don't get to see often enough, reach out to a colleague you'd like to get to know better, or get your co-workers together for a team-building day and get out there! I'm confident you'll fill a part of your tank that maybe you didn't even realize was running on empty.



Goodbye Maryam, Goodbye Shiho & Wataru.

This past month, we said our goodbye to Maryam Ladoni, an international graduate student from Iran who has just graduated with her Master's Degree in Photography. Since last year, Mariam has been an active participant to MIP activities and have touched many by her caring love and kindness. She is leaving behind the many friends she made here, but promised to stay in touch. She will be dearly missed. We wish her all the best as she move to California for the next step of her career.



We also said goodbye to Shiho, her husband, and her son Wataru who are returning to Japan after spending almost 3 years with us in Madison where the husband was held a post doc position that ended in May. Shiho was one the most regular participants of Global Spouse Circle which she joined at its inception in the spring of 2017. We organized a baby shower for her in September 2017 and we saw her son Wataru being born and become a cute little boy. They have both been fun people to be around. We will miss them very much. Here is what Shiho had to say about her time in Madison.

“Thank you for your great support to us. Definitely, my life in Madison might have been totally different if I had not joined this group. I found how important the connection between people was especially after giving a birth, even though I couldn't speak English well. I was afraid of staying here at first. Of course, I was confused with some cultural



differences, but always you guys relieved my worry. Since I met many warm-hearted volunteers and other friendly spouses here, I had wonderful experiences with them and expanded my way of thought. I really appreciated all of you! Stay safe and hope to have a wonderful summer vacation. Thank you”.

Internationals give back amidst Covid 19 pandemic.

At the peak of the covid 19 crisis in the US when hospital workers were lacking protective equipment (PPE), a former participant of English Conversation Time who currently lives in China heard about the dire situation of the pandemic in the US and wanted to help. He contacted us to see if he can send some face masks. When we let him know that we needed those, he sent us a shipment of 100 surgical face masks (that's the maximum I individual could send from china). Part of those surgical face masks were sent to a nurse in Green Bay whose hospital was lacking protective equipment for the medical personnel.

A few days later two other alumni from English Conversation Time in China, also contacted us because they were worried about our situation here in the US and wanted to help. They too sent us 100 masks that have distributed to those who needed them.



I have been blown away by the spirit of generosity and solidarity that our internationals have shown toward us in these difficult times. The covid 19 has given them an opportunity to give back and they are doing it in a way that makes us proud. Kudos to our internationals!

How to get involved or support MIP?

Sign up to volunteer with MIP: <https://internationalmadison.org/volunteer/>

Donate to support MIP at : <https://internationalmadison.org>

MIP Board of Directors: Martha Henderson—**President**; Tammy Taylor—**Treasurer**; Terry Tao—**Secretary**;

Members: Dave Nelson; Sumudu Atapattu; Nathan Barnes; & Ellen Hansen; Eileen Wilson; Amy Stettner; & Olivia Rico-McKeen

Advisory board: Norma Madsen; Ellen Murdoch; Boris Frank; Jane Coleman; David & Marian Quade; Mike & Cheryl Shult; Ken Baun



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Madison International Partners' mission is to extend welcome and hospitality services to internationals and promote in-depth cross-cultural exchanges between Americans and internationals in the Madison community. Through its various programs MIP creates opportunities for global awareness and better understanding between people of different races, cultures, religions, and social backgrounds.

Visit and Support MIP at : Internationalmadison.org



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