



Madison International Partners Newsletter

"The Global Mind"

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We are a Family!

By Jean-Rene Watchou, Executive Director

Graduation happened a few weeks ago. After the euphoria of graduation, it is time for us to say farewell to some of our international friends who have finished their time in Madison and are heading home or pursuing other job opportunities in the U.S. We will miss them, but many of them will stay in touch through our online programs for which they can participate via zoom. They are leaving carrying with them the ethos of friendship and hospitality that they have cultivated here through our programs and activities. Our hope is that they will be ambassadors of that ethos wherever in the world they go.

We believe in bringing change into the world through the people who have been part of our organization. Saying goodbye to some of them has been quite difficult as many of them have become family to us. However, we are comforted by the fact that the void that they are leaving in our hearts, will be soon filled by the many more international students and academic scholars who will arrive in Madison this fall to achieve their academic dreams. Some of them, like Viviana whose story you will discover in this edition of the newsletter, will arrive to finally meet in-person the people they have come to know virtually through our online programs.

Yes we are a family, and we saw that family spirit on full display a few weeks ago when Global Spouse Circle organized a baby shower for three of its participants who are expecting babies this summer. That event was so meaningful to those expectant parents who live far away from their family and friends. The baby shower was a sign of love and the opportunity to immerse in the traditions of another culture. The three young ladies and their spouses certainly felt the love of their friends and the family-like community of Madison International Partners.

Yes, we are indeed, one family, the family of mankind. We are looking forward to later this summer, not only for the babies we will welcome in our midst, but also because of the new international students, visiting scholars, and other immigrants we will welcome and get to know as we help with their transition to life here in Madison. In the meantime, we will enjoy the summer like any family does with activities such Breakfast on the Farm, our annual picnic, and an outing to the Brewers game or a day trip to Chicago. We invite you to join us!

Featured Program: English Conversation Time

By Yong Li, MIP Program Associate

Madison International Partners (MIP) offers a variety of programs to support international students and scholars in their transition to life in the U.S. One of these programs is English Conversation Time. This program is designed to help international students improve their English language skills, make new friends, and learn about American culture.

For newly arriving international students and scholars, the English language can be a significant barrier to their integration into American society. They may feel isolated and struggle to communicate effectively with local residents. English Conversation Time provides a supportive and friendly environment where they can practice their English and engage in conversation with native speakers without fear of misunderstandings. To further enhance learning about American culture and friendships, the English Conversation Time program includes a variety of activities throughout the year such as picnics, potlucks, pizza and game nights, museum visits, hikes, and holiday celebrations.

This program is staffed by volunteer tutors who are passionate about helping international students and scholars succeed in their new home. For these volunteers, English Conversation Time is a great opportunity to enrich their own lives by learning about world perspectives and different cultures and making new friends. In this way, the program not only benefits the international students and scholars who participate but also the broader community in which we all live.

The English Conversation Time program is truly an invaluable resource for international students and scholars in the Madison area and also provides local residents with an opportunity to learn and grow. This type of cross-cultural exchange is essential for building a strong and inclusive community, and Madison International Partners is proud to offer this opportunity for those in the Madison area.



Your Support is Critical:

Donate today or volunteer to help continue and expand these programs and activities that mean so much to our international friends and also enrich the Madison community.

Mail check payable to Madison International Partners to 944 E Gorham St, Madison, WI 53703.

To donate stocks or other securities, contact Jean-Rene Watchou at 608-217-3008 for transfer directions.

Donate securely online anytime at <https://internationalmadison.org/>

Volunteer –There are many ways to get involved, from one-time events, to weekly programs, to becoming a member of the volunteer board or a committee. For details on options, call executive director Jean-René Watchou at 608-217-3008 or email him at jeanrene@cpcmadison.org.

Celebrating New Life at a Joyful Baby Shower

By Yong Li, MIP Program Associate

In a heartwarming celebration of new beginnings, Madison International Partners (MIP) recently hosted a baby shower event as part of its Global Spouse Circle program. The event brought together international families and local volunteers to honor three expectant mothers and their partners awaiting the arrival of a precious little one. and foster a sense of community and support.

Attendees enjoyed a festive atmosphere filled with laughter and love as they celebrated these families and the joyous occasion. The event featured a variety of delightful games and activities and thoughtful gifts. Through the games, gifts and heartwarming conversations, this event was a beautiful opportunity to connect with a diverse group of community members, share experiences, and build lasting friendships.



At Madison International Partners, we believe in nurturing a welcoming environment for everyone, and the baby shower exemplified the spirit of warmth and inclusivity that we cherish. This type of opportunity to connect with one another and share experiences, stories, and dreams is at the core of MIP's mission. It's another example of how the supportive environment nurtured by MIP creates a space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together and offer each other encouragement, friendship, and a sense of belonging.

"We are incredibly grateful to all who participated and made this gathering a truly memorable experience," said Jean-Rene Watchou, MIP Executive Director. "Special thanks to Chimmi Wangmo for taking the lead on planning and beautifully decorating this event. The baby shower was a true celebration of life and unity and we are incredibly grateful for the community we have built and the support we provide to international spouses and families. It is heartening to witness the bonds formed and the genuine care that our members extend to one another."

MIP is dedicated to organizing engaging events and programs like this baby shower that foster enrich the lives of its community members. To stay updated on the latest news and upcoming events, follow Madison International Partners on Facebook.



Building Community Across Borders

By Viji Kandhadai, Rob Greenberg, Mike Barnett & Viviana Veloza Martinez

My name is **Viji Kandhadai** and I have been volunteering with Madison International partners for more than three years. Late in August 2022, I waited at the Van Galder Coach USA bus stop on campus to pick up Viviana from Bogota, Colombia. When she stepped off the bus, it felt like a close friend was coming home.

Although we had never met in person, I knew her from over three years of meeting via Zoom. She was a person who didn't let circumstances keep her down, fought for something better, worked hard to get an education, and then worked to help others find opportunities and a better life. She initially joined MIP's English Conversation Time (ECT) to improve her English skills to seek opportunities for further education in England. As we practiced English conversation skills at ECT sessions, we learned about each other, shared life stories and experiences, helped each other face challenges and reach goals (me learning Spanish to travel and she practicing interview skills to win scholarships), handled disappointments and celebrated successes together—we built a friendship.

So, when Viviana got off that bus, it took each of us a minute to attach a face to the person we knew so well and then we were off! It has been a year since she arrived in Madison and she has become an integral part of our family. My Spanish conversations with Vivi gave me the confidence to spend a month in Spain recently and conversely, I feel immense pride in seeing how Viviana has successfully navigated the first year of her Master's program at UW Madison.

Building a family of friends in a home away from our homes has expanded our worlds in so many ways. Madison International partners has helped build community that is not limited by geography.

Mike Barnett, another longtime MIP volunteer, has also become a member of Viviana's family away from home. He first met Viviana on ECT Zoom meetings during the pandemic. After Vivi arrived in Madison and went to her first in-person English conversation session, she met Mike for the first time, but not really, because Mike was already part of her life and the virtual community she had built in Madison. He shared the following thoughts on their connection.

"During the first couple of years of participating in the ECT program, Viviana set up one-on-one Zoom calls in order to further practice her English skills toward obtaining an academic position at College of London or UW-Madison. Viviana works extremely hard and is successfully improving her English-speaking skills. She survived the stresses of last-minute visa interviews, first week jitters a UW teaching assistantship, and the remote location of her Eagle Heights apartment. I am impressed with her stories (and compassion) of working with and for the poor young people from the streets and shelters of Bogata. I have come to associate the word vivacious with Viviana."

Rob Greenberg also met Viviana during ECT sessions via Zoom. Here are his comments. "If there is a silver lining to the Covid pandemic, it was the ability to connect with people whom you have never met in person—people like Viviana. It was clear from the first Zoom session that Viviana was committed to improving her English. She was interested in improving the lives of women in Colombia, specifically by increasing educational opportunities that too often don't exist for those who come from humble beginnings. She thought that learning to speak English and furthering her own education would allow her to have a greater impact toward achieving her goals.



Building Community Across Borders

By Viji Kandhadai, Rob Greenberg, Mike Barnett & Viviana Veloza Martinez

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I was taking Spanish classes at that time and Viviana agreed to look over my work and make suggestions. She was always willing to help. After years of encouraging her to not give up on her dream of studying abroad especially after receiving a rejection, it was like a miracle when she shared with us that she was accepted at UW-Madison. This was something that seemed nearly impossible up to that time. Working with Viviana to prepare her for her US visa interview in Bogota and then finally seeing her in person on her arrival in Madison felt like a group achievement!”

For **Viviana Veloza Martinez**, the ECT program came into her life serendipitously and “stayed to inhabit my soul as a home.” The first time she participated was in the summer of 2018 when she was in Madison on vacation. She was visiting some Colombian professors at UW-Madison and her English skills were almost nonexistent. “I still wonder how I was able to converse, but I managed to connect with several people, of whom I am now infinitely fond,” said Viviana. “That trip was a wonderful experience. Seeing the world come together at MIP events and the joy of sharing with people from different backgrounds, languages and expectations of life, I always felt like I was in a familiar place—with people who were respectful and listened. It inspired me to pursue the dream of continuing to travel and to study outside of Colombia, overcoming the obstacles that life presents. As the expression in my country goes, against all odds!

While the world was in chaos due to the pandemic, I was actively preparing to apply for the Chevening Scholarship in England. My biggest challenge was not only to learn English, but to believe that I had the skills to do it. Viji, Rob and Mike dedicated hours of their lives to speaking with me and supporting me in improving my English. They gave me advice and became the type of fan that all human beings should have, those who applaud you at every step of the way no matter whether you achieve your goals or not. I gained strength from Viji, a strong woman who became my mentor and friend. Rob is my unconditional friend with whom I feel confidence and joy in life. Mike was my perfect English coach. He was generous with his time and showed infinite patience when he often had to say, ‘I didn't understand. Repeat your idea.’ Since he doesn't speak Spanish, he was the perfect gauge of my ability to express ideas in English. But most importantly, he is a sweet person who reminds me that he is there to accompany and support me in everything I need.

After a long process, I became fluent in English and managed to win both the Chevening scholarship in England and admission at UW Madison. It was a difficult decision, but I leaned toward what resonated for me as the best example of what I call community—Madison!”

Viji Kandhadai - Moving to a new country is challenging, but having a community of which you are already a part, plus good friends who welcome you and enjoy sharing their lives with you, makes it feel more like coming home—a home away from home. Madison International Partners has provided that home for so many of us. It has been a pleasure to welcome Vivi into our lives and share her successes and adventures. The reciprocal is true as well. Rob and I have traveled to places around the world where the community we created through MIP has provided us warm welcomes and wonderful experiences. Join us to expand your community!



A peek Into this “Home Away From Home”

By Alex Vakar, Senior, West High School

On April 22, I attended an International Cooking and Dinner event hosted by Madison International Partners (MIP) with my English-learning grandmother. This dinner offers an opportunity for citizens of the world of all ages living in the Madison area to come together and cook, laugh, share their experiences and make friends. The event lasts 4 to 5 hours, but between the energizing atmosphere in the kitchen and the playful laughter and games in the dining room, time passes quickly. The event proves how, despite our differences, we can always find common ground; whether it be food, music, or something as simple as a friendly smile. By cooking alongside those so different from you and learning about the process of their cooking, you learn about how your paths came to intersect here in this welcoming corner of the world.



My grandmother is learning English, and takes classes a few times a week, which is how she found out about these dinners which occur monthly throughout the school year. She attended her first dinner a few months ago simply hoping for more conversational practice but she has quickly become a part of this diverse community. Little did she know, that learning a language could be so much fun!

My grandmother introduced me to her new friends from Ecuador, Ukraine and China, all of whom greeted us with a big smile and an enthusiastic “Hello!” The communal kitchen buzzed with laughter and conversation in many different languages. We stood at a counter and I helped cut parsley and dill as garnish for the borscht made by my grandmother.

I spoke with Ellen, Qing, and Kashmir who told me a little about their lives and the dishes they prepared. Ellen from Mexico, prepared a dish of rice with vegetables and herbs. When asked how she’s adjusted to the community and what her experience has been, she reflected on the amount of opportunity such an event provided. “You meet people from many countries around the world,” mentioning that not only people of many cultures, but also different professions, and bringing unique perspectives.

Qing is an example of this. She moved to Madison from Shanghai, China in 2017 for her husband’s job as a scholar at UW-Madison. She told me that she was a journalist back home. She prepared Mapo Tofu, a spicy tofu dish that features Sichuan Peppercorn, a spice known for its numbing effect on the tongue!

Kashmir moved here just this year and speaks English well, the result of watching Hollywood movies he said. He sought out international events online and joined MIP’s community. Kashmir prepared a Goat Biryani, consisting of goat, white rice, cilantro, and ginger. Flavorful juices from the meat extracted into the rice, make a deliciously rich dish from Pakistan.

Once everyone finished cooking, all dishes were brought to long tables in the large dining room and the buffet-style meal would soon begin. Each dish had a label identifying its name, main ingredients and source country which offered an opportunity to increase the vocabulary of English-learners and expand all of our taste buds with new flavors. Jean-Rene Watchou, MIP’s executive director, welcomed everyone to the event, playfully encouraging the crowd to sit next to someone they didn’t know and make a new friend. He welcomed a Turkish family that had survived the recent earthquake and was already surrounded by friendly people. Finally, Jean-Rene gave the announcement for dinner to begin asking that we respectfully let those who are older than us at each table go first. With that, the culinary trip around the world began!

As a child of two immigrants myself, I understand the difficulty of moving to a place so different from home and starting anew. Everyone who contributes to support MIP and programs such as this, is providing an outlet for empathy, respect, understanding, friendship and a place to belong. Whatever the reason that each individual or family arrives here, there is something for them through the programs of Madison International Partners.

Fall Volunteer Opportunities: Join us!

Temporary Hosting (August 1st-31st)

The Temporary Hosting opportunity allows you to open your house to an international student for up to four nights when he/she first arrives in Madison as a way to welcome them and help ease their transition to their new environment. This is an invitation to provide welcome and friendship; there is no charge to the student and no compensation for hosts. If you have a spare bedroom you could share for 2 to 4 days sometime between August 1st and August 31st, please let us know.

Airport/Bus Station Pick up (July 30th - September 10th)

Through this opportunity, you will pick up one or more students at the Dane County airport or the bus station and transport them to their apartments or dorms. All the information about the students and where to drop them off are given to you in advance. This is a wonderful way to show hospitality and ease anxiety for someone arriving in America for the first time.

Tour of Madison (Sunday September 3rd from 1 to 5:30 pm)

The Tour of Madison is a unique opportunity to welcome new international students in Madison, meet new friends, and make a long lasting impression on these newcomers. Volunteer drivers use their own cars to help transport the student around town following a route specially designed for the occasion. The tour begins with an orientation for drivers and readers and ends with a light reception at one of our volunteer's home. More volunteer drivers and readers are needed.

Apple Orchard and Picnic (Saturday, Sept. 17)

Apple picking at Appleberry Farm followed by a picnic at Martha and Rich Henderson's nearby home has become a fall tradition for MIP as it offers internationals an excursion into the countryside. Volunteer drivers are needed for this activity.

English Conversation Time (in-person on Fridays, 6 to 7:30 pm and online on Wednesdays, 10 to 11 am)

English Conversation Time is a casual and flexible program where international students have a meaningful interactions with native speakers. The program helps international students practice their English, and gives them the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about American culture while sharing their own customs and culture. You can make a huge difference in the life of someone by volunteering weekly or as often as your schedule allows.

International Friendship Hour (Tuesdays from noon to 1 pm)

This program meets at Pres House on the UW-Madison campus on Tuesdays, noon-1 p.m. during the school year and allows international students and visiting scholars a chance to take a break from their studies and socialize with Americans.

Global Spouse Circle (Wednesdays from 1 to 2:30 pm)

Moving to the U.S. can be challenging for the spouses of international students and visiting scholars. We know that it can get lonely being at home with their children or alone while their partners are busy with their studies or research work. The goal of this program is to help international spouses make connections with Americans and other international families and find friendships and support within the Madison community as they embark on a new life in the United States.

To volunteer for any of these opportunities, sign up through this link: <https://internationalmadison.org/volunteer/>

You may also contact Jean-Rene at jeanrene@cpcmadison.org or call him at 608-217-3008.



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Our Mission:

Helping global citizens, living in or connected to the Madison area, thrive through hospitality, friendship and cross cultural exchanges.

Through its various programs, Madison International Partners creates opportunities for global awareness and better understanding between people of different races, cultures, religions and social backgrounds.



In this newsletter, you will hear about the fascinating journey of Viviana from Bogota to Madison.

A visit to Madison in 2018 inspired Viviana to improve her English language skills and work toward being admitted to a Master's program in England or at UW-Madison. Thanks to the online programs offered by Madison International Partners throughout the pandemic, Viviana found the help and support she needed. See pages 4 and 5 to learn more about how MIP volunteers Viji, Rob and Mike became her support system and helped her achieve her goal.

Board of Directors: Eileen Wilson—*President*; Hannah Lanser—*Treasurer*; Amy Stettner—*Secretary*; Jean-René Watchou—*Executive Director*; Nathan Barnes; Terry Tao; Lisa Cutting; Guy Van Rensselaer; Viji Kandadhai; Bob Sorensen; Matt Wolfram; and Steve Ujvarosy—*Members*

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