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# *In Their Own Words:*

**FLEX ALUMNI  
WITH DISABILITIES**  
describe their  
program experiences



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When I was with someone in America who couldn't see, or had trouble walking, **THEY HAD THE SAME RIGHTS AS EVERYONE ELSE.** No one ever pointed out that they were not like everyone else. For me, America contributed to my self-confidence, helped me stop worrying about walking down the street, or worry that someone would stare at me or do something to me because they think I'm not capable. Everything was normal, everyone is respectful, you can interact with everyone, there is nothing wrong with having a disability. Now I say that it's actually kind of cool to be different.

## Maryana

UKRAINE | HOSTED IN CALIFORNIA

It was a little bit of a surprise to me when **I WENT TO SCHOOL AND I SAW THAT EVERYTHING WAS ACCESSIBLE:** doors, and bathrooms, and classrooms... I was able to do everything that I wanted to do in their house, and I didn't have any problems. I tell my story to other kids and inspire them and say that you have to take a risk, and I was scared when I was coming here, but it worked out very, very cool.

## Tamara

GEORGIA | HOSTED IN NORTH CAROLINA

American Councils staff helped students with disabilities. For example, if a student does not see well or cannot write, staff could write the students' answers on his or her behalf. In June, we had the Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO). This is an orientation for all finalists of the FLEX program. I stayed in the same hotel as other students. In August, I partook in a program only for students with disabilities called Mobility International USA (MIUSA). There, **WE WERE TAUGHT HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR DISABILITY, CHALLENGES WE FACE, AND ACCOMMODATIONS WE NEED.** We were also given many new opportunities. I tried to ride a bike for the first time. This was a very unforgettable experience for me. We also volunteered. They provided me with all of the accommodations I needed.

## Yuliya

UKRAINE | HOSTED IN IOWA

I have had hearing loss since I was 2 years old. To be honest, I was always so lost. I have a different accent, and people don't know my story behind that accent... I can say that **THIS SCHOLARSHIP GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND MYSELF, WHO I AM, AND TO BE PROUD OF IT.**

## Marija

MONTENEGRO | HOSTED IN MINNESOTA

Unfortunately, I did not pass the test the first year I tried. I decided that it wasn't worth being upset and to try harder. The second year, I passed the test and became a FLEX finalist. Therefore, for those who are worried, **I WANT TO SAY: TRY.** Don't worry and everything will work out. In fact, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it will be useful after finishing school, when you have to choose your profession and what you want to do in the future.

Before America, for example, I never used a walking stick because it was embarrassing. In America, I began to understand that there's no shame in it; people are different and adapt the best they can. My advice for students with low vision who want to travel to America is to try your best because this might be exactly what you need.

## Serhiy

UKRAINE | HOSTED IN HAWAII

Recreation was very exciting as I saw accommodations there that I have never seen before, and I realized that there are **NO LIMITS IN DOING SPORTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE** as well.

## Danil

KYRGYZSTAN | HOSTED IN CALIFORNIA