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## Study abroad program expands students' borders

By Mandy Miles Key West Citizen

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Morehouse

The five tenets practiced by high school participants in the Experiment in International Living study abroad program are a roadmap for diplomacy and international relations worldwide: Go to learn, not to work; expect the unexpected; turn a crisis into an adventure, learn to live together by living together and be quick to observe, slow to judge.

The scores of Monroe County students who have spent the bulk of their summer in places such as

Tanzania, Japan, South Africa, Mongolia, India, Thailand, Italy, Ecuador, Peru and Argentina report an experience that did more than any classroom lesson to broaden their thinking, bolster their confidence and better their critical thinking skills.

Three such students spoke of their experiences Monday evening at an informal gathering at the home of EIL supporter John Padget and his partner, Jacob Gelt-Dekker, who are hosting Aaron Morehouse, executive director of "The Experiment," and his wife for the week. Padget, who has lived and worked abroad for decades, is a champion of the international experience as it relates to students' abilities and aspirations.

"But nobody should go with a friend on these trips; go alone and make friends," Padget told the group of 20 or so people gathered in his backyard.

One student who had participated in The Experiment in Tanzania laughed when she described her first meeting with their fun-loving Maasai hosts.

"We had only learned how to address people in Swahili, not in the Maasai language, so after a quick crash course, we met our hosts, and they love to joke around, so they were teasing us about getting the greetings wrong, even if we had it right," she said.

Key West High School senior Anna Mott spoke of her experience in Japan the summer before her junior year as being one of the best things that could have happened to her.

"One day in Tokyo, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, we were in a shopping district, and then we turned a corner and down a side street, we came upon a huge forest and a temple," she said. "In the middle of this huge city, there existed a slice of peace and quiet. It was just beautiful, and something I'll never forget."

Mott went on to tell the group that her grades were the best they'd ever been when she returned from Japan.

"I tried new things, joined more clubs and made friends more easily," she said.

Morehouse nodded knowingly throughout the students' short discussions.

"The consistency of the impacts is amazing, with students reporting back an increase in confidence and communication and problem-solving skills," he said, adding that in the coming year, 30 Monroe County students will have the opportunity to get 50 percent of their program fees paid for through a merit-based essay contest that ends Feb. 1.

“Now is the time for students to start applying and writing their essays,” he said, adding that program fees typically cost \$5,000 to \$7,000 depending on the destination country. So a half scholarship would cover \$2,500 to \$3,500. “And that covers everything in country. We recommend that students only need to bring about \$300 spending money for their entire four to six weeks. Obviously, we’ll get kids with their dad’s credit card, but for others whose families may struggle to save the \$300, I’d recommend trying for the essay contest and then perhaps trying to raise the rest of their program fees through local rotary clubs, go fund me campaigns, anything.”

“Outside of the New York City area, Monroe County sends more students on Experiment trips than anywhere else in the country, and we treasure that partnership we have with the Monroe County Education Foundation, the school district and Take Stock in Children,” Morehouse said.

He explained that The Experiment is one of the few nonprofit study abroad programs in the world, and one of the most established.

“We sent our first group of students to Germany in 1933,” he said. “We firmly believe that we can learn to live together — by living together.”

The Experiment in International Living has been changing lives and shaping futures ever since.

More information is available at [experiment.org](http://experiment.org).

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