



Visions USA Summer Recap

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We did it!

Amazing organizations, amazing programming, and amazing students!



by **Katie Wilson** on August 05

I have to say, this was Visions USA's best summer so far. Our students are their hosting families with perfect matches, all of them- so much so that there were LOTS of tears at our farewell meeting, and we had to intervene or else be late to the airport! The activities were all fantastically executed- highlights being the new Adventure Center High Ropes Course and Team Building Activities, the Asheville Tourists Baseball Game, and the fan favorite Tubing on the Green River. What a joy to witness so many happy faces, so much learning, and so many friendships being formed. Additionally, this year we reached a longtime goal of mine, and were able to offer full scholarships to THREE local students.

Let's hear a bit more about summer!

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Local Schools Tours, High Ropes, and More!

This summer we were able to offer the most diverse and well rounded schedule of programs yet, each week packed with outdoor activities, teambuilding, learning, and opportunities to give back. It's hard to choose favorites, but here are a few of what I'd consider our highlights:

Team Building and High Ropes Course at the Asheville Adventure Center

This was our first activity to start the session off. Monday afternoon, students are just getting settled in to their host family homes, and now learning the routine of the program, everyone's names and where we are. The Adventure Center did a great job mixing it up with games designed to help students get to know one another and build skills for working as a team collaboratively and supportively. Then they were able to spend a few hours trying out the variety of high ropes courses offered at the park. There was something for everyone, from lower to the ground interactive courses, to high, physically challenging ones. A great way for students to use their bodies and language skills, and a great bonding experience. Everyone came in the next morning as though they'd known each other for years, and we kept that closeness through to the end of the program.

Tour of Asheville High School

What a treat! We were given a tour by First Sergeant Jesse, who has been with Asheville High School for nearly 30 years. This man knows the school's every hidden corner, and it's long history. And what kept him there for so long? His love for students! He really went above and beyond for our group, from providing everyone with something to take home (T-shirts, whistles, water bottles), to getting to know everyone's names and where they're

from, to even taking out the basketballs and footballs and letting the students play on the real athletic field. Everyone got a true American High School experience, and a few hours flew by in no time. Times flies when you're having fun!

Tubing the Green River

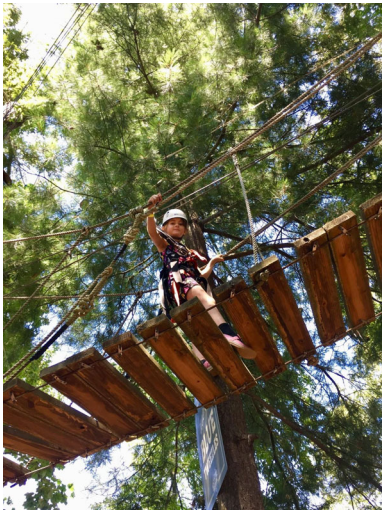
Always a fan favorite. Something I've learned- tubing isn't a popular activity in many places outside the U.S. And if you think about it, riding an inflatable plastic doughnut down a river *does* seem like a wild idea! So unsurprisingly, often many of our students don't know what to expect. Year after year, on the last day many name it as their favorite activity. And for good reason! Floating down a gentle and pristine river in a stunningly beautiful forest offers such a perfect opportunity to appreciate nature, and relax. And a few hours uninterrupted time where they're expected to just hang out together- what more can a teen ask for?

Volunteering at Bounty and Soul

We worked with this organization 3 times this summer- and I wish we could have gone more! They are truly an amazing organization doing powerful work. They source "undesirable" food from local grocery chains- food that is out of date but still perfectly good, produce that isn't "pretty", maybe too big or too small, odd shaped, as well as a large amount of produce and herbs donated from local community gardens and farms. Food is washed and presented, and then provided for FREE to anyone who needs it. And on top of that, this organization provides outreach programs to marginalized communities and the elderly, from transportation assistance, classes on health and wellness, like yoga, cooking classes, and even childcare. Our students were involved at every step, preparing and serving food, assisting older people with heavy groceries, and even taking care of the younger kids. And the best part of this place? It never feels like work. It is truly an authentic space to get to know your neighbors and support one another. Now THAT's what I call community.

English and Foreign Language Classes

Of course, every day in a foreign country is an english lesson for our visiting students. And that's usually how I prefer the learning to happen- in an authentic, unstructured, real format. But our morning lessons offer such a fun space for learning about each other and putting our new knowledge into action. Every morning we were able to talk about the previous day's activities, offering clarity and elaboration. It's these moments of reflection that really make experiences impactful. It was also a space to share about what goes on in each host family's home while students aren't around one another in the evening, giving them a broader perspective of American life. At the same time, American host siblings were engaged in foreign language lessons- and it was so awesome to hear them bravely trying out their new language skills with their new international friends at lunch after class!



A Big THANK YOU from Visions USA!!!

We absolutely could not have pulled this off without the support of our local partner schools, particularly Rainbow Community School which hosted us for the 3rd year in a row, local partner organizations such as Bounty & Soul, and the support of local families who chose to open their hearts and homes to young strangers from abroad. It's wonderful to see local families form friendships with one another and all pitch in to support the needs of our students. It's not always easy work, but it's always fun and meaningful! It's such a privilege to be able to work with so many awesome folks from the community and help facilitate their experience and building their global network. And most importantly, from our students who were willing to be brave, travel to a new country or invite a stranger to share their family with them, and "give up" some precious weeks of summer vacation to spend learning. At a young age they already value hard work, developing empathy and understanding for others, and becoming educated and well-rounded citizens. These kids are truly our future and I'm impressed by their goals and efforts. I'm simply honored to be able to be in the presence of so many great people and help make so many connections, worldwide and locally here in Asheville. Thank you all for helping make my dream come true!

-Katie

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<https://www.visionsusa.org>



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