



**Poughkeepsie Branch American Association of University Women Inc.**  
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**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**  
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**International in Our Own Backyard – An Update**

Poughkeepsie's new teacher-exchange program with Oaxaca, Mexico, is well underway. The three Dutchess County teachers selected to participate in the first trip to Oaxaca left the US on Sunday! I was privileged to attend a Buen Viaje luncheon honoring the trio as well as some of the donors, organizers, and supporters, which was held at La Cabanita restaurant in Arlington – owned by a native of Oaxaca. Poughkeepsie Mayor Rob Rolison, who has spearheaded the sister-city arrangement between the two cities, attended the luncheon; the exchange program is the work of Gabriel Owen and AAUW member Ellie Charwat.

Transportation costs for the trip were underwritten by Mark Adams, who was also in attendance, as well as Poughkeepsie City Manager Marc Nelson, and a grant from the Vassar College Good Neighbor Fund. Other expenses were paid for by additional individual donors.



*L - R: Blanca Calderon, Joyette Walton, and Franky Perez*



*Buen Viaje Luncheon – Poughkeepsie-Oaxaca Friendship Committee,  
La Cabanita Restaurant, August 22, 2019*

I gave my Mid-Hudson International Calendar address to all three and urged them to tell me about any events open to the public that should be added to the calendar after they return. I told them I hoped they would be able to speak at an AAUW meeting about their experiences, and indicated that the new Hospitality Resource we are planning for the Poughkeepsie AAUW Branch will be available to support next year's visit to Dutchess by their Mexican counterparts.

*[One of the teachers, Blanca Calderon, is actually a native of El Salvador. She told me that, like thousands of her countrymen, she had escaped to the US in the 1980s after her brother was murdered during the civil war involving the Sandinistas – a situation similar to the one now faced by asylum-seekers from Guatemala. She pointed out that many countries took in Salvadoran refugees in those days, including Israel, which accepted an extraordinary number out of gratitude for the welcome El Salvador had extended to many Jews seeking refuge from the Holocaust.]*

*[Another, Franky Perez, recalled that when he came to his first teaching position in Poughkeepsie more than 20 years ago, he identified just one Latino student in his school. Now, he noted, the Poughkeepsie School District is 40 per cent Latino.]*

## **January 9 Membership Meeting**

I have spoken to several individuals about the program our Committee is preparing for the January 9 AAUW membership meeting. We plan to illustrate the needs of international members of the Mid-Hudson community that might be met by an AAUW International Hospitality Resource. This could be the most fun undertaking the Committee has attempted yet. Who doesn't enjoy hospitality?

The focus of the January 9 session will be on both young people -- of traditional high school and college age – and adults seeking to improve their English language skills or learning how to integrate their family life into American culture, which might seem bewildering to them. I

have discussed the topic with Dutchess Community College staff who offer support services to DCC students, and expect to have a commitment from at least one person from the college to serve on the panel.



*Members of Engaging People in Change at Grace Episcopal Church*

### **Supporting EPIC at Millbrook's Grace Episcopal Church – Sept. 27**

I have also met with Abby Nathanson, Director of Program Development for Grace Episcopal Church in Millbrook, who has invited us to learn about a wonderful youth group she has established at the church, called Engaging People in Change (EPIC), by attending their first dinner meeting of the school year. I expect Abby will also play a role in the January 9 program.

EPIC's Friday, September 27, dinner, which will be held from 5 pm to 7 pm at the church, 3328 Franklin Avenue, will be donated by a caterer. But we can contribute some of our famous AAUW baked goodies in exchange for our meal. **Please let me know if you would like to attend; the caterer will need to know how many diners to expect.**

A Vassar College graduate who grew up in Seattle, Abby wants us to understand her group's membership so we can learn how to assist them most effectively. She considers participation in the dinner meeting to be an essential orientation.

Abby was originally hired by the church to establish a generic youth group. But while the invitations to join were extended widely, the only youths who expressed an interest were ethnic Mexicans and Guatemalans. EPIC's program is a response to the needs of that membership. Full membership is about 20; around 15 usually attend the regular Friday evening dinners.

Abby points out that neither she nor her interns are social workers, but many of their efforts could be classified as case management. Because the youths speak English, she notes, they are frequently called on to translate for their parents – particularly at medical appointments. It is common for them to show up late (on-time appearances are considered rude in their culture);

and there is often instability in their homes, requiring them to accept responsibility for siblings and the resolution of domestic crises.

Development of leadership skills is one aim of the EPIC program, as well as the expansion of members' horizons. Events planned so far in the coming school year are a creative session at the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center in Poughkeepsie, and a field trip to the SUNY-Albany campus.

Possibly the most immediate need some of the youths have is for assistance with their applications to college, including financial aid. She points out that many of them do not have cell phones, computers, or printers, a major roadblock in today's college admissions process. Nor are they likely to have independent transportation. (Abby and her interns pick them up and deliver them to the church for Friday meetings.)

So if you are interested in working with this group, you must be prepared to serve as an advocate for an individual, recognizing that person's unique needs, and help him or her adapt to the American culture that is so foreign to their parents.

## **Global Friends Sharing Circles**

The second season for Global Friends Sharing Circles will be underway soon. If you would like to host a Circle in your own home this fall, please contact me. Hostesses need only provide seating for a maximum of 12 people, some snacks, and a beverage. So far, they have been scheduled from 4 pm to 6 pm on a weekday, but other scheduling could be arranged if that would be more convenient for you.

We'd also appreciate hearing your suggestions for international guests to invite (we'll extend the official invitations). And please let us know if you would simply like to participate in the Sharing Circles, which are open to all Branch members.

