



Starfish International Exchange Program The Gambia, West Africa

September 17, 2019

Dear Dr. Nolin,

As you know, we led a group of twelve students and five adults on a trip to Starfish International in The Gambia, West Africa this summer. We stayed in dorms with twelve Starfish girls, doing everything together for two and a half weeks. We taught and took classes; we spent a day in their homes with their families, helping with chores and sharing a meal; we learned songs, dances and poetry for their commencement; we danced, walked, ran, swam, played soccer and softball together; we engaged in meaningful discussions about education, race, poverty, family and sexuality. Most importantly, we became great friends with our Starfish sisters.

We are excited to pursue the second phase of the exchange program. We are hoping to welcome twelve Starfish students and four adults to Natick High School from January 17 - February 5, 2020. We have not yet secured their visas for the trip, but they remain very optimistic and hopeful that the US Embassy will grant visas for this educational exchange.

Benefit to Natick Students

Natick students will benefit from their visit in a number of ways. Starfish International was founded on the belief that education is the most important way an individual and a community can improve their life. They are dedicated to the principles of hard work, perseverance, collaboration and love. They recite this pledge every day that helped our girls maintain perspective and persevere through difficult times during the trip...

I am not the product of my circumstances. I am the composite of all the things that I believe, and all the places I believe I can go. My past does not define me. I can step out of my history and create a new day for myself. Even if the entire culture is saying "you can't," even if every single possible bad thing that can happen to me does, I can keep going forward.

Natick Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, gender identity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual differences, immigration status, or homeless status.

As we embrace the Profile of a Graduate competencies, promote inclusion and a culture of respect across difference, challenge our students to self-advocate and persevere, and as we embed Social Emotional Learning into everything we do, the Starfish girls serve as inspiring examples and partners. I would like to make Natick High School *a little more Starfish* in the process.

Planned Activities

- Starfish and Natick students perform music, dance and poetry at the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration at Wilson Middle School. Following the ceremony, Starfish girls teach cultural dancing to young students.
- Starfish students visit classes and clubs at Natick High School. They have been invited to meet with the Change the World Club, French Club and Robotics Club, participate in Global Awareness classes, do a common read and discussion with an English class, sing with the choir, participate in a Northstar multicultural discussion, join yoga and meditation classes, dance with the dance team, teach Mandinka and Wolof and more.
- Students in advanced video production class would like to profile Starfish International and document their visit in a video. We will circulate the video through the eblast and student newsletter.
- One of the Starfish faculty members is applying to be a speaker at TEDx Natick. The Starfish and Natick students will attend TEDx Natick to meet the guests during lunch.
- Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Representative David Linsky invited the Starfish and Natick students to the statehouse for a tour and a discussion of American democracy. We would visit Civics or AP Government classes in follow-up to discuss similarities and differences between American and Gambian forms of democracy. The Gambia gained independence from Britain in 1965 and became a democracy in 2017. This could be used as part of our efforts to norm discussions and teach civility around the 2020 election.
- We will host an all-student assembly or welcome ceremony at Natick High School. The Starfish and Natick students will show a film about our [Natick Starfish Partnership](#) and perform music, dance and poetry. The goal of the assembly is to help students build an understanding and appreciation for another culture and the values of Starfish International. We would partner with Peer Advocates to teach respect and challenge our students to speak up when they witness or experience microaggressions.

Natick Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, gender identity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual differences, immigration status, or homeless status.

- We will include Peer Advocates and Starfish students and faculty in staff professional development focused on SEL, inclusion and respect. Their visit coincides with our February 5th Early Release. This could build off the student assembly.

We estimate that we need to raise upwards of \$25,000 for this exchange. This includes the cost of the flights, visas and inoculations. The families of the students and adults who attended the trip have offered to host the Starfish girls in their homes.

The Natick Public Schools Health Clinic provided a list of all the vaccines that The Gambian students and adults need. If any of the vaccines are not available in The Gambia, we will provide vaccinations immediately upon arrival.

Fundraising Plans

- Corporate donations: Every student will request donations from local businesses. We will thank all of our corporate sponsors in the program for our benefit dinner.
- Benefit dinner: Host a dinner at Natick High School on Friday, January 31, 2020. We will charge \$50 per adult and \$25 per student to attend. The Starfish and Natick students will prepare a West African meal and perform music, dance and poetry. We will sell ad space and request corporate donations.
- Chipotle Fundraiser: Starfish earns 33% of the proceeds per order using the fundraiser code.
- Raffle calendar: Once a week, raffle off different donated items. Students will request donated items and sell raffle tickets in the community.
- 50/50 raffle: Students will sell 50/50 raffle tickets at one Natick High School football game, basketball game, hockey game and wrestling match.
- Swiss exchange donation: For twelve years, students from Natick High School visited a school in Basel, Switzerland as part of an exchange program. The program was discontinued in 2018. The program advisor maintained a balance of over \$9000 for future exchange trips. The advisor has requested that the balance be donated to the Starfish exchange program.

Natick Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, gender identity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual differences, immigration status, or homeless status.

Natick Schools Central Office:

13 East Central Street

Natick MA 01760

<http://www.natickps.org>

508•647•6500 (phone)

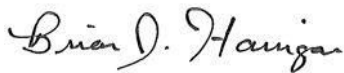
508•647•6506 (fax)

www.facebook.com/natickps

- Farmer's market: Natick students will request a table at local farmer's markets to sell soap, bags, bracelets, Gambian food and drinks. We would sell products made by the Starfish girls in the Business Center at Starfish International.
- Roche Brothers and Stop n Shop: Natick students will sell baked goods and request donations at local grocery stores.
- Boston Marathon: We will request multiple bibs from the towns of Natick and Hopkinton. Each runner will commit to raising the BAA minimum (\$5000) for the Starfish exchange program. We would like to explore mechanisms to collect donations online.

Thank you for your support of this exchange program. We would be happy to present to School Committee if they would like to learn more about the benefits of the exchange program to the students of Natick High School.

All the best,



Brian Harrigan, Principal
Natick High School

Natick Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, gender identity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual differences, immigration status, or homeless status.