My name is Noelle Hinrichs and I have volunteered with the Global Community Program for over two years. I joined the program in 2016 as a Conversation Partner matched to international students from Hong Kong, China, Brazil, Mexico and Iran. As a former international student studying overseas in China and Taiwan, I was familiar with what it felt like to live and study somewhere completely different from your home country and loved the idea of connecting with others who were new to Canada and to UVic. And, as a UVic alumnus, I wanted to participate in UVic’s effort to cultivate an inclusive and globally-minded campus community.

When I joined the program, one of the first students I was matched with was Mahsa, a PhD student from Iran. Knowing relatively little about that part of the world, I was intrigued to meet her and had a lot of questions! From the very beginning, we had the most interesting conversations about everything from current affairs, cultural customs, idiomatic expressions, history and the environment. Weekly conversations sparked ideas for outings, and both together and with other students in the group, we visited heritage sites in Victoria, hiked local trails, cooked and sampled foods from each of our countries and met and visited with each other’s families.
Together, we’ve visited the annual gingerbread showcase held in Victoria during the holidays (we have done that twice!), enjoyed North American Halloween celebrations, and attended concerts. Each and every time we meet, I am aware of how rich an experience it is for me; I continue to gain new perspectives and most importantly, I continue to enjoy the company of a life-long friend.

Volunteering in the Global Community program has been one of the most positive experiences I could have imagined. Shared laughter that transcend the boundaries of culture is a frequent memory of the conversations I have had with the international students. I never guessed that I could have the experience of travelling the world while living in Victoria!

The international students that I met while in the Global Community program have become and remain, my very good friends. This is perhaps the best benefit of all. Thank you Global Community!

![Image](image.jpg)

**Global Community Experience: Mahsa**

I clearly remember the very first email that I got from Noelle through the global community conversation partner program explaining that she is Canadian and has studied Chinese literature, which amazed me! I thought to myself, maybe she is of Chinese ethnicity and that encouraged her to choose such a demanding language! After couple of meetups, I found the reason for her choice! The reason was her very artistic point of view regarding Chinese calligraphy and her adventurous interest in discovering different cultures!

Noelle was the one who always initiated the cultural exchange and sharing of information in our conversation meetups, helping every single student with their questions from finding pinkeye ointment in a drugstore to job searching and interview skills in Canadian society, all in the context of an English classroom! Now, after several years, I would say that our friendship has surpassed the phase of language and culture exchange to the stage of sharing spirit and an attitude toward life which has resulted in a truly rewarding friendship. However, I always had a problem with Noelle and that was, I didn’t know how to appreciate what she offered to us! Sharing time and life while you raise your family and work at the same time is a priceless gift that Noelle granted to us. It’s hard to explain how deeply people can change our perspective of community and I do appreciate all those who made my UVic experience a very memorable one.