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## Ward Melville High School graduate gains valuable experience while volunteering in Mongolia

Eighteen-year-old Joseph Suk, a recent graduate from Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, had always been interested in the medical profession. Eager to seize the opportunity of observing doctors and surgical procedures and to experience a different culture, Joseph traveled to Mongolia to volunteer at Projects Abroad's High School Special Medical Program.

The Medical High School Special program enables volunteers to both examine doctors' work during surgeries and ask them questions; and in this way, they are able to learn about medical practices in Mongolia. During the 2 weeks that he spent at the Medical Project, Joseph teamed up with other high school students from all over the world and visited hospitals around Ulaanbaatar. "It's really hard to get this kind of opportunity in the United States as a high school student, so I thought it was very neat to be able to see this firsthand in Mongolia."

This experience allowed Joseph to

observe various surgeries including an ophthalmological surgery, prostate surgery, heart surgery as well as a cholecystectomy. It was this that formed his best memory from the medical program: "I really, really liked seeing the cholecystectomy because that was my first surgery, and I saw it from start to finish; so that was just amazing for me; something that I won't forget."

After two weeks, Joseph was interested in spending more time in Mongolia. Extending his stay to one month, he decided to take on a second High School Special program; this time he chose to do the Teaching Project. He taught two beginner's English classes, to older students – only a few of them under 15 years of age. A truly rewarding experience for Joseph was when he was able to communicate smoothly and get his lesson across, despite the language barrier between himself and the students: "There were many times when my supervisor wasn't there, and I just had to explain something and they had no idea what it was. I would use gestures

or pictures or movements, or I would try to explain it in very simple terms. And sometimes they would get it, and that's the most remarkable feeling – when you explain something to them, and then they finally they nod their heads and they understand."

After spending one month in Mongolia, Joseph's experience has sparked his interest in travelling more in the future. On a professional level, though he is not fully certain about pursuing a career in medicine, he has shared that this experience has put a lot more meaning into the medical profession for him. And like Joseph's two projects, he also has two pieces of advice for future volunteers: "Be open and be willing!"

