

A New Commitment to Social Justice

Azat Toroev, a U.S. Department of State-funded Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) participant from Kyrgyzstan who has a physical disability, came to the United States driven by his interests in film, volunteering, and journalism. Azat quickly became an active presence in his host community of Fort Collins, Colorado.

Back in my country I did not know that the rights of disabled people are so protected in the United States. I think there are many positive things to learn from Americans, especially about taking care of our fellow people.

In Kyrgyzstan, says Azat, it is hard to imagine people with physical and other disabilities having so many opportunities outside of their homes. Azat knows how important support from society can be, although it is sometimes difficult to find.

After he saw the convenient equipment and services that people with disabilities could access in the United States, it brought up strong emotions in him about what he wishes for his country.

“It was in Eugene, Oregon during Mobility International USA’s workshop for exchange students with disabilities that I fully felt cared for. I didn’t feel rejection or compassion; I felt that MIUSA staff members were confident in my abilities and that I was capable in overcoming my fears and doubts to challenge myself. Now I know that through challenging yourself you can change the world.”

Then when Azat arrived to his host community in Fort Collins, he saw the same — people really care about disabled people. He was impressed by three-wheeled adaptive bikes and big buttons to push to automatically open doors for those who need assistance.

“After all the things that happened, I went through a turning point. I want to change the situation towards disabled people in my country.”

What’s Next For Azat?

Upon his return home, Azat is thinking about law school. “Seeing all the injustice in the world, especially to women, made me very uncomfortable. I have decided to apply for the best law school in Kyrgyzstan and study international law.”

